



Diverging Visions on Political Conditionality: The Role of Domestic Politics and International Socialization in French and British Aid

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Summary. — This article shows that and explains why the United Kingdom has internalized political conditionality to a larger extent than France. The assessment part is based on the analysis of policy documents, international agreements, and two “hard” cases (Mozambique and Zimbabwe). Variation between the two countries is explained by the existence of clearer lines of accountability for British aid decision-makers, stricter scrutiny by British media, and stronger social pressure from Nordic donors. Evidence does not support the explanatory power of material interests, party politics, level of parliamentary control, and socialization processes within the Commonwealth (*versus* the International Organization of La Francophonie).

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1. INTRODUCTION

After the end of the Cold War, France and the United Kingdom (UK) were among the first donors to signal parallel policy changes in favor of political conditionality, that is, the norm by which the allocation and disbursement of bilateral development assistance should depend on respect for human rights and democratic principles by recipient governments. On June 6, 1990, the British Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs Douglas Hurd stated that “governments which persist with repressive policies, corrupt management, wasteful and discredited economic systems should not expect us to support their folly with scarce aid resources” (quoted in Robinson, 1993a, p. 88). On June 20, 1990, the French President, François Mitterand (1990a), concluded the Franco-African Summit at La Baule by affirming that “France will bind all its [aid] contributions to the efforts that will be made to move towards more freedom”.

This novelty was not to be an ephemeral moment for the donor community; political conditionality was subsequently hailed as the “core” of the post-Cold War international aid regime (Gibbon, 1993, p. 36), a “strongly coercive” trend (Baylies, 1995, p. 328), and a “new standard” in development cooperation (Arts, 2000, p. 1). In 2007, Carey (2007, p. 460) commented that international norms still “legitimize and even encourage such donor behavior”.

Against this background, it is puzzling to discover that today Paris and London hold strikingly different views with respect to political conditionality. In 2011, during the consultation on the Green Paper “The future of European Union (EU) budget support to third countries”, the European Commission (2011) explicitly asked: “should budget support programs make more use of political governance conditionality?”¹ The French government argued that “budget support cannot be conceived as an instrument to promote values and policy objectives, except if you want to divert the purpose”, that is, “to support the national strategies to fight against poverty, elaborated by partner countries” (French Ministry of Foreign, 2011b). In contrast, the UK stressed the need to

“raise political governance issues through its dialog on budget support with partner governments—with the clear focus on commitment to fundamental values of human rights, democracy and the rule of law” (European Scrutiny Committee, 2011).

This article shows that and explains why the UK has internalized political conditionality to a larger extent than France. *Assessment* of internalization is based on a three-fold measurement framework (policy statements, legal texts and state behavior). The analysis of around 70 strategy papers and international agreements is corroborated by the examination of two “hard” cases (Mozambique and Zimbabwe). *Explanation* of internalization combines a Most Similar Systems Design with process-tracing. In order to test the relative explanatory power of material interests, domestic politics, international socialization pressures, and organizational cultures, information from primary sources (such as independent newspapers’ articles, government evaluation reports and diplomatic cables) was triangulated with semi-structured interviews with more than 100 officials who are working or have worked for French and British institutions, and aid practitioners who are working or have worked for other donors or for development/human rights NGOs.²

The article offers two main contributions to the existing literature on aid, human rights, and democracy. First, it enlarges

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the scope of investigation to the analysis of international agreements and policy documents. Past research on political conditionality has given almost exclusive attention to the behavioral aspect of this norm. Quantitative researchers have explored whether human rights records have influenced donors' decisions on (a) who their recipient governments should be and (b) how much aid these governments should receive (for instance, on US aid allocation see [Abrams & Lewis, 1993](#); [Apodaca & Stohl, 1999](#); [Cingranelli & Pasquarello, 1985](#); [Poe & Meernik, 1995](#); [Schultz, 1981](#)). Qualitative studies have concentrated on specific cases when donors applied (or did not apply) aid sanctions ([Renard & Reyntjens, 1995](#); [Schulte Nordholt, 1995](#); [Stokke, 1995](#); [Waller, 1995](#)). In contrast, comparative research on political conditionality and international agreements is non-existent, and only a couple of researchers have looked at the policy agendas of different donors on a comparative basis ([Barratt, 2008](#); [Crawford, 2001](#)).

Second, past studies have shown that some donors apply political conditionality more consistently than others. For instance, numerous statistical analyses have contrasted the influence of human rights concerns on aid allocation by different donors ([Berthélemy, 2006](#); [Carey, 2007](#); [Clist, 2011](#); [Dollar & Levin, 2006](#); [Hoeffler & Outram, 2011](#); [Neumayer, 2003](#); [Younas, 2008](#); [Zanger, 2000](#)), and qualitative researchers compared donors' responses to specific cases of human rights violations and democracy setbacks ([Crawford, 2001, pp. 163–181](#)). However, while variation was established, no effort was made to explain it. This article builds on the only study that has explored why (not only that) donors internalize political conditionality to different degrees ([Cumming, 2001](#)), but expands its analysis to 2012 and tests new relevant hypotheses (for instance, Cumming overlooked the potential influence of organizational cultures and international social pressures from like-minded donors and international organizations).

The article is structured as follows. The second section justifies the selection of France and the UK. The third section compares the two donors on the basis of (1) endorsement of political conditionality in policy documents, (2) inclusion of human rights clauses in international agreements, and (3) willingness to adopt aid sanctions in response to human rights violations or democratic setbacks in recipient countries. The fourth section embraces “analytic eclecticism” and tests four different hypotheses that can explain variation across the Channel. The conclusion summarizes the main findings of the article and recommends a potential avenue for future research.

2. SELECTION OF FRANCE AND THE UK

The Most Similar Systems Design (or Mill's Method of Difference) suggests comparing cases that are as similar as possible, except with regard to the dependent variable. The ambition is to keep constant the highest possible number of independent variables ([Anckar, 2008](#); [Yin, 2009, pp. 64–67](#)). Bearing this in mind, the selection of donors for this research was narrowed down through a two-step process.

To begin with, the universe of potential cases was restricted to EU Member States. The EU as a whole is one of the most enthusiastic devotees of political conditionality. Since 1990, the Commission and EU Member States have consistently inserted a human rights clause in all their development agreements with third countries ([Bartels, 2004](#); [Horng, 2003](#)). In addition, EU aid has been suspended, redirected,

or withdrawn in 56 cases, an average of three times per year (see [Table 1](#)).

Strong internalization of political conditionality by EU institutions encourages a similar position to be held by France and the UK for two main reasons. On the one hand, aid sanctions are usually decided through unanimous agreement within the Council. This means that when EU aid is suspended, reduced or redirected, Member States have agreed on the appropriateness of these measures. Second, the academic literature on “Europeanization” has persuasively demonstrated the harmonizing power of EU institutions with respect to member States' politics and policies ([Featherstone & Radaelli, 2003](#); [Ladrech, 2010](#)), even in areas complementary to foreign aid, including foreign policy ([Tonra, 2001](#); [Wong & Hill, 2011](#)).

Within the EU, the article selected France and the UK because of their similarities as middle-ranking powers, nuclear-weapon States, permanent members of the United Nations Security Council, former colonial empires and human rights “homelands”. Moreover, in 1998 the Heads of State and Government of the two countries met in Saint-Malo, and agreed on a declaration putting an end to Anglo-French rivalry in Africa ([Chafer & Cumming, 2010](#)). This initiative “established the basis for ... harmonizing policies and the overall approach” toward the continent ([Jones-Parry, 2011, p. x](#)), and led to initiatives like cooperation between Heads of Mission in individual countries and informal dialog within European fora (including the Africa Working Group and the General Affairs and External Relations Council, that is, where political conditionality is discussed) ([Cumming, 2011, p. 59](#)). As Africa represents by far the most recurrent target of European aid sanctions, Saint-Malo should have led to enhanced understanding between both countries.

3. ANALYSIS OF VARIATION

Assessing the significance of human rights norms in the foreign policy of a specific country is a difficult exercise. As highlighted by [Brysk](#), “some countries claim more than they produce ... in order to gain international reputation. Conversely, principled promoters often under-assess their own efforts, discounting modest gains relative to unfulfilled aspirations” (2009, pp. 19–20). Past literature in IR offers little help. For instance, [Cortell and Davis](#) commented that “scholars repeatedly conclude that domestic salience is crucial to many cases of states compliance with international norms, but they rarely provide definitions or operational measures for the concept and, instead, merely assert that the norm in question was salient” (2000, p. 67).

This article argues that, if we accept the definition of a norm as a “standard of appropriate behavior for actors with a given identity” ([Finnemore & Sikkink, 1998, p. 819](#)), norm internalization has three fundamental indicators when applied to donor countries:

1. *Policy documents.* Since a norm is a standard of appropriate behavior, and appropriateness is communicatively shared, a salient norm is referred to by the State to justify its behavior.
2. *Legal texts.* Since a norm is a standard of appropriate behavior, a salient norm is institutionalized into the documents that regulate development cooperation.
3. *State actions.* Since a norm is a standard of appropriate behavior, a salient norm is acted upon by the State (for a similar three-fold measure, see [Farrell, 2001, p. 79](#)).³

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