

# Donor Interests or Developmental Performance? Explaining Sanctions in EU Democracy Promotion in sub-Saharan Africa

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**Summary.** — This article investigates why sanctions are applied unevenly in EU democracy promotion in Africa. Given the increased attention on good performers in development cooperation, we assume that not only strategic allies but also good development performers will be shielded from strong sanctions. This thesis is tested with a fuzzy-set Qualitative Comparative Analysis of 17 cases of violations of democratic principles and human rights in nine sub-Saharan African countries in 2000–11. The QCA confirms that sanctions are taken in the absence of donor interests and developmental performance, and are not taken in the presence of donor interests and developmental performance.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

Why are sanctions applied so unevenly in democracy promotion? Previous studies have traditionally followed the realist–idealist discussion of whether interests or norms influence the decision of democracy promoters. From a realist perspective, international actors are mainly concerned about their power position, including the preservation of spheres of influence and the defense of security and commercial interests. These issues will prevail when conflicting with democracy promotion (Hyde-Price, 2009, p. 26; Mearsheimer, 2001, p. 46). Idealists recognize the importance of power, but argue that norms can be more important than power politics. From this perspective, sanctions can also be imposed against important allies, as was the case with anti-apartheid sanctions against South Africa in the 1980s (Klotz, 1999; Risse, Ropp, & Sikkink, 1999).

This article sheds new light on the above-mentioned debate by studying, in addition to the well-known conflict between norms and interests, the conflict that might appear between norms such as democracy and development. It has been recognized that, despite a general shift toward linking democracy and development, donors have been reluctant to incorporate democracy in their development policies (Carothers, 2010; Clist, 2011; Easterly, 2013; Hout, 2012). Hence, donors may avoid using sanctions against countries that perform well on economic development, as sanctions may disturb a positive developmental relationship.

The European Union (EU) has been no exception when it comes to the selective application of sanctions. This article studies why this has been the case, particularly in Africa.<sup>1</sup> More specifically, the article investigates whether countries that facilitate the EU's interests or good development performers are shielded from sanctions. Previous studies on EU democracy promotion in Africa have mostly been in line with realist theses (Brüne, 2007; Crawford, 2005; Khakee, 2007; Olsen, 2000), but no systematic, up-to-date and multi-case analysis has been conducted thus far. On the one hand, we can expect that the democracy-development nexus plays out more clearly in sub-Saharan Africa than in other regions. EU development assistance has traditionally been focused on

Africa. Although the EU has increasingly provided aid to other regions such as the Mediterranean, this has been more motivated from a security and trade logic (Reynaert, 2011). On the other hand, it has been recognized that the EU's policies toward Africa have become more geared toward its own interests. As the EU has become aware of the spillovers that insecurity in Africa may have in Europe, security has entered into the EU's agreements with Africa (Del Biondo, Oltsch, & Orbie, 2012; Keukeleire & Raube, 2013). In addition, the EU has aspired to put Africa more central in its external energy policies (Youngs, 2009, p. 133).

By focusing only on Africa we filter potential intervening variables. Within EU policies, relations with Africa, the Caribbean and the Pacific countries (ACP) are regulated by the Cotonou Partnership Agreement (2000–20) and until 2010 the European Commission's Directorate-General for Development was responsible.<sup>2</sup> Hence, the instruments for conditionality and the institutions responsible for implementing these instruments are equal. It has been noted that the only conditionality clause that has been implemented frequently by the EU is the one in agreements with the ACP group (Fierro, 2003, p. 209).

Empirically, the analysis is based on a fuzzy-set Qualitative Comparative Analysis (fsQCA) of 17 instances of violations of democratic principles and human rights in nine countries: Ethiopia, Kenya, Nigeria, Niger, Zimbabwe, Guinea, Chad, Ivory Coast and Rwanda. In seven of these cases, the EU adopted or threatened to adopt strong sanctions. In 10 others, the EU adopted no or only weak sanctions. fsQCA is used to analyze the combination of donor interests and developmental performance as necessary or sufficient conditions for strong

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sanctions. The analysis confirms the thesis that the combination of donor interests and developmental performance can explain variation in the EU's reaction. Strong sanctions are taken in the absence of both donor interests and developmental performance. When those conditions were present, strong sanctions were not taken.

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

### (a) *Democracy, development and donor interests*

Democracy and development are interrelated in a complex way. Traditionally democracy and development are seen as separate objectives. In this conception, development refers to the socio-economic evolution of a country, which can be measured on the basis of GDP growth, education, health, macro-economic stability, etc. (Rostow, 1960; Seers, 1969). A broader definition sees democracy as a crucial element in the development process (Levy & Fukuyama, 2010; Sen, 1999). When interpreting democracy and development as separate but inter-related processes, there is no consensus on their exact causality or correlation (Sirowy & Inkeles, 1990). For example, many of the South East Asian developmental states combined high growth and an authoritarian political system (Leftwich, 2000). There is, however, consensus on the importance of 'good governance' for development. Governance, in this sense, is interpreted in a technocratic manner referring to property rights, a good regulatory framework and the absence of corruption (North, 1990).

The first studies on political conditionality hardly paid any attention to the democracy-development nexus. This should be seen in the light of the international context: political conditionality emerged after the Cold War, when donors were convinced that liberal democracy and a free market economy formed the winning model (Fukuyama, 2002). Moreover, the early 1990s were characterized by an 'aid fatigue', which made donors more willing to attach conditions to development assistance (Barya, 1993). During this time, the debate on political conditionality mainly focused on the conditions for its effectiveness and on the clash with donor interests. Stokke (1995) formulated ten hypotheses on the effectiveness of political conditionality, which were tested and refined by Crawford (2001). Studies by Crawford (2001) and Emmanuel (2010) found that donor interests, including security, commercial and historical interests, led to a selective application of political conditionality in the 1990s. Gillies' (1996) study of the application of political conditionality by some of the like-minded donors (Netherlands, Scandinavian donors), which are known to be particularly active on human rights, reached the same conclusion. The importance of donor interests also resonated in analyses of the motives behind aid allocation (Alesina & Dollar, 2000; Neumayer, 2003) although some studies also found that democratic countries received more aid (Alesina & Dollar, 2000).

In the late 1990s, the donor community came to realize that conditionality had been too donor-imposed and that country ownership was necessary for successful reform (World Bank, 1998). The 2005 Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness called for more responsibility and leadership by recipient governments, in exchange for which donors would provide aid directly to governments in the form of program aid and budget support. Against this background, conditionality emerged in different forms. First of all, there was a shift from negative conditionality, where aid is suspended in the event of negative evolutions in democracy and human rights, to aid selectivity,

whereby donors selectively give aid to countries that already own reforms (Chhotray & Hulme, 2008; Koch, 2015; Molenaers, 2012). Secondly, negative conditionality was often applied to budget support. As providing general budget support is often seen as legitimizing the partner government, this is particularly sensitive in the case of authoritarian governments. Donors are particularly wary of disbursing budget support in situations of political crisis (Hayman, 2011; Molenaers, Gagiano, Smets, & Dellepiane, 2015; Reinsberg, 2015).

Against this background, studies have increasingly focused on the reluctance of donors to link their development policies to democracy. Questions have been raised regarding the extent to which donors live up to their commitments to focus aid on democratic countries (Clist, 2011; Hout, 2007), although donors were found to increase aid shortly after democratic transition (Dollar & Levin, 2006; Reinsberg, 2015). It has been argued that donors are more likely to choose development over democracy in case of a goal conflict, for example when well-performing countries fail to respect democratic principles (Carothers, 2010; Hout, 2012; Marriage, 2006). The main objectives of aid agencies are humanitarian, related to poverty reduction (Hout, 2012) and are usually pursued in a technocratic way (Brand, 2001; Easterly, 2013). Aid agencies tend to have limited political expertise and are organizationally separated from the democracy promotion community (Carothers, 2010; Hout, 2012; Nelson, 2007).

In addition to the difficult integration of democracy in development policy, donors continue to prioritize their own interests. The strategic importance of the developing world, and Africa in particular, has increased. Traditional donors face competition from non-traditional donors, particularly from rising powers such as Brazil, India and China which do not apply conditionalities (Grimm, Humphrey, Lundsgaarde, & de Souza, 2009). Moreover, the Global War on Terror has become the new framework according to which allies are chosen, regardless of the democratic character of governments (Fleck & Kilby, 2008).

### (b) *The European Union: what kind of democracy promoter?*

In this article, we will analyze whether countries that facilitate the EU's interests or good development performers are shielded from sanctions. We explicitly refer to the European Union and not the European Commission, since many of the instruments applied for conditionality and democracy promotion are adopted by the EU. On the one hand, we expect the EU to have a strong emphasis on democracy promotion. The EU is seen as a Normative Power that is particularly strong in promoting democracy, human rights and the rule of law (Manners, 2002). Democracy promotion has been an explicit goal of EU foreign policy since the mid-1990s and has been an important aspect of the EU's Africa policies (Council of the EU, 1998; EU & AU, 2007, p. 7). Development policy is used by the EU to diffuse democracy (Manners, 2002, p. 245). Democracy, human rights and the rule of law constitute 'essential elements' of the Cotonou Partnership Agreement (CPA) between the EU and the ACP group. In case one of these essential elements is violated, Article 96 of the CPA stipulates that the Council may call for consultations with the country concerned, and take appropriate measures such as the suspension of aid if these consultations do not lead to an appropriate solution. Recently, the EU has strengthened the focus on democracy in its development policy. According to the 2011 Agenda for Change, there should be an 'enhanced importance of human rights, democracy and good governance trends in determining the mix of instruments and aid modali-

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