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From Solidarity to National Interest: The Influence of the Swedish Populist Radical Right on Development Aid after the 2022 national elections

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Master in International Studies

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SOCIOLOGIA
E POLÍTICAS PÚBLICAS

Department of History

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Resumo

Esta dissertação investiga como as políticas de ajuda ao desenvolvimento da Suécia mudaram após as eleições parlamentares de 2022, com foco no aumento da influência dos Democratas Suecos. Utilizando o Institucionalismo Histórico como referencial teórico, o estudo analisa se as eleições podem ser compreendidas como um ponto crítico na evolução institucional da ajuda sueca. Foi adotado um estudo de caso qualitativo, centrado em projetos de lei governamentais, propostas orçamentárias, estratégias políticas e acordos partidários, bem como em fontes secundárias, como pesquisas acadêmicas, relatórios de organizações internacionais e comentários da mídia.

A análise mostra que, embora a ajuda ao desenvolvimento sueca tenha sido historicamente caracterizada pela redução da pobreza e pela solidariedade, as eleições de 2022 marcaram uma mudança em direção a uma ajuda mais restritiva e orientada por interesses nacionais. O Acordo de Tidö, que representa a cooperação entre os partidos de direita no governo e os Democratas Suecos, introduziu novas prioridades na política de ajuda ao desenvolvimento, enfatizando eficiência, transparência e o interesse nacional sueco. Os resultados sugerem que as eleições de 2022 representam tanto continuidade institucional quanto mudança. Embora as estruturas estabelecidas limitem transformações mais radicais, a influência dos Democratas Suecos alterou prioridades que podem ter implicações de longo prazo para o papel da Suécia como ator global no desenvolvimento.

Palavras-chave: Ajuda ao desenvolvimento, Democratas Suecos, Institucionalismo Histórico, mudança de políticas.

Abstract

This dissertation research how Sweden's development aid policies has changed after the 2022 parliamentary election, with focus on the increased influence of the Sweden Democrats. Using Historical Institutionalism as a theoretical framework, the study analyzes if the election can be understood as a critical juncture in the institutional development of Swedish aid. A qualitative case study has been used, focusing on government bills, budget proposals, policy strategies, and political agreements. As well as secondary sources such as academic research, reports from international organizations and media commentary.

The analyze shows that while Swedish development aid has long been characterized by poverty reduction and solidarity, the 2022 election marked a shift towards a more restrictive, nationally oriented development aid. The Tidö-agreement, which is a cooperation between the governing right-wing parties and the Sweden Democrats, brought forward new priorities in development aid policy that emphasize efficiency, transparency, and Swedish national interest. The findings suggests that the 2022 election represents both institutional continuity and change. While established structures more radical changes, the influence of the Sweden Democrats has changed priorities that could have long-term implications for Sweden's role as a global development actor.

Keywords: Development aid, Sweden Democrats, Historical Institutionalism, policy change

Index

Acknowledgements	iii
Resumo	i
Abstract	ii
CHAPTER 1	1
1.1. Historical Institutionalism, Path Dependence and Critical Juncture: Conceptualizing Swedish Aid	2
1.1.1. The case of Swedish PRRP and aid.....	2
1.2. Methodological approach and research design.....	4
1.3. Delimitations	6
1.4. Limitations	6
1.5. Structure of thesis.....	6
CHAPTER 2	8
2.1. The origins and evolution of aid	9
CHAPTER 3	13
3.1. The rising political space of PRRPs	16
3.2. The case of European PRRPs and development aid.....	17
CHAPTER 4	21
4.1. An overview of Sweden’s ODA	21
4.2. The origins of Swedish ODA	22
4.3. Building the Swedish ODA system: Institutions, ideas, and organizations	23
4.3.1. The institutions shaping Swedish ODA	24
4.3.1.2. <i>The one percent target</i>	25
4.3.2. The ideas influencing Swedish development aid policy	27
4.3.3. The organizations putting in place Swedish development aid: from NIB to Sida.....	28
4.4. The politics of Swedish ODA: The role of political parties	30
4.4.1. The Tidö-agreement (2022-2026): A critical juncture for Swedish Development aid policy?	31
4.4.2. The Swedish Democrats and their development aid agenda	32
4.4.3. The Tidö-parties and the changing priorities of Swedish Development aid policy.....	35
4.4.4. The Rising Influence of SD in Sweden’s development aid policy	37
CHAPTER 5	44
Bibliography	46
Annexes	52
Annex A – Sida: Detailed Budget Allocation and Policy Priorities 2023–2025.....	52

CHAPTER 1

Introduction

This dissertation aims to understand how the 2022 election in Sweden has influenced the country's development aid priorities, fundings and outcomes. The 2022 election introduced a new coalition government including the Swedish parliament parties Christian Democrats, Liberals, and the Moderate Party. Together with the Sweden Democrats they created the Tidö-agreement. The research question explores if this shift has changed Sweden's priorities of development aid from a historical institutional perspective. To analyze this, the dissertation uses a Historical Institutionalism theory, which shows how past institutional choices creates path dependencies that can constrain or enable policy changes. Based on this theory, the 2022 election can be seen as a possible critical juncture that may have changed the long historical direction of Swedish development aid policy.

For the first time, the Sweden Democrats, a populist radical right party (PRRP) has influence over government decisions by being a part of the Tidö-agreement. These elections represent an institutional change, where Swedish political traditions have been challenged and new types of coalitions have been created. The case of Sweden also reflects a broader trend in Europe where PRRPs have gained popularity and influence over public policies. Based on the literature review, PRRPs have generally pushed to allocate development aid funding towards policies within national self-interests, for example economics, security or immigration while reducing support for areas like humanitarian aid or social development. Therefore, the research question is the following:

- How have the results of the 2022 elections contributed to significantly change Swedish development aid policies?

The dissertation studies how the shift to a right-wing government in Sweden, particularly the increased influence of the Sweden Democrats, has begun to affect the country's development aid policies. The analysis is built on Historical Institutionalism (HI) and focuses on whether the 2022 election can be seen as a potential critical juncture. To make this possible, it will explore historical and traditional trends in Swedish aid policy in particular three rules that have been at its core: solidarity as a principle, the one percent target of GDP for the aid budget and the emphasis on democracy and human rights in its aid programmes. Based on previous research on PRRPs in Europe, it is expected that the Swedish government's development aid budget has decreased or

shifted focus since 2022 and that there is a noticeable increase in aid funding related to economic growth, security, and immigration.

1.1. Historical Institutionalism, Path Dependence and Critical Juncture:

Conceptualizing Swedish Aid

1.1.1. The case of Swedish PRRP and aid

Sweden has historically been one of the most generous donor countries when it comes to development aid. The aid policies have been shaped by international commitments, norms, and historical structures. In this context, institutions can be defined as formal rules, laws, regulations, and organizational structures that shape how development aid policies are designed and conducted. This could, for example, be parliamentary decisions regarding aid budgets, the one percent target or specific laws regulating Sweden's aid priorities that function as formal institutions shaping how aid is allocated and conducted. They are strengthened by norms, practices, and expectations among policymakers over time.

The election in 2022 made a shift in the political landscape when it created a right-wing coalition government supported in the parliament by a PRRP, the Sweden Democrats. This thesis research how a right-winged populist party has begun to change Swedish development aid policies after decades of a consensual approach between the Left and Right. In the Swedish case, development aid policy has historically followed a path dependency shaped by international commitments and the one percent target (Sweden has in fact gone beyond the target of 0.7% of the GDP agreed by rich donors for development aid). The 2022 could be a potential critical juncture, where the collaboration with the Sweden Democrats could challenge established practices.

It has been a major change because the Sweden Democrats never had the possibility to directly influence public policies. The research is about understanding how political changes can influence rules and practices in the Swedish development aid policies. HI is a useful approach by focusing on how regime changes and transitions within the democratic regime can influence institutions (Barrenechea, Edward & Larkin, 2016). Sweden's long-standing commitments as the one percent target of GNI and historical cooperation between left- and right-wing parties have created a continuity in how development aid policy has been implemented in the past decades. The 2022 election can be seen as a moment of relevant change by allowing new (old) actors to

influence budget allocations or new guidelines for development aid policies. By studying decades-old institutional patterns, it will be possible to understand whether recent policy shifts stand for a continuation of past practices or the beginning of a new trajectory in development aid policy.

Two key concepts within HI are relevant for this study:

- Path dependency: Path dependency is about how a choice or event sets institutions on a particular course that becomes difficult to change over time. Alternative paths then become less attractive, and change is difficult even if the alternative is more beneficial (Capoccia & Klemen, 2007).
- Critical juncture: Critical junctures are key moments in history when institutions experience changes that would not have been possible during periods of stability. This is often triggered usually by external events such as wars, economic crisis, revolutions, or political shifts (Rixen & Viola, 2016). But internal events can also be the source of this change. Such is the potential case of the 2022 Swedish election and the creation of the Tidö-agreement allowing the Sweden Democrats to directly influence for the first time public policies. such as development aid.

In sum, HI explains institutional change and continuity through concepts like path dependency, critical junctures, and institutional constraints. Path dependency highlights how historical policy choices make change difficult while critical junctures refer to key moments when institutional transformations become possible. HI was chosen for this dissertation as the most adequate approach to analyze how a particular event in time and space has opened the policy space for a new political force to potentially impact decades-old rules of the game.

The 2022 election could represent a potential critical juncture because the collaboration with the Sweden Democrats have introduced a new political influence that may challenge established practices in development aid policy. HI is relevant because it allows us to understand how past institutional structures constrain or enable policy change and how specific moments can open new paths of change.

1.2. Methodological approach and research design

This dissertation will use an analytical model to research how Sweden's development aid policies have started to change under the right winged coalition government. First, it is important to understand how past institutional decisions have shaped the current Swedish aid policies and practices. Second, budget allocations, shift in aid priorities and introduction of recent changes under the 2022 government are expected to show potential changes in the institutions, norms and practices of the Swedish aid system. Third, investigations of how right-wing parties frame development aid policies will attempt to justify the potential critical juncture.

In studies using HI, qualitative methods are often used because it is possible to do in-depth case studies rather than large statistical analysis (Rixen & Viola, 2016). It is often more focused on formal institutions, but informal institutions also play a role in shaping political behavior and preferences. In HI, the unit of analysis is often institutions, for example individual organizations as political parties, unions or corporations, or broader systems as relationship between different government branches or political parties. It can also be larger, as entire political regimes (Capoccia & Klemen, 2007).

For this dissertation, a qualitative case study research design has been chosen. The reason for this choice is based on how to best answer the research question "How have the results of the 2022 elections contributed to significantly change Swedish development aid policies?" A qualitative method focuses on understanding a topic in depth compared to a quantitative method that relies on numerical data (Hancock, Algozzine and Lim, 2021).

A case study investigates institutions and their interplay with individuals within a particular context and time, where the goal is to understand the meaning and dynamics of what is being studied. Hancock, Algozzine and Lim (2021) explains that in cases where the researcher needs to focus on a current phenomenon and in the environment where it occurs, a case study is a useful methodological tool. What it gives is a broader understanding of what is being studied and understanding of the underlying factors. It can also uncover information to that otherwise would not have been found, which can give additional information to the research. Gerring (2004) argues that a case study is a great methodology because it explores multiple variables within a unit which can be applied to a broader population.

Therefore, I argue that a qualitative case study is most fitting because it uses various kinds of sources to collect information. This is useful for this dissertation because it gives a broader

opportunity to use various kinds of sources, therefore it is possible to do broader research. Furthermore, a qualitative case study allows for an understanding on how historical turning points, institutional agreements and changes occur to affect a sole case.

The study is based on a qualitative text analysis of secondary documents such as policy papers, budget proposals, and formalized political agreements. They are analyzed to be able to identify potential changes or continuities in Swedish development aid. With this method, it is possible to do thorough readings and achieve understandings of different text types and therefore, as a result, being able to answer research questions.

Hancock, Algozzine and Lim (2021) explains that in a case study, there is a possibility of using different sources but the most common are interviews and documents which could be internet sources, private records, or public records. For this dissertation I have relied on peer-reviewed academic research and journals, government reports, international organizations data, news articles, and books. Political documents like government bills, budget proposals, official policy strategies, and directives are used. Other sources such as texts produced by individuals, civil society actors, or interests' groups are published in for example, newspapers, journals, or online platforms have also been used. To understand the changes in aid policy in an institutional and historical context, the document analysis is combined with an overview of previous research and secondary sources. By placing contemporary policy texts in relation to previous political guidelines, historical stages and established norms within Swedish aid policy, a broader analysis of continuity and change is enabled.

Using HI as the theoretical framework allows the research to understand both continuity and change in Swedish aid policy. It makes it possible to estimate if the 2022 election and the Tidö agreement represent a critical juncture in the historical traditions of Swedish aid, and to what extent the collaboration with the Sweden Democrats has led to change in the established policy paths.

In addition to the written source material, a semi-structured interview was also conducted with an expert in aid policy. The interview was conducted at an early stage of the research process and was used primarily to contextualize the study, identify relevant themes and understand the political dynamics surrounding aid issues after the 2022 election. The interview is thus not used as a primary empirical source in the analysis but contributes to deepening the

understanding of certain processes and party-political priorities that are also expressed in the analyzed documents.

1.3. Delimitations

This dissertation focus only on Sweden's development aid policies and does not cover a broader analysis of foreign aid which could have included diplomatic assistance, military aid, or trade policies. Another delimitation is a country comparison where the case study is limited to Sweden and the impact of the 2022 election. It has a particular focus on the influence of a PRRP influence on development aid policies rather than a general policy shift under right wing coalition. The study does not investigate the internal decision-making processes within political parties but instead examines their policy outcomes.

1.4. Limitations

There is a chance that policies may still be unfolding, and official reports might not yet fully capture the impact on the 2022 election shifts. Here, the timeframe of the dissertation might not fully be able to capture the impact of post-2022 shifts. Since the study is a single case-study, there is a chance that findings may not be easily generalized to other countries with PRRP influence. As well as changes in development aid policies might not be solely due to right-wing influence, it could also be economic, or geopolitical factors may also play a role. There was an original plan to conduct more than one interview with policymakers and politicians involved in the Swedish development aid sector. The responses to the requests did not get answered or the organizations turned down the offer of being part of the interviews. Additional interviews could have added a more deeper understanding of the Swedish PRRP's impact on the country's development aid policy as well as other insights.

1.5. Structure of thesis

This thesis is structured as follow. The dissertation starts with this introduction chapter, followed by chapter 2 on the role of OECD-DAC in setting the rules defining the standards on the practice of providing development aid by their member states. It discusses the historical background and development of OECD-DAC and ODA. As well as the role of international organizations in shaping development aid policies and standards.

Chapter 3 describes the influence of political ideologies and the role of populist radical right parties in shaping development aid in Europe.

Chapter 4 looks at the case study of the influence of a PRRP in Swedish development aid policy. It presents analyses historical Swedish development aid policies, the 2022 elections and the Tidö-agreement and the empirical findings related to the influence of the Sweden Democrats on development aid policies. It ends with a discussion of the findings with the help of HI, discussing institutional continuity and changes. Lastly, the conclusion provides the answer to the original question of the research followed by suggestions on future research.

CHAPTER 2

OECD-DAC: setting the ODA rules

The Organization for Economic and Cooperation for Development (OECD) and Development Assistance Committee (DAC) is responsible for setting the rules on provision of official development assistance (ODA), particularly the measures of flows from the world's richest countries to developing nations. It was created in 1961 and is recognized as the most transparent, relevant, and reliable source of statistical data on ODA provided by the member state (EECD, 2024b). DAC members, multilateral organizations, private philanthropists' foundations, and other provider countries report the data. It is published two times a year, with ODA figures released in April for the previous year and detailed updates provided in December. OECD creates official standards to ensure that the data is relevant and useful to policy makers and data users. DAC is responsible for policy standards to be followed by member states promoting quality of aid funding and effectiveness (OECD, 2025b).

Aid is aimed at supporting the economy and welfare (health, sanitation or education) of partner countries and it has been a primary source of development finance, particularly for the lowest income ones. Aid can take the form of grants or soft loans, and they need to be provided by official agencies like states or local governments. Grants are transfers of cash, goods or services that do not require re-payment, and soft loans are fund transfers with lower interests' rates compared to commercial banks. Aid can be delivered through different channels, often categorized into bilateral and multilateral aid (OECD, 2024a). Bilateral aid is when the aid goes directly from the donor country to the recipient country. Donor countries usually have development cooperation agencies which oversee the implementation of the countries' ODA policy. The second is multilateral aid where the aid is given by a donor country to a multilateral organization within the UN system such as UNICEF, WFP, or the World Bank. They then allocate the funds to programs supporting developing countries.

Financial flows are received by countries and territories that are listed by DAC list of aid recipients (OECD, 2024b). These recipients are Low Income Countries (LIC), Lower Middle-Income Countries (LMIC), and Upper Middle-Income Countries (UMIC). Aid can also encompass certain types of support for the private sector, known as private sector instruments (PSI), which include loans, guarantees, equity investments, and other financial mechanisms (OECD, n.db). PSI must be allocated to countries on the DAC list of aid recipients, and their

primary object must be to promote economic development and welfare. Finally, they must be financially and developmentally additional, meaning that they offer resources that would otherwise not be available (OECD, 2024b).

OECD (2025b) statistics show that in 2024, aid provided by DAC member countries reached USD 212.1 billion, a 7.1% decrease from 2023. Despite this, only four countries reached the 0.7 percent target¹ of ODA, including Sweden (OECD, 2025b). In general, DAC countries aid has been at 0.33% of their combined gross national income. The reduction in net ODA compared to 2023 was driven by lower contributions to the core budgets of multilateral organizations, as well as decrease in donor-refuge costs, humanitarian assistance, and support for Ukraine. In 2024, France, Germany, the United States, and the United Kingdom reduced their ODA for the first time in thirty years (OECD, 2025a). These announced cuts can explain the decrease in aid and are expected to hit the poorest countries hardest. According to the OECD, in 2025, these countries are expected to receive a 13-25% decline in net bilateral ODA from DAC providers (OECD, 2025a).

2.1. The origins and evolution of aid

“Development assistance has left-wing roots. These roots are found in the increase of private aid in the early part of the twentieth century, the creation of the welfare state, the establishment of the UN system, and the launching of the Marshall Plan” (Thérien, 2002). Since the end of World War II, foreign aid has changed and has been shaped by decolonization, globalization, the failure of the New International Economic Order² and the Cold War.

The current aid system started after WWII during the efforts of rebuilding Europe (Dabelstein & Patton, 2013). The European Recovery Program, or the Marshall Plan, was a program that provided funds to help rebuild European economies. The goal was to rebuild war-devastated economies, remove trade barriers, modernize industry, and prevent the spread of Soviet communism. The program operated for four years, and the United States invested around 13

¹ During the 1970s, one main goal by the UN was to create the target of 0.7% of a country's Gross National Product (GNP) that should be spent on development aid.

² “The New International Economic Order (NIEO) was a set of proposals put forward during the 1970s by some developing countries through the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development to promote their interests by improving their terms of trade, increasing development assistance, developed-country tariff reductions, and other means. It was meant to be a revision of the international economic system in favor of Third World countries, replacing the Bretton Woods system, which had benefited the leading states that had created it – especially the United States.” (Unescwa, n.d)

billion US dollars in economic and technical assistance to European countries that joined the OECD (Dabelstein & Patton, 2013).

The Marshall plan officially ended in 1952 and by then the economy of every participating state had surpassed pre-war levels (Dabelstein & Patton, 2013). The competition between the Soviet Union and Western capitalist countries also contributed to aid to be used geopolitically and to support developing countries friendly to the West. Most of the aid was directed toward serving the interests of donor countries instead of meeting the real development needs of developing countries (Dabelstein & Patton, 2013).

In 1961, OECD was formed and DAC sought to increase aid flows, improve aid terms and effectiveness. Resource flows included grants, loans and private investments but there still was a need for a more precise measurement. Here, a process started to find a better definition for aid after receiving pressure from countries that provided a large share of their assistance in grant. DAC contributed to refining the concept of ODA and in the 1970s, DAC members established clearer rules on aid (Hynes & Scott, 2013).

For European countries, this process led to the establishment of national development aid agencies and participation in multilateral collaborations such as the OECD-DAC and UN development programs. The US has long been seen as the central force of the foreign aid system and has been a major contributor since the end of the Second World War. They have implemented development and humanitarian programs and laid ground for international development organizations such as the World Bank Group, the International Monetary Fund, and the regional multilateral development banks (MDBs), as well as different UN agencies (Pipa, 2020). Until its closure in 2025, the United State Agency for International Development (USAID) was the largest international development agency in the world and sponsored projects in almost 100 countries (BBC, 2025). In 2017, they contributed to the UN with around \$10 billion which was one-fifth of the organization's total budget (Regilme, 2022).

Today, the aim of aid is that the grants and soft loans given by development countries should fund programs to improve access to drinking water, health care, decent housing, and poverty reduction (Riddell, 2014). Aid rests on the belief that assistance will improve the lives of those most in need. At the end of the Cold War in 1989 with the collapse of the Berlin Wall, the provision of development aid took a new turn as it became more focused on promoting democracy, human rights, and economic liberalization (Jakupec & Kelly, 2016). Later in the

2000s the focus shifted to national development, poverty reduction, good governance, and macroeconomic policies.

From the beginning of the 21st century, the provision of aid became associated with the achievement of so-called global goals. The Millennium Development Goals (MDG) was created in 2000 and were eight international development goals, supported by all 193 United Nations member states and at least 23 international organizations (Dabelstein & Patton, 2013). The overall goal was to address global challenges in developing and poor countries and reach these goals by 2015. The aims were to eliminate extreme poverty and mortality, improve maternal health, combat diseases like HIV/AIDS and malaria, ensure environmental sustainability, and foster global partnerships for development.

By 2015, the MDGs contributed considerable progress and helped lift over one billion people out of extreme poverty, made progress against hunger, enable unprecedented numbers of girls attending school, and contributed to protecting the planet (UN, 2017). For example, extreme poverty declined between 1990s and 2015, reducing the global number of people living in extreme poverty from 1.9 billion to 836 million. Child mortality fell by more than half, from 90 to 43 deaths per 1000 living births between 1990 and 2015. New HIV infections dropped by around 40% between 2000 and 2013, and by mid-2014, 13.6 million people were receiving antiretroviral therapy, up from 800,000 in 2003.

Despite progress, achievements have been uneven, leaving millions of the poorest people behind. Women still faced barriers to work, assets, decision making and other inequalities remained in 2015. Conflicts and climate challenges continue to be a problem with 60 million displaced people in 2014 (UN, 2017). Patton (2013) argues that while the MDGs had an overall positive impact, it faced criticism for being unrealistic and too narrow focused. Some areas could overshadow others and most of the goals were directed toward developing countries and not addressing the systemic issues whitening developed nations.

Therefore, in 2015, the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) were created as a more comprehensive and ambitious option to be achieved by 2030. They consist of 17 goals and are designed to address all countries, recognizing the interconnectedness of global challenges (Woodbridge, 2017). The agenda is applied to all UN member states and not only the developing and poor ones. Compared to the MDGs, they have a broader range, including goals related to poverty eradication, gender equality, education, clean water, and sanitation, among others. At the

same time, the SDGs emphasize environmental sustainability, economic growth, and social inclusion. They also include input from governments, civil society, and the private sector reaching to include all nations, especially developing countries (Woodbridge, 2017).

Since 2015, millions of people have gained access to essential services and over half of the global population now benefits from different forms of social protection (UN, 2025).

Despite these improvements, the yearly UN monitoring reports on SDG achievements show that only 35% of the SDG goals have reached adequate progress, (UN, 2025). In contrast, 48% demonstrate insufficient progress, including 31% with marginal gains and 17% with no progress. There are 18% of the goals that have regressed below 2015 levels (UN, 2025). Areas as peace and security are becoming more unstable and there are over 120 million people displaced, which is more than in 2015. These results show that progress is too slow and that the global context is challenging.

Despite the expansive vision of the SDGs, there are challenges that can affect their implementation and success. First, Woodbridge (2017) argues, there is a financing gap where the cost is about to be around USD 17 trillion which is raising question about how these goals will be funded. Second, there is a question about the integration of SDGs because they are not designed in the way that one area can positively influence other goals. Here, national government may choose to prioritize certain goals, while ignoring or not prioritizing others. Third, data collection remains a problem. Without the ability to properly monitor, it can create challenges to be able to assess if the goals are being met.

CHAPTER 3

Ideology and Development Aid

The research by Suzuki (2023) supports that political ideologies do influence aid policies at certain levels. The ideological beliefs are a motivation to fulfill their promises because otherwise it would undermine their credibility and support. While the Right-Left view can be used as a measurement, there is a risk that it overlooks coalitions which can influence the ideological impact of parties (Suzuki, 2023).

One of the major differences between the Left and the Right is that the Left have a more moral view on development aid and see it as an extension of the welfare state on a global level (Thérien, 2002). For them, development aid is supposed to promote humane internationalism, promote economic, social, and political development. Here, NGOs are a big part of the system who are also often more visible and vocal in media about issues and challenges. During the late 20th century and continuously in the 21st century, the Left have prioritized UN goals as poverty reduction, social development, and environmental goals (Thérien, 2002). During the 1970s, one main goal by the UN was to create the target of 0.7% of a country's Gross National Product (GNP) that should be spent on development aid. Countries as Denmark, Norway, Sweden, and the Netherlands did reach this goal and raised the standards for international generosity (Thérien, 2002).

Compared to the Left, the Right sees development aid as a policy tool and that each state has a responsibility to fight poverty (Thérien, 2002). Often, they have a view that aid is ineffective and does not give direct results or promote economic growth. The Right promotes policies that are more selective towards countries where values align with their own and where it is possible to create trade agreements (Thérien, 2002). While the idea of development aid was based on Left-wing ideas, the Right has used it as a policy instrument during the last century. It was used during the cold war to secure ideological allies and by the US that was often restricted to non-communist states (Thérien, 2002). Development aid has also been used by major political powers as the US, the UK and France to contain communism or maintain influence in their former colonies.

The results from the research made by Tingley (2009) show that economic ideologies do have an influence on aid policies to various degrees. It also explains that support for development aid is dependent on domestic politics in a country's government, where with new ruling parties there can be ideological changes. When more economically conservative parties gain power,

there is a decline in aid for Least Developed countries (LDCs) and Other Low-Income Countries (OLICs) (Tingley, 2009). On the other hand, when it comes to Lower-Middle-Income Countries (LMICs) and Upper-Middle-Income Countries (UMICs), economic ideologies do not have as much influence. The study indicates that aid assistance to LDCs and OLICs are influenced by ideology and that LMICs and UMICs are more shaped by strategic or economic interest (Tingley, 2009). Ideology is a more consistent driver of development aid and is more responsive to short-term political shifts. The relationship between ideology, strategy, and development stresses the complexity of aid allocation.

Thérien (2002) argues that it is also important to understand the changes in the aid system within the ideological context at the time, between the Right and the Left. While the two concepts have no broader consensus on how to describe them, for example most would agree that in the 2000s the British New Labour Party, NGOs and the government of Sweden tend to be left leaning, while the Conservative Party, the government of the USA and the IMF were more right leaning (Thérien, 2002). Two of the biggest contributors to development aid have been United States and the United Kingdom. Both countries also serve as good examples on how Right-leaning governments (Boris Johnson in the UK and Donald Trump in the US) significantly influence the aid system by significantly reducing or even stopping it.

In 2020, the new prime minister in the United Kingdom, Boris Johnson, merged Department for International Development (DFID) with the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) which together became Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO) (Devanny & Berry, 2021). Development aid was now subjected to UK's foreign and security policy priorities. This change have highlighted a shift in the aid policy, linking aid to more domestic interests. The reasoning by the prime minister was that the UK needed a unified department, even though DFID existed for 23 years and made it possible for an institutional separation between development aid and foreign policy. Devanny and Berry (2021) argue that it was also created from the shifting dynamics within the Conservative party.

Johnsson also believed that taxpayer's money should not be spent on development aid, as well as that aid should promote political influence and economic benefits, not only focusing on humanitarian goals. He criticized DFID for spending more in Africa than in European countries like Ukraine and the Western Balkans, which he argued were more critical for UK's national security (Devanny & Berry, 2021). Except for the reasons listed, there was no broader

explanation why the DFID was deemed ineffective. The merger was not the only change to UK's development aid priorities. In November 2020, it was announced that the UK would no longer commit to the allocated 0.7% of GNI to aid. It was reduced to 0.5% which was a cut around £4 billion (Devanny & Berry, 2021). The current Labour-led government has continued this approach. In February 2025, it was announced that from 2027 it would again cut the development aid budget by 40% to 0.3% of gross national income.

After being re-instated as president in 2025, Donald Trump and his administration announced that they are eliminating over 90% over USAID's foreign contracts and cuts assistance worldwide to a total of \$60 billion (AP News, 2025). This cut, in practice, could leave only a few remaining USAID projects. Once again, this shows a broad retreat from US usual foreign aid policies which have historically been seen to stabilize other countries, fostering economic development and strengthening diplomatic allies. Donald Trump claims that USAID's programs promote a liberal agenda and represent an inefficient use of federal resources.

On 20 January 2025, he ordered a review of all foreign assistance programs over a 90-days period, with an immediate suspension of all aid funds (AP News, 2025). This freeze has led to the disruption of thousands of U.S.-funded initiatives globally, and most USAID staff have been forced to leave their positions through mandatory leave or dismissals. Among the affected programs are several with demonstrated success, including initiatives aimed at containing outbreaks of Ebola and other global health threats, as well as HIV and AIDS treatments, which, according to USAID, have saved more than 20 million lives in Africa. A federal judge ruled against the aid freeze, but the administration countered this by canceling contracts. The Supreme Court temporarily blocked the lower court's order to release aid, keeping the freezing in place. The situation remains legally unresolved, with pending Supreme Court decisions (AP News, 2025). Later in 2025, it was announced that USAID was officially dismantled because of allegations of being inefficient and wasteful spending (BBC, 2025). In March 2025, over 80% of the agency's programs had been closed and the remaining were integrated into the State department.

Within this ideological debate on aid, the rising Populist Radical Right Parties or PRRPs in Europe have been playing a key role in influencing the aid system.

3.1. The rising political space of PRRPs

Mudde (2007) defines Populist radical Right Parties (PRRPs) as having three core themes, nativism, authoritarianism, and populism. Nativism is built on the belief that the state should consist only of the native group and outsiders are perceived as a threat. Nativists often target foreign origins minorities and oppose foreign influence. While nationalism entails loyalty to the nation, nativism explicitly combines nationalism with xenophobia, underscoring its hostility toward nonnatives. Authoritarianism often involves respect for authority within the group and glorifying authority figures. In short, they believe in an ordered society where violations of authority are punished. Populism divides society into two groups, pure versus the corrupt and that politics should reflect the general will of the people. Populism is considered a "thin" ideology, meaning it can combine with other ideologies, such as nationalism or socialism (Mudde, 2007).

PRRPs are built on identity politics, meaning they have an idea of an us versus them and that the world is divided into good and bad. They have a clear perception of who is native to the state, and who is an outsider, enemy, or an alien. The current government, or the elite, is seen as an internal enemy and a traitor to the nation and the people. The external enemy is a nonnational living outside the state, which could be individual groups, a country or an organization like the EU and UN. In Western Europe, for example, for PRRPs the enemy is often immigrants while in Eastern Europe is often ethnic minorities. While antisemitism has been rare and seen as unacceptable since the second world war, there is instead islamophobia which has become the central theme in PRRPs propaganda. PRRPs oppose to cultural globalization and multiculturalism because there can only be one official national culture. Here, some parties make a distinction between European and non-European foreigners because the former are more capable of assimilation as they share a similar culture (Mudde, 2007).

PRRPs adopt an economic stance that could be called nativist economics which is not liberal or socialist, but a mix. They promote market dynamics within the nation-state but are sceptic towards global markets (Mudde, 2007). When it comes to welfare systems, they promote social benefits as pension to the native people, but aliens are excluded. It is also common among the parties to prioritize the agricultural sector with small native businesses because it seemed vital to the survival of the nation and should be self-sufficient. PRRPs are also often critical to economic globalization because it is a threat to national sovereignty. Global markets allow foreign influence and undermine national interests. They are skeptical about the UN because of international

cooperation (Mudde, 2007). Despite their staunch opposition to globalization, populist radical right parties are not typically associated with the broader anti-globalization movement. Ideological differences often place them in opposition to other anti-globalization activists, despite occasional calls for collaboration among all opponents of globalization (Mudde, 2007).

What is also important for PRRPs is law and order where the state should be built on values such as authority, compliance, and respect. There is often a view on zero tolerance to crime and increasing the police, reducing bureaucratic constraints, and enhancing their professional competence.

3.2. The case of European PRRPs and development aid

Most PRRPs in Europe have a similar view on foreign aid where they advocate for budget cuts and to spend the funds instead on the country's own population (Hackenesch et.al, 2022). The main ideologies of PRRPs stem from anti-establishment views where the social elite, or establishment, are not connected to the ordinary person (Suzuki, 2023). The politicians of these parties often try to convince them they are different from the establishment and can represent the common people. Here, aid is seen as something that divides the common person from the elite who promotes aid policies without consent (Suzuki, 2023). Their views can also stem from nativism which means that the state should only be made by members of the native group and PRRPs uses this to separate the population into nationals and foreigners, using anti-immigration rhetoric to assert national dominance. Still, more traditional conservative parties may prioritize foreign aid to keep international relations, supporting strategic partnership or maintaining international obligations.

Research shows that mainstream center-right and left-parties have been in decline during the past decades where anti-establishment parties gain more support. In 2021, 32 percent of people voted for antiestablishment parties in Europe, compared to just 12 percent in the 1990s, according to the University of Amsterdam (Balfour & Lehne, 2024). In countries as Denmark (Danish People's Party), Sweden (Sweden Democrats), the Netherlands (Party for Freedom) among others, the PRRPs started to gain power in governments already in the 1990s (Hammerschmidt, Meyer & Pintsch, 2021). In Austria, the Freedom Party of Austria (FPÖ), a PRRP, formed a coalition with the Austrian People's Party (ÖVP), a more right leaning conservative party, after the 2017 elections. The coalition resulted in FPÖ allocating four ministries and was able to nominate an

independent minister to oversee the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, which is responsible for Austria's foreign aid distribution. During their time in power, the coalition government reduced development aid to its lowest level since 2004 (Hammerschmidt, Meyer & Pintsch, 2021).

The research by Hammerschmidt, Meyer and Pintsch (2021) shows that there is a correlation between the participation of a PRRPs in the government and a larger decrease in foreign aid commitments. Their possibilities to manage this can depend on whether the government is a minority or majority. This could be because of minority governments having less control and flexibility over their policy decisions. Majority governments on the other hand have more possibilities to counterbalance the influence of PRRPs.

The parties can take different paths to be able to influence the mainstream parties (Hackenesch et al., 2022). First, they can gain electoral support which pressures mainstream parties to adjust their policy position to retain voters who otherwise mainly align with PRRPs views. Second, they can enter coalition agreements with mainstream parties, offering their support in exchange for inclusion in the policy making. The latter have a greater opportunity to shape politics and development aid policies (Hackenesch et al., 2022). At the same time, there has been a debate among scholars in how much and in which way PRRPs do make an impact (Tingley, 2009; Suzuki, 2023).

There is a general trend that a higher share of PRRPs in the legislature is associated with changes in foreign aid policies. However, this effect is less noticeable in wealthier countries, whereas in poorer countries, it tends to have a more negative impact (Hammerschmidt, Meyer & Pintsch, 2021). This suggests that the economic strength of a country plays a significant role in how the presence of PRRPs in the cabinet impacts foreign aid decisions. In poorer countries, foreign aid is more sensitive to political shifts, including the rise of PRRPs in the government (Hammerschmidt, Meyer & Pintsch, 2021).

Hackenesch et al. (2022) argue, however, that there is only weak evidence that supports the idea that PRRPs have a direct influence on aid budgets. What it shows is that when PRRPs gain more votes and seats, the share of development aid directed toward migration increases. What the research also indicates is that PRRPs are more successful when they are in opposition and argues that migration-related aid issues are important and from there pressures mainstream parties to align with their views, they create an electoral threat (Hackenesch et al., 2022). In response to PRRPs' electoral strength, governments reallocate aid toward migration containment strategies,

reflecting a short-term effort to address migration pressures and diminish the appeal of PRRPs to voters. They can shift the policy priorities of mainstream parties, particularly in areas they highlight as electorally significant, such as migration containment. This finding underscores the role of electoral competition in shaping foreign aid priorities, with mainstream parties adjusting their positions not based on public opinion or objective needs, but in response to the electoral threat posed by PRRPs (Hackenesch et.al, 2022).

In the study by Suzuki (2023), where they study 17 parliamentary democracies in Western Europe, it shows that that "...PRR parties exert significant aid-reducing pressure toward recipient countries that send substantial numbers of immigrants to the donor country...". The subject of immigration is a great way for PRRPs to gain public support by posing themselves as the primary advocates. In the case of foreign aid policy, they can advocate for reducing aid to countries with high immigration rates which is supported by the voters and therefore a way to change the way of foreign aid in line with their anti-immigration view.

In January 2024, Giorgia Meloni, the Italian Prime Minister, launched a significant investment program for Africa, claiming it was aimed at addressing the root causes of migration and fostering cooperation on migration-related issues (Balfour & Lehne, 2024). Another example, shown in Denmark, the center-right minority government had support from the Danish Freedom Party (DF). Here, they tightened immigration rules while dismissing poverty as the root cause of migration and cut aid to 16 countries in Africa and Asia (Suzuki, 2023).

What the results by Suzuki (2023) show is that PRRPs can only influence aid policy if they have direct access to political coalitions because the research shows that when they are not part of a coalition, they do not have enough policymaking power to affect aid. But, when they are in power, they use their nationalist and anti-immigration agendas to try to make changes in aid policies. This is evident in the case of the Rutte coalition government, formed after the 2011 elections in the Netherlands, which, with the support of Geert Wilders' PVV. In this case, the ODA budget were decreased from 0.8% to 0.7% of GNP from 2012 and onward (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Netherlands, 2012). This were followed by ODA budget cuts of €900 million in 2012, followed by €720 million in 2013 and €750 million in 2014. The cuts led to reallocation of funds where the priorities were in security and legal order, water, food security, sexual and reproductive health, and rights (SRHR), and private sector development. Areas such as education, budget support, and healthcare experience cuts.

For a long time, the Netherlands has been one of the major contributors to development aid, committed 0.7% of its GDP to foreign assistance (Meijer, 2024). Following the electoral success of the PRRP party leader Geert Wilders in 2024, the new right-wing government announced that there would be a significant reduction in the development aid budget. For the next three years, the government plans to cut aid by more than two-thirds. The budget will decrease by 300 million euros in 2025, followed by a further reduction of 500 million euros in 2026, resulting in a total reduction of 2.4 billion euros by 2027. The government is also reducing budget for cooperation with NGOs from 2026 to make civil society organizations to be less dependent on government (The Government of the Netherlands, 2024a). To reach this goal, they intend to introduce stricter requirements for organizations that want to get a grant under the new policy framework.

The Minister for Foreign Trade and Development has also announced that it intends to use the money in the budget to support Dutch companies do business internationally.

Previous research shows that political ideologies can influence development aid policies, especially when parties have access to government coalitions. PRRPs are seen to advocate for reducing aid budgets and reallocating funds towards national interest, anti-immigration, and nationalists' agendas. What shows is that PRRPs can function as triggers for potential critical junctures in development aid policies. European countries have historically had a tradition of long-standing international commitments and strong international departments. The introduction of PRRPs in government coalitions can disrupt established paths and create policy changes. They show how institutional changes can occur when new actors appear. As seen in the example of UK, where ideological shifts translate into concrete policy changes. Or in the Netherlands where a change of government led to reallocation of funds towards security, migration, water and food security, and private sector development, while other areas as education, health and general budget support received cuts.

CHAPTER 4

PRRP in Sweden and Development Aid

4.1. An overview of Sweden's ODA

Sweden provided 5 billion USD of ODA in 2024, representing 0.79 percent of GNI, which was a decrease from 2023 (OECD, 2025). Also, Sweden ranked as the 3rd DAC member countries when ODA is taken as a share of GNI. The Swedish ODA is channeled to and through civil society organizations and it has a dedicated support for the UN system, which received over 40 percent of Swedish multilateral funding.

Sweden's aid allocation to its largest partner countries has remained stable since the late 1990s, with around 50% of bilateral aid going to the top 10 recipients³ (Pettersson, 2022). Sweden distinguishes between countries with specific country strategies and those where aid is governed by regional or thematic strategies. Since Sweden became an aid donor, it has promoted multilateralism for strengthening international relations and improving aid effectiveness. Bilateral aid has made up about 70% of Sweden's aid and multilateral aid accounting for about 30% (Pettersson, 2022). Most aid has gone through the UN system as UNPD or UNICEF, while the World Bank Group has received about one third (Odén & Wohlgemuth, 2011).

Ukraine was the top recipient of Swedish development aid in 2023 as well as its closest neighboring countries (OECD, 2025). This continued into 2024, where 415.4 million USD of net bilateral ODA were allocated from Swedish aid, as a response to the impacts of Russia's full-scale invasion. Second to Ukraine, countries in Africa were a primary focus in 2023 where 1.1 billion USD was allocated, for example, Democratic Republic Congo, Mozambique, and Ethiopia. In 2023, Sweden allocated 18.3 percent of gross bilateral ODA to developing countries (OECD, 2025).

In 2023, the largest focus of Sweden's bilateral ODA was on social infrastructure and services. Other large focus areas were gender equality and women's empowerment and environment (OECD, 2025). Sweden has a three-year development aid framework which amounts to 56 billion SEK (€5.12 billion) per year, and it is running until 2025, this could translate to 0.79% of the GNI (Sida, 2025). In 2024, the budget were 52.89 billion SEK with 27,6 billion SEK (€2.53 billion) (or 52%) allocated to SIDA. The other half is divided among other

³ In 2024, the 10 top countries was Ukraine, Democratic Republic of Congo, Afghanistan, Moçambique, Sudan, Ethiopia, Somalia, Kenya, Palestine and Tanzania (openaid.se)

public actors, as Ministry for Foreign Affairs (45%), Folke Bernadotte Academy⁴ (0.70%), and Swedish Institute⁵ (0.60%) (Openaid, 2025). Geographically, most of the bilateral aid goes to Africa south of the Sahara, primarily to southern and eastern Africa. In Asia, aid is concentrated in the poorest countries in South Asia, and in Latin America, it goes to the countries in Central America and Bolivia.

4.2. The origins of Swedish ODA

During the first half of the 20th century, Sweden overcame its own poverty, mostly under the leadership of Social Democratic Governments. The Swedish aid we see today have had different driving forces during its development, but the first ones were organized through efforts made by the civil society, mainly missionary work by the Church of Sweden and Free Church movements. The missionary work by the church were in Asia and Africa, and outside of religious work the focus was healthcare and education (Lundgren, 2021). Another example was activism where students and intellectual movements protested against apartheid in South Africa, leading to fundraising campaigns, a national anti-apartheid committee and a growing solidarity with Southern Africa (Odén & Wohlgemuth, 2011).

In the start, Swedish development aid was mainly driven by individuals and liberal-center political groups where humanitarian concerns gained attention. In the absence of a formal state aid policy during the 1950s, various organizations such as labor and cooperative movements also took a leading role. Their approach aligned with UN goals and emphasized local empowerment, fair labor, and international solidarity (Berg, Tydén & Lundberg, 2021). Government led aid began with the creation of the Board for International Assistance (NIB) in 1962 with Minister Ulla Lindström and Secretary-General Arne Björnberg as leading figures. At this time, aid policy outlined poverty reduction as its main goal, supported by sub-goals as boosting production, promoting social development, and fostering democratic governance (Odén & Wohlgemuth, 2011). Although the aid budget increased significantly, NIB managed only around 13% of the 1962/63 allocation (Berg, Tydén & Lundberg, 2021).

⁴ A Swedish government agency working for peace, security and development.

⁵ A Swedish public agency that promotes Sweden, regional and global cooperation, and international trust and interest in the country

Swedish aid policy was about peace and solidarity. In the existing research, Berg, Tydén and Lundgren (2021) argues that it is difficult to distinguish ideological differences in the development aid discussion during the early years. Later, anti-communism and the fear of the Soviet Union were something unifying the parties and kept the democratic ideas of policies together. Two recurring themes during this time were poverty and extremism, and the wish to prevent development towards increasing political unrest and communism. Other discussions included the crisis of humanity and the will to atone and improve, responsibility towards people, colonial rule, and imperial politics, living conditions and concerns about racial and cultural change because of colonial rule (Berg, Tydén and Lundgren, 2021).

At the start of the 1950s, Sweden supported the ideas and goals of the United Nations (UN) and took part in in the aid and reconstruction programs after the world war. Since 1962, the general goal of Swedish aid has been poverty reduction through economic development and an ambition to devote one percent of GNI to development aid, and since 1975 it has never been below 0.7% (Pettersson, 2022). Swedish development aid has mostly been formed under consensus and has not had major shifts during government changes. Sweden has become a leading donor internationally, particularly in relation to its size and GDP (Lundberg, 2021). It has set up bilateral relations with countries in other parts of the world and taken an active role in international organizations. During the cold war, aid policy became an element of Sweden's 'small-state idealist' foreign policy. While old empires like France and Britain had postcolonial debts and new superpowers as the USA and the Soviet Union had the Cold War, Sweden stood for a humanitarian internationalism (Berg, Tydén & Lundberg, 2021).

4.3. Building the Swedish ODA system: Institutions, ideas, and organizations

The Swedish development aid policy has been shaped by a vision for global development based on solidarity and a legal framework that has influenced policy implementation since the 1960s.

The legal framework has been particularly important for making decisions on how aid provision should be organized, which countries to be prioritized, and how to ensure long-term effectiveness. Over time, these choices became increasingly formalized and path-dependent, influencing the direction and scope of Swedish aid and the work of the country's development agency.

4.3.1. The institutions shaping Swedish ODA

4.3.1.1. *Bill 1962:100*

Bill 1962:100 became the ‘bible’ for Swedish development aid, consisting of 160 pages and the first Swedish aid policy that went through a separate guideline proposition (Berg, Tydén & Lundberg, 2021). What made it special was that, for the first time, the government had highlighted the development aid policy area through a separate guideline proposal with the goals and means of Swedish development aid. The Social Democrat-led government approved the bill with relative consensus with even the members of the conservative party agreeing on the overall aims. Sweden's financial aid increased rapidly after the bill was adopted by the country’s parliament, the Riksdag. The bilateral financial aid of 20 million in 1962/1963 had grown to 70 million two years later (Berg, Tydén & Lundberg, 2021).

The proposition was significant with several guiding principles (Anell, 2017). Mainly that development aid was a moral duty and international solidarity could justify a generous Swedish aid program. In other words, the aid level was meant to be seen as an expression of Sweden’s solidarity with the world’s poorest counties. The main principles in from Bill 1962:100 have been reused in later policy documents, with solidarity as the basic motive for aid and poverty alleviation, support for human rights, justice and equality and ownership have formed important parts of Swedish development cooperation. It also included the current areas for development aid such as population growth, elimination hunger and poverty, eradication of epidemic disease, and reduction of infant mortality.

The bill stood for three sub-goals which were contributing to promoting overall economic productivity in developing countries, promoting political democracy, and fostering social equality. In 1968, political and economic independence became a fourth sub-goal. Later, as the importance of environmental issues grew in 1980s, management of natural resources and care for the environment were added as a fifth sub-goal in Bill 1987/88:100, a Swedish government bill focusing on aid objectives. In Sweden, gender equality issues also grew in importance, and in 1995, gender equality between women and men became another sub-goal in in the Swedish Government proposition 1995/96:153 on development cooperation. Both Bill 1987/88:100 and Bill 1995/96:153 were government propositions that focus on development aid goals, updating the existing framework from 1962:100. Changes in world order, the international political

economy and new research findings played a significant role not only in development aid policy trends but also in which goals were in focus.

4.3.1.2. The one percent target

The idea of the one percent target started during the Socialist International meeting in 1956 where they got the inspiration from the Dutch Social Democrats. The one percent target for Swedish aid was included in Bill 1968:101 and was decided in the same year. This meant that the aid allocation gradually increased to one percent of the estimated GDP, and it reached its goal in the 1974/75 budget year (Odén & Wohlgemuth, 2011). Later, the target was changed to one percent of GNI to follow the international 0.7 percent target based on GNI. As a result, Sweden has over the past four to five decades been among the countries that provide the highest level of aid compared to the size of their own economy (Odén & Wohlgemuth, 2011).

While the one percent target was not aimed at for the budget years between 1993 and 2005 it was never below 0.7% of GNI. This was due to a crisis package negotiated between the conservative government and the Social Democratic Party (Pettersson, 2022). Still, there was an agreement that the target should be reached as soon as possible. Therefore, departures from the one percent target have only been made for budgetary reasons. The highest amount of aid was reached in 2009 when DAC registered Swedish disburse aid at 1.12% of GNI (Odén & Wohlgemuth, 2011).

4.3.1.3. The aid concentration principle

Already in the Bill 1962:100, the principle of concentration was stated as a core principle guiding Swedish aid. It meant that aid should be concentrated in a few countries and thematic areas (Odén & Wohlgemuth, 2011). It was argued that because of Sweden being an internationally small aid donor, this principle was speaking in favor of a limited number of partner countries, as well as thematic areas. Another argument promoting the principle were historical, that had little experience from poor countries and therefore it should choose those where links had been made by missionaries or other Swedish activities. SIDA intended to pursue the principle of concentration in terms of the number of countries and types of aid projects, and this would characterize SIDA in the following years (Berg, Tydén & Lundberg, 2021).

In practice, the principle did not work. The reason was the increased aid volume after the one percent target (Odén & Wohlgemuth, 2013). Also, over time other reasons were the support to the

liberation movements which led former Portuguese colonies becoming major recipients of Swedish aid after independence and similar with the breakdown of the Soviet Union. Later, more countries were added under a broader cooperation with middle-income countries. From the middle of the 1990s to around 2013, the total number of recipient countries receiving aid through Sida has been between 100 and 120, with around 40 countries having long-term cooperation agreements (Odén & Wohlgemuth, 2013). This has been criticized by the aid administrations as well as by outside observers as DAC. To make the principle of concentration working, the new coalition government in 2007 launched a program with the aim of reducing the number of cooperating countries. The intention was that bilateral development cooperation should become concentrated to 33 regular partner state, compared with earlier 67 (Odén & Wohlgemuth, 2013).

When it came to recipients of specifically bilateral aid, there was a general rule that aid should be given to countries that were able to effectively use it. This meant that countries that had already developed a certain basis for economic development could be given priority over countries with more urgent aid needs, but with poorer conditions to draw full benefits. Around 1965, a selection of highest priority countries had been agreed upon and this included Ethiopia, Tanzania, Kenya, Sudan, Tunisia, Pakistan, and India (Berg, Tydén & Lundberg, 2021).

Berg, Tydén and Lundberg (2021) argue that the selection of recipient countries has remained constant based on what is known as path dependence. The selection of partner countries has not been based on research or in-depth studies but instead of individual opinions, opinions among influential advisors in the UN, as well as key people in NIB, SIDA and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. At the same time, continuity was seen as having intrinsic value because development and development cooperation were regarded as long-term processes (Berg, Tydén & Lundberg, 2021).

The choice of aid partners was often symbolically important and a showcase of Swedish aid to the public. It was also motivated by efficiency and the possibility of modernizing countries. The selection of aid recipients should consider Sweden's role as a non-aligned state in a world characterized by the Cold War and ongoing decolonization.

4.3.1.4. Policy for Global Development (PGD)

In the early 2000s, the Swedish international development aid policy was revised leading to the Sweden's Policy for Global Development (Sverige's politik för global utveckling, PGU) of 2003 (Odén & Wohlgemuth, 2011). Still, solidarity was a major underlying motive for aid as well as coherence and coordination. A more prioritized focus was that all political areas implemented in

Sweden by the different departments and ministries was to be coordinated to take development into account. The leading aims were to contribute to an equitable and sustainable development, as well as contribute to the UN Millennium declaration and the Millennium Development Objectives.

The two main perspectives were the rights perspective on development and the perspective of the poor on development. The first included human rights, democracy, the importance of gender equality, children's rights, and work against discrimination. The second was that development could not be created from the outside but must be built from the inside. This meant that countries own strategies and priorities for poverty alleviation would guide international support and that partnership in development cooperation was built on dialogue and mutual respect (Odén & Wohlgemuth, 2011).

4.3.2. The ideas influencing Swedish development aid policy

The overall goal of Swedish development aid has been to reduce poverty in the world through solidarity (Pettersson, 2024). In all three bills in 1962, 1968, 1978, both the goal and the volume goal were decided unanimously. The formulation of the overall goal has, at least until the turn of the century, not been a subject of conflict. At the same time, priority between the aid policy objectives have changed over the years. During the 1960s, growth was the focus. During the 1970s, the importance of distribution goal and the independence goal grew but declined in the 1980s. It was replaced by macroeconomic balance and structural adjustment programs throughout the 1980s and 1990s (Odén & Wohlgemuth, 2011).

The main ideological divides were between small- or large-scale projects, private solutions, or state control, as well as trade-based development or continued transfers rooted in solidarity. It was possible to see these conflicts conducted in the 1980s and 1990s where a political shift towards deregulation and decentralization influenced aid policy (Berg, Tydén & Lundberg, 2021).

From the mid-1980s, Swedish aid priorities began to reflect broader global development discourse. There was a stronger emphasis on shared responsibility between donors and recipients, the promotion of domestic middle classes, and the strengthening of public sectors. Aid increasingly aligned with the frameworks of the IMF and the World Bank, with environmental sustainability emerging as a central concern (Odén & Wohlgemuth, 2011). After the Cold War, democracy and gender equality gained importance, with the latter eventually becoming a sub-

goal of Swedish development policy. These changes reflected both global ideological shifts and growing collaboration among development actors.

Overall, while debates have existed, there have been few changes in objectives and directives when it comes to Swedish aid. Solidarity has always been the underlying main aid motive, and respect for recipient countries' sovereignty and poverty reduction as the main objective. The last main principle of Swedish aid through history is that aid has always been seen as an assistance to the recipient's own decisions on how to develop, regardless of the Swedish model (Odén & Wohlgemuth, 2013).

4.3.3. The organizations putting in place Swedish development aid: from NIB to Sida

Nämnden för Internationellt Bistånd (NIB), translated Committee for International Assistance, was one of the first institutional attempts to develop Swedish state aid and existed between 1962-1965 (Gerremo, 2025). NIB's main assignments were to prepare proposals and long-term plans and implement the decisions of the government. It was focused on specific bilateral aid projects and on scholarship reception and had a reduced role with not much independence. NIB only had 13 percent of the total aid allocation, and a small part of the aid funds were channeled to the organizations, which is a reason for its little independence and made it less effective (Berg, Tydén and Lundberg, 2021).

In the 1960s, Sweden was providing bilateral, technical, humanitarian, and financial aid to over twenty countries. It also became the first Western country to cooperate with North Vietnam and support African Liberation movements (Berg, Tydén & Lundberg, 2021). As this expansion happened, and NIB being unable to achieve their goals, Swedish International Development Authority (SIDA) was established under the leadership of Ernst Michanek in 1965 (Lundberg, 2021). SIDA worked differently compared to other government departments because it had the authority to both formulate and implement an aid policy. The main challenges for SIDA was the selection of recipient countries and policy areas as the budget grew from 280 million SEK to 2.8 billion SEK within the first decade (Berg, Tydén & Lundgren, 2021). Between 1965 and 1975, the agency grew from 150 employees in Stockholm to an authority with around 400 employees in Sweden and abroad. In the end of the 1960s, SIDA had to navigate in a new political climate, with liberation movements in different countries. Sweden who earlier had been a marginal participant in international aid policies, emerged during this time as one of the central actors.

Due to the concentration principle, a path for Swedish aid in the 60s, a narrower focus was needed for SIDA. The subjects were narrowed down to vocational training, food supply, and healthcare, particularly family planning. The countries to be prioritized were Ethiopia, Kenya, Tanzania, Tunisia, India, and Pakistan, as well as financial aid to Sudan and a few other countries (Berg, Tydén & Lundberg, 2021).

During the 1980s, development aid failures came into focus both internationally and in Sweden. This made the government decide to create more smaller aid agencies, called “mushrooms” rather than expanding SIDA (Berg, Tydén & Lundberg, 2021). While there is not much information about the reason, in 1995, SIDA went through a reorganization and was merged with the so-called “mushrooms”: the Board for International Technical and Economic Cooperation (BITS), the Board for International Business Assistance (SwedeCorp), the Board for Development Research (SAREC), and Sandö U-Center. This is what the current SIDA is made of.

These days, the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (Styrelsen för Internationellt utvecklingssamarbete), Sida, is the main government agency that implements the country’s development aid policy (Sida,2025). The agency finances initiatives and investments by the government’s directives and guidance. It also supports the government and other actors with knowledge, information, and statistics.

The work is led by an appointed board, and the Director General manages the day-to-day operations and reports to the board. The work is guided by national strategies and an annual operation plan. Sida’s mandate is governed by the government directives in the form of ordinances, appropriation directions, and development cooperation strategies (Sida, 2025). They do this by financing partners and sharing financial risks in guaranteed operations, mobilizing engagement, strengthening capacity, and lastly conducting dialogue. It is the government who decides on the strategies that chooses which countries and thematic areas Sweden’s development aid will focus on and what goals it aims to achieve. Geographic strategies apply to specific countries or regions. Thematic strategies focus on specific issues, such as human rights, democracy, or justice sector development. Because of Sweden being a member of the Development Assistance Committee (DAC) of the OECD, it gets annual evaluation (Sida, 2025).

4.4. The politics of Swedish ODA: The role of political parties

The Swedish political parties can generally be placed on the left-right spectrum as the Social Democrats and the Left-party on the left, the Green Party on center-left, Center Party and Liberal in the center, and lastly Moderates, Christian democrats, and Sweden Democrats on the right.

Since 1962, the overall goals and volume of aid have mostly been agreed upon between parliament parties. In 1976, the Social Democrats lost for the first time the elections and were replaced by a Center-Right coalition consisting of the Centre Party, Moderates, and the Liberal People's party (Berg, Tydén & Lundberg, 2021). Despite this ideological shift, the government kept a similar aid policy with the one percent goal prioritized and solidarity as a main principle. In 1977, a parliamentary report concluded that poverty reduction was the overarching goal of Swedish development aid, keeping the goals from a 1968 proposal (Odén & Wohlgemuth, 2011). With the end of the Cold War, Sweden's priorities were about democracy and human rights, and better coherence between foreign policy and development cooperation. The report based on these new priorities became the foundation that eventually led to the Policy for Global Development (PGU).

The overarching goals have been stable with changes in sub-goals or thematic areas driven more by international trends than by party politics. Since the 1990s, the Moderates have focused on economic growth as the key to poverty reduction, and since 2015, have promoted a shift from aid to trade (Pettersson, 2024). They advocate concentrating aid on fewer countries and aligning it with Swedish interests and values, including conditioning aid on the return of deported citizens. The Sweden Democrats, active in parliament since 2010, prioritize concrete poverty relief (e.g., water and agriculture) and humanitarian aid, while opposing aid focused on democracy and human rights (Pettersson, 2024).

When it comes to the area of poverty reduction as a goal, in the beginning of the 2010s, it became more evident a trend emphasizing growth as the most important goal for development and poverty fighting in poor countries (Odén & Wohlgemuth, 2011). This could primarily be achieved through supporting the development of the private sector while distribution issues and specific interventions aimed at poverty reduction were downplayed. The government adopted a policy for economic growth in 2009. In the budget proposals from 2010 onwards, this trend has been further strengthened.

Since the early 1990s, the Social Democrats have supported the maintenance of the one percent target and the aid budget, while the Greens (Miljöpartiet), Left Party, Liberals (Vänsterpartiet), Christian Democrats (Kristdemokraterna), and Centre Party have often pushed for increases (Petterson, 2024). In contrast, since the mid-1980s, the Moderates has proposed cuts and been skeptical towards the target. The two parties argued that the goals in policy areas should not be set in the form of expenditure targets. Since 2020, the Moderates have argued for a replacement of the target with a multiannual budget decision for the volume of aid, and that aid must be weighed against needs in Sweden (Petterson, 2024).

The Sweden Democrats have not formally announced a position against expenditure target and since 2010 they have argued for aid to amount to 0.7% of GNI (Petterson, 2024). Since 2021, the party has been suggesting that Sweden's aid in a few years should amount to 0.5 percent of GNI. In the budget process for 2022, the budget motions from the Moderates and the Sweden Democrats both suggested a level of 0.7 per cent of GNI, and the Christian Democrats one per cent. The Sweden Democrats initially supported 0.7% of GNI for aid but shifted to 0.5% in 2021. Although the one percent target has been upheld symbolically, it was formally abandoned in the 2023 budget (Petterson, 2024).

4.4.1. The Tidö-agreement (2022-2026): A critical juncture for Swedish Development aid policy?

The Tidö Agreement describes a cooperation between the Sweden Democrats, the Moderate Party, the Christian Democrats, and the Liberal Party during the 2022-2026 term. The Sweden Democrats is the only party that is not a governmental party but has full and equal influence in the projects the same way as the parties in the government. The goal is to implement policies for crime, migration, integration, economy, healthcare, energy, development aid and climate. They have a joint budget agreement for the 2022-2026 parliamentary term. The agreement regulates how SD will participate in government work without formally being part of the government (Olsson & Jones, 2022).

The agreement between the government and the Sweden Democrats (SD) is, due to several political scientists, historically unique. What stands out about the agreement is that it is based on three parties forming the government while SD, the largest party, remains outside. At the same time, SD has achieved influence over government policy by being a cooperating party that has

the same influence as the parties in the government. In Sweden, this type of cooperation is unique, and no other government agreement has been written this way, addressing not only policy areas but also the forms of cooperation. SD now has access to the resources of the Government Offices and a kind of veto power over which proposals the government can present within the framework of the Tidö Agreement. They also have the possibility to participate in budget negotiations and presenting proposals that the government will submit without holding any ministerial posts (Olsson & Jones, 2022).

4.4.2. The Swedish Democrats and their development aid agenda

It is difficult to say exactly when the radical right emerged in Sweden, instead it grew in the late 19th and early 20th century. It has its roots with the National Socialist Germany ideas, anti-communism during the Cold War, and in the late 20th century, the skepticism grew against immigration and multiculturalism. The Tidö Agreement has been seen, the author argues, as a departure from the democratic development.

Enocksson (2025) argues that the Moderates, the Christian Democrats, and the Liberals belong to right-wing populist conservatism, while the Sweden Democrats represent radical conservatism. The Sweden Democrats were created about 35 years ago and were formed by people with a background in National Socialism. But since the second half of the 1990s, they have been moving increasingly in a radical conservative direction. In the 2011 party program, conservatism was written into the party's ideology. The SD has had influence both on the Tidö Agreement and on the other parties. For the first time in Sweden, a party with roots in National Socialism has influence over government policy in the country.

In the 2019 motion on aid policy (Motion 2019/20:752), the Sweden Democrats (Sverigedemokraterna, 2019a) describe themselves as a socially conservative nationalist party who values conservatism and a solidarity-based welfare model. They said to be wanting a democratic Sweden which keeps the common national identity that created the foundation of the welfare state. They hope to create a 'people's home'⁶ which characterize security, prosperity,

⁶ "The concept of Folkhemmet (the People's Home) was central to Swedish Social Democratic ideology during the 20th century." From the Sweden Democrats' perspective, folkhemmet ('the People's Home') refers to a national community built on cultural cohesion and solidarity among Swedes.

democracy, and strong internal solidarity, by combining freedom and security as well as individualism and community (Sverigedemokraterna, 2019a). They state that they do not follow a socialist or liberal economic theory and instead adopt a pragmatic and realistic approach to economic issues (Sverigedemokraterna, 2019a). In their motion, the SD states that it recognizes all nations with the same fundamental rights and freedoms that they demand for Sweden (Sverigedemokraterna, 2019a).

The Sweden Democrats have had a similar vision for development aid policy in the recent years, especially since 2020 with only minor changes due to a changing global situation. They believe that all governments have the task of taking responsibility for their own citizens to the best of their ability. Meaning, recipient countries should be able to take economic and humanitarian responsibility for their own population and respect fundamental democratic and human rights (Sverigedemokraterna, 2023).

One of the main themes in the Sweden Democrats is that Swedish aid should focus on what Sweden is good at. For example, as agriculture and forestry are expert areas for Sweden, it should be more incorporated into Swedish development aid. This also includes health, water and sanitation, humanitarian aid, and refugee aid (Sverigedemokraterna, 2023). Children should be a major focus and Convention on the Rights of the Child should be a guiding principle through aid. At least 10% of bilateral aid should go to environmental, climate and energy initiatives.

The number of UN organizations should be reduced, and savings should be made on the administrative costs of other organizations based in Sweden. While there should be support for organizations like UNHCR, FAO, UNICEF and WFP, there should be work towards reducing the overall number of UN organizations. For example, UNRWA should be discontinued, and the funding should instead go to UN's main refugee organizations UNHCR (Sverigedemokraterna, 2023).

Overall, there should be savings in areas where results have been less successful. The party believes that results should guide continued resource allocation and that results-based management, particularly in democratic aid, is insufficient. Where results are lacking for a longer time-period within certain programs, they should be terminated. Based on this, the Sweden Democrats believe that aid with the aim of improving respect for human rights is commendable but must be implemented with an understanding of the deep cultural differences that often exist between donors and recipients (Sverigedemokraterna, 2023). Therefore, a focus on creating the

basic conditions for a strengthened business sector should be given higher priority in aid, even if in the short term this means that less priority is given to supporting democratic processes. The Sweden Democrats believes that the government should continue to support peace and security, and one of the prioritized thematic areas should be humanitarian aid, especially to countries where refugee flows comes from (Sverigedemokraterna, 2023).

While there is not much information on country specific allocations, the countries in Europe are no longer underdeveloped, the party argues, and apart from the refugee situation in Turkey and the war in eastern Ukraine, there are no serious humanitarian crises. Therefore, Europe should not be a priority for development aid and can be reduced (Sverigedemokraterna, 2023).

The Sweden Democrats want Sweden to actively defend religious freedom in international contexts. This means, among other things, not supporting candidates for leadership positions in international organizations who oppose the right to believe or to leave their religion. Sweden should prioritize aid to religiously persecuted groups, especially Christians minorities. Aid to states with religious discrimination should be conditional on these states actively combating persecution (Sverigedemokraterna, 2023).

The Sweden Democrats propose stricter conditions for Swedish development aid. They argue for an assistance mechanism to support voluntary return for migrants and citizens wishing to return to their countries of origin, linking this to significant public savings. Aid should be conditional on recipient countries accepting the return of their citizens whose asylum applications have been rejected in Sweden, countries refusing these agreements should lose Swedish aid. Payments must also be frozen if corruption is suspected and discontinued if countries repeatedly mishandle aid. The party highlights past cases such as the African Enterprise Challenge Fund, the Palestinian Authority, the Islamic Relief Fund, and the Afghanistan Reconstruction Trust Fund (ARTF) (Sverigedemokraterna, 2023). In Syria, they stress that aid should not reach actors tied to extremism but instead be directed to credible organizations upholding human rights, with strengthened monitoring to safeguard humanitarian principles.

4.4.3. The Tidö-parties and the changing priorities of Swedish Development aid policy

In 2023, the Tidö-parties⁷ created a new reform agenda for Swedish development aid policy called Development Assistance for a New Era⁸. This replaced the Policy Framework for Swedish Development Cooperation and Humanitarian Support⁹ and the Strategy for Multilateral Development Policy¹⁰. In this new agenda, the focus is freedom, empowerment, and sustainable growth. It is a long-term perspective which prioritize transparency and efficiency. The government seeks to create new directions for aid and make it more efficient by creating coordination and coherence between policy areas. These could be development policy, foreign policy, security policy, trade policy, climate policy, and migration policy. In time, this will lead to increase the impact of Swedish interests globally and bilaterally with other countries (Utrikesdepartementet, 2023).

The negotiation process that led to the policy was a closed one including only the Tidö parties without giving the political opposition, authorities and affected organizations the opportunity to comment (Winborg, 2024). This has not been the frequent practice in Swedish development aid policy process.

The new reform agenda have new perspectives on development aid but one of the main concerns are security, mainly connected to the Russian full-scale invasion of Ukraine. Here, it is important to support Ukraine to ensure security for Sweden and Europe, and the government will continue to provide support as long as necessary (Utrikesdepartementet, 2023). Illegal migration is also presented as a strain on Europe and our part of the world. Therefore, aid should be used to reduce root causes of irregular migration and serving as a tool to counter it, increase returns, and contribute to voluntary returns. In general, there is a focus on creating better living conditions for people living in poverty and oppression, as well as reducing poverty overall. Children's rights are prioritized and their life situations when it comes to Swedish aid. Other prioritized thematic areas are health interventions for the most vulnerable which will promote democracy, freedom, combat oppression, climate aid, strengthen women's and girl's freedom, strengthen the synergy between

⁷ The group of the collaborating parties in the government

⁸ Bistånd för en ny era – Frihet, egenmakt och hållbar tillväxt

⁹ Policyramverk för svenskt utvecklingssamarbete och humanitärt bistånd (Skr. 2016/17:60)

¹⁰ Strategi för multilateral utvecklingspolitik (UD2017/21055/FN)

aid and migration policy, and humanitarian support to save lives and alleviate suffering (Utrikesdepartementet, 2023).

When it comes to cooperation, Sweden should only cooperate through aid with countries that have expectation of mutual constructive cooperation. If a country's leadership lacks democratic reform, aid should primarily be conducted thorough actors, including civil society, that contribute to Sweden's aid policy agenda (Utrikesdepartementet, 2023). Multilateral cooperation should be focused on the organizations that work with thematic priorities, humanitarian refugee aid, and children's rights. From here, Sweden needs to work with likeminded countries for added value of Swedish aid. The aim is for counites themselves to have the primary responsibility for their development and it is a central starting point in the transformation of aid. The new agenda argues that tax funds should not be supporting corruption and not support states or actors that are non-democratic or undermine the rule-based world order, and in the end undermine Swedish interest (Utrikesdepartementet, 2023).

Quality and clearer reporting of results are also central. The Tidö-parties argues that more efficient aid is a matter of solidarity towards the recipient countries, as well as a matter of legitimacy towards Swedish taxpayers. Trade, private investment, loans, and domestic resource mobilization are important to reach the goals and development cooperation should contribute to engagement in investing of other actors, including the private sector. Transparency and efficiency are key words in this new policy. Instead of traditional aid strategies, broader country strategies that align with the goals are to be used (Utrikesdepartementet, 2023). The purpose is to phase out aid reforms that are insufficient or where political conditions have changed. Bilateral cooperation will be limited to a maximum of 30 countries with regular reviews conducted. Multilateral organizations who do not align with the decided thematic priorities will be phased out.

The new reform agenda also argues that aid should be cost effective and achieve results and contribute to reduced poverty and increased prosperity (Utrikesdepartementet, 2023). Aid should also function as a lever to increase domestic resource mobilization and mobilize private capital flows and sustainable investment. Lastly, Swedish development aid should contribute to OECD DAC and Global Partnership for Effective Development Co-operation (GPEDC) projects, with a focus on results, transparency, anti-corruption, and evaluation.

The new development aid agenda by the Tidö-parties prioritize poverty reduction, health, education, democracy and human rights, climate action, women's empowerment, migration, and

humanitarian assistance (Regleringsbrev, 2025). Sida allocates resources according to the decided thematic priorities, focusing on efficiency, transparency, and alignment with Swedish national interest. Aid is both bilateral and multilateral, with focus on Africa, Asia, Latin America, the Middle East, and Eastern Europe (Sida, 2025). The detailed allocations, recipient countries and specific focuses are provided in Annex A.

4.4.4. The Rising Influence of SD in Sweden's development aid policy

Since 1962 when Swedish development aid first was formulated, the overall goal has been to reduce poverty in the world. This continued in the Development policy platform¹¹, 2013/14:131, the coalition government¹² budget bill for 2014 (Pettersson, 2024). The main theme in the Policy Framework for Swedish Development Cooperation and Humanitarian Aid¹³, 2016/17:60, written by the Social Democratic government was to create improved living conditions for people in poverty and oppression. Since 2022, it is possible to see a change occurring where Swedish development aid is now leaning more towards aid promoting Sweden's interests and values abroad, in cooperation with Swedish business (Pettersson, 2024). It also, for the first time, emphasizes that aid should be tied to a country's willingness to take back its citizens who have been deported from Sweden. The Sweden Democrats are a party who, since 2010, argued for a changed development aid policy focus, to concrete poverty reduction and humanitarian aid instead of being based on democracy and human rights (Pettersson, 2024).

Even though Swedish interest have been present in Swedish development aid policy during history, there is now a shift towards where development cooperation is described as an important foreign policy tool for pursuing and safeguarding Swedish interest. Concepts as collaboration, coordination and coherence are based on Swedish priorities more than previous documents (Pettersson, 2024). For example, PGU is being replaced with the argument that Agenda 2023 includes the goals, perspectives and guidelines that cover PGU and creates more effective governance (Concord, 2024). While implementing Agenda 2030 is seen as a positive policy, it shows a change in Swedish development aid where PGU has been the foundation since 2003 and is replaced based on the argument of efficiency. When the PGU were decided, the idea was that

¹¹ Biståndspolitisk platform

¹² A bourgeois coalition government consisting of the four parties the Moderate Coalition Party, the Centre Party, the Liberal People's Party and the Christian Democrats.

¹³ Policyramverk för svenskt utvecklingssamarbete och humanitärt bistånd

global poverty reduction and justice should be the forefront for Sida and something all government authorities should contribute to (Winborg, 2024).

In an interview with a spokesperson from EBA¹⁴, it was stated that the recent government intended to conduct a paradigm shift in development aid policy, but it is affected by two reasons. First, the changes is a reaction to changes in the international environment, as the Russian invasion of Ukraine. Second, the reasons behind these changes are ideological, especially when it comes to views on the size of aid. Historically, development aid has not been a clear left-right issue, as most parties supported the one percent target (personal communication, 26 may, 2025). Before the Sweden Democrats entered the parliament in 2010, it was primarily the Moderate Party that sometimes opposed this target, although at times they supported it.

At the same time, it is possible to observe a connection to the left-right spectrum, since it is the more right leaning parties, particularly the Moderates and the Sweden Democrats, that have driven the abandonment of the one percent target as the basis for aid budgeting (personal communication, 26 may, 2025). In the interview, an example from 2006 is used when the Moderates held the Minister for International Development Cooperation and the one percent target was still upheld. This reflects a broader political shift, where the Liberals and the Christian Democrats were strong advocates for generous aid but now, they have a decreased influence, and the Sweden Democrats have gained ground (personal communication, 26 may, 2025). Looking at aid more broadly, not just at the size, there is a trend toward aligning aid more closely with Swedish interest and linking it more directly to Swedish foreign policy. So how someone views aid can affect it as well, if it is seen, at its core, as something that should mainly be decided on and managed by a partner, or if it is seen as an instrument to promote Swedish values while at the same time contribution to the political goals we have (personal communication, 26 may, 2025).

The Sweden Democrats believes that aid should prioritize Swedish interests, for example priorities areas as agriculture, forestry, healthcare, water, and sanitation which Sweden have much knowledge about. As well as a focus more on strengthening the business sector and promoting growth strategies (Sverigedemokraterna, 2023). This reflects a shift in aid policy which is seen in the 2024 Regleringsbrev, which emphasizes the importance of private

¹⁴ EBA, Expertgruppen för biståndsanalys (Expert Group for Aid Analysis) is a committee under the Ministry for Foreign Affairs (UD), tasked with evaluating and analyzing issues of relevance to aid. They conduct evaluations and analyses, which are not focused on individual projects or programs, but rather have an overarching scope. EBA maintains an independent status relative to UD.

investments, trade, and the role of business sector in development cooperation. The government also states ambitions to strengthen the policy area of healthcare systems and access to clean drinking water (see annex A).

In the interview, it is argued that in the 1962:100 proposition, there were already a connection to trade policy, but some argue that this was purely based on solidarity (personal communication, 26 may, 2025). What the propositions says, is that solidarity remains a strong enough reason to provide aid, but there is also the acknowledgment that aid has multiple other outcomes, such as potentially benefiting Swedish exports and companies. The difference from today is that while this acknowledgment existed, it was not the primary reason for providing development aid. The change we can see after the 2022 election is that trade policy interests, migration and security policies are now made more explicit, which could identify an ideological difference (personal communication, 26 may, 2025).

The Sweden Democrats argue that development aid should be guided by results, with savings made in areas where outcomes have been limited. Here, result-based management has been insufficient in the field of democratic aid, and programs that fail to show improvements should be terminated. As seen, this continues with the argument that payments should also be suspended in cases where corruption is evident. The party uses the African Enterprise Challenge Fund or the Palestinian Authority as examples (Sverigedemokraterna, 2023). This is also shown in the government's new reform agenda, emphasizing that aid should be cost efficient, deliver results, and contribute directly to poverty reduction and economic prosperity (Utrikesdepartementet, 2023). By being able to encouraging domestic resource mobilization, attracting private capital flows, and supporting sustainable investments, it could benefit cooperation with Swedish businesses.

At the same time, Sweden's development aid policy is still tied to international commitments, but the priorities has changed. The Sweden Democrats argues that development aid must be implemented with a clear understanding of deep cultural differences (Sverigedemokraterna, 2023). Humanitarian aid is now separated from development aid and allocations are based on global humanitarian needs, independence and like-minded donors and organizations, ensuring that government priorities are implemented (Utrikesdepartementet, 2023; see Annex A). Development aid cooperation should not occur with governments that lacks

commitment to democratic reform and support should be channeled through civil society actors that contribute to Sweden's aid policy goals (Utrikesdepartementet, 2023).

Continually, multilateral organizations are still viewed positively but the current government are dissatisfied with the effectiveness of certain UN organizations and may want to reduce Sweden's support (personal communication, 26 may, 2025). As well as where Sweden might be an only major donor they feel like it would be better that the funding go to bilateral development aid instead. The Sweden Democrats argues that Swedish development aid should cooperate with fewer multilateral organizations.

For example, supporting organizations such as UNHCR while reducing funding to others like UNRWA (Sverigedemokraterna, 2023). This reflects an announcement made by the government in December 2024. In the press release, the government stated that "Support to the response in Gaza will also continue through Sida's channels and the extensive core support that the Government provides to a number of key humanitarian actors, such as the United Nations World Food Programme (WFP), the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) and the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC). The Government's core support to UNRWA will be discontinued" (Regeringen, 2024). This could link to the previously discussed principle of aid being aligned with Sweden's thematic priorities and prioritization of working with what the government sees as likeminded organizations and states (see Annex A). The new policy framework promotes that recipient countries have the primary responsibility for their own development, which is something the Sweden Democrats advocates for (Sverigedemokraterna, 2023).

In the interview with the spokesperson from EBA, it is also stated that there is a change in the way migration is talked about. Prior, migration used to be a thematic priority, focusing on creating safe pathways for migration and working to reduce the cost of remittance more effectively. The emphasis was on strengthening the positive impacts of migration for both the host countries and the sending countries. Today, it is becoming more about reducing irregular migration, addressing root causes, and increasing returns and reparations (personal communication, 26 may, 2025). This could be driven by the fact that the Sweden Democrats has its focus on migrations issues.

The Sweden Democrats main area of priority is that Swedish development aid should focus on migration. This is shown in the argument that aid should be made conditional on the recipient

country's willingness to accept the return of citizens whose asylum application have been rejected (Utrikesdepartementet, 2023). While earlier policy frameworks highlighted migrations potential to generate positive development effects, the focus now is on irregular migration, return and forced displacement (Pettersson, 2024). Further, the Sweden Democrats argues that aid should actively support Sweden's more restrictive refugee policy, where irregular migration is seen as a burden on Europe which justifies a more securitized and interest-driven use of aid (Winborg, 2024).

In the new agenda, aid is presented as consistent policy framework in which other areas, as migration policy, is given priority over development assistance. Concord¹⁵ (2023) argues that this marks a clear departure from earlier approaches where global development had the overarching priority. Another example is that sexual and reproductive health and rights are integrated in several parts of the agenda, there is a lack of integration of gender equality in areas such as environment and climate, migration, and democracy. When it comes to multilateral organizations, the agenda claims it to be limited to the thematic priorities and organizations working for children's and refugee rights (Concord, 2023).

The priority now is Ukraine and security which represents an extreme shift. The assessment for the funding to Ukraine this year is 7.2 billion SEK from the Swedish aid budget, which is about 15% of Sweden's total aid (personal communication, 26 may, 2025). No other country have ever received this much fund which shows a significant geographical reallocation. At the same time, it is added in the interview that it is not possible to see how much of this shift is ideologically motivated. What is possible to understand is that this allocation of funds terminates, or reduces, funds to other development aid programs (personal communication, 26 may, 2025). Several country partnerships, mainly in Africa, in what are called fragile states and post-conflict countries¹⁶ are being ended. There are also ongoing discussions about development aid to Iraq and Yemen, and the reason is most likely to be that the government thinks that aid is not really succeeding in contributing to change there. Arguments of "watering where it grows" is used a lot in Swedish development aid policy discussions now, where previously the argument was to try to create a foundation or a foothold (personal communication, 26 may, 2025). The current path is

¹⁵ Concord is an organization that works with information and advocacy work with a focus on the EU's and Sweden's development aid policy.

¹⁶ Examples are Mali, Burkina Faso and Sudan.

leaving very problematic environments and instead focusing resources where there are governments willing to contribute to aid, concludes the EBA spokesperson. It is possible to see the decrease in aid to Africa as aid going to Ukraine and neighboring regions instead.

Pettersson (2024) brings the idea that the reason for aid not changing in previous coalition government has been the fact that aid was not given high priority by the previous parties and therefore been negotiated away in the formation of government documents. Until the early 2000s, major aid policy decisions were often based on government reports that were subject to consultation and led to bills that were in turn considered by parliamentary committees before being decided by parliament. The system was seen as legitimate by political actors (Pettersson, 2024). The current reform agenda has instead taken in the form of a government decision and has neither been subject to consultation nor sent to parliament. It can therefore be argued that it has become less of an inclusive process and increasingly subjected to politicization (Pettersson, 2024).

Since the 2022 election, the collaboration with the Sweden Democrats has suggested a potential critical juncture in Swedish development aid, but while there are evident signs of increasing influence in policy decisions, it is too early to determine its degree. The changes in the development aid policy, as increased focus on national interest and a new focus on trade, could have been pursued by other government parties without the influence of the Sweden Democrats. On the other hand, there are clear similarities between the party's agenda on development aid and the policy changed introduced by the Tidö-agreement.

As previously outlined, the one percent target for aid has been a key principle during history, even if it sometimes has become a politically polarized issue. The target has not always been upheld due to budgetary restrictions, even if politicians have always declared support for it (Pettersson, 2024). The budgetary decision in 2023 to abandon the one-percent target therefore marks a shift in Swedish development aid. Since 2010, the Sweden Democrats have advocated aid of 0.7 percent of GNI and since 2021 that aid should amount to 0.5 percent of GNI. Pettersson (2024) also argues that there could be several reasons that has made these changes possible, for example the current governments longstanding ambition to rewrite the aid policy area, increased politicization, support from another political party and its growing budgetary importance.

Recent reforms show a changed focus for Swedish development aid policy. The abandonment of the one percent target, the replacement of PGU and the reallocation of aid resources towards

migration and return policies, among others, shows that aid now prioritizes national interests. At the same time, institutions such as Sida have not been closed, poverty reduction, humanitarian assistance and human rights are still a part of the development aid policies, and the overall scope of reform is not as extensive as in countries such as the United Kingdom or the United States.

In conclusion, what can be observed at present is primarily an ideological shift, accompanied by some early signs of institutional change. Most of the core institutions of Swedish aid remain intact, reflecting path dependency, yet solidarity and poverty alleviation are increasingly being redefined in relation to Swedish interests. The symbolic abandonment of the one percent target and the growing politicization of aid governance may represent initial steps toward institutional adaptation. Whether these changes develop into a durable institutional break or remain a temporary deviation will depend on future political developments and the extent to which the current reforms become embedded in practice.

CHAPTER 5

Conclusion

This dissertation started by asking the following question

- How have the results of the 2022 elections contributed to significantly change the Swedish development aid policies?

The analysis shows that while traditional themes remain, the priority of aid has changed, with more focus on migration and national interests, and less on democracy and solidarity. The election was a historic point in Swedish politics, as the Sweden Democrats gained influence in government decision making through the Tidö-agreement. This agreement is unique and has not happened before in Sweden, representing a potential critical juncture where new actors and coalitions reshape the political climate.

The Tidö-agreement (2022-2026) is a coalition between the governing parties the Moderates, Christian Democrats and Liberal party, with the Sweden Democrats as a party outside of the government. Although the Sweden Democrats are not a part of the government, it has gained to possibility to shape policies and the joint budget for key areas such as crime, migration, integration, economy, healthcare, energy, development aid and climate. This agreement departs from traditional Swedish governance, where non-government parties rarely have direct influence on policy making.

Swedish development aid has its roots in individual and liberal initiatives in the 1950s which were guided by humanitarian concerns and solidarity. The creation of NIB and the BIL 1952:100 formalized aid policy, emphasizing poverty reduction, social development, and democratic governance. Historically, Sweden's aid system has followed the same path with a broad consensus on development aid policies between the government parties despite change in government and in institutional structures. It is shaped by post-war welfare state, multilateralism, and institutional stability. International policies has also been a reason for the continuity, with the Swedish aid policies reflecting global trends as democratization, gender equality, and environment sustainability. The new approach of Swedish development aid being undertaken by the new coalition-based government shows a shift from the previous policies by focusing on national interests, migration, security concerns, conditionality of aid, efficiency, and closer alignments with Swedish economic and trade.

Through an HI perspective, the findings suggest that the 2022 election might represent a potential critical juncture in Swedish development aid policy. While traditional features are still visible in the ongoing development aid policies, there are growing signs redefining its future path that involve emphasis on national interest, efficiency, migration management, conditional aid, and security as supported by the SD. This represents a departure from the traditional emphasis on global solidarity, poverty reduction, and democratic governance as the guiding principles of Swedish development aid.

The Tidö-parties show how new actors, in this case the SD, can trigger institutional changes within a path-dependent system. While the core of Swedish aid policies seems to remain in place, there is a trend of reducing traditional humanitarian and social development policies. In the end, the Swedish case shows both continuity and change. PRPPs influence is strongest when the government depends on their support, as the case in Sweden with the SD.

If the current direction remains, Sweden can experience a more significant shift in development aid policies and a critical juncture can take place. But if future governments re-introduce the one percent target and go back to the traditional way of Swedish aid then the path dependence continues to be the feature.

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Annexes

Annex A – Sida: Detailed Budget Allocation and Policy Priorities 2023–2025

Poverty reduction through job creation, trade, and education

When it comes to education the Tidö-parties prioritize equitable and inclusive education, particularly for girls and women in line with Agenda 2030 (Utrikesdepartementet, 2023). Sida has an assignment to report on the agency's work on global food and security transitions to sustainable food systems to be able to synergies with other priority areas within development aid.

Improved health for the most vulnerable

Another thematic area includes strengthening healthcare systems, improving global health, and supporting vulnerable population through access to vaccinations, mental health services, and life-saving treatments. Including efforts on infection control, ensuring access to clean water, sanitation, and hygiene (Utrikesdepartementet, 2023).

Promote freedom and combat oppression

The new agenda also advocates for human rights and freedoms which includes strengthen human rights and freedoms as freedom of expression and religion, sexual and reproductive rights, rights for women and girls, children, and youth, LGBTIQ individuals and persons with disabilities (Utrikesdepartementet, 2023). To achieve this, support should go to democratic institutions, actors, and local election monitoring in partner countries. This includes strengthening democratic political parties, democratic reforms, multi-party systems and promoting conditions for free elections. The thematic area will also strengthen civil society by supporting organizations, movements and networks that defend human rights and uphold democratic principles. As well as to advocate for freedom of religions, especially persecuted Christian communities.

During 2023-2025, Sida is to allocate substantial funds in accordance with the established strategy for democracy support 2023-2027, with an annual budget framework of around 159-166 million SEK (Regleringsbrev, 2025). Only short-term agreements may be entered into until a new strategy has been decided.

Expanded and more efficient climate aid

Swedish development aid should also contribute to a global green transition and strengthening efforts to support the implementation of the Paris Agreement, among others. Efforts will focus on both emission reductions and climate adaptation, while also building local capacity

for financial markets and investment-friendly conditions to tackle the climate, biodiversity, and pollution crises. This is also shown in the Regleringsbrev between 2023-2025 where the focus for Sida is on international organizations, climate and environmental efforts and gender equality (Regleringsbrev, 2025).

Strengthen the freedom and empowerment of women and girls

Another focus is strengthening women's and girls' rights, empowerment, and opportunities. They argue that gender equality is a freedom issue and Swedish core values (Utrikesdepartementet, 2023). It also prioritizes combating all forms of sexual and gender-based violence, including exploitation, trafficking, and harmful practices such as female genital mutilation and forced sterilization.

In 2024, Sida disbursed 1.5 billion SEK within the area of support for women's and girls' freedom and empowerment, which is around 6 percent of the total aid of Sida (Sida, 2025). Work against gender-based violence is also reported here. Geographically, the largest share of funds for women's and girls' freedom has gone to Africa (40 percent). The second largest region was Europe (Ukraine, Eastern Europe, Western Balkans, and Turkey).

Strengthening synergies between development aid and migration policy

When it comes to migration and development aid, a priority is to safeguard the Swedish interests in countering irregular migration and its risks, promoting return, voluntary repatriations, and sustainable reintegration (Utrikesdepartementet, 2023). The Tidö-parties intend to use development aid as a foreign policy tool to enhance migration cooperation with third countries through dialogue. This could include strengthening transit countries' border control, procedure, and migration management, linking parts of development aid to compliance with international legal standards and cooperation of return citizens. They argue that aid can help to reduce the negative causes and structural factors that make people leave their homes (Utrikesdepartementet, 2023).

Migration received 1 percent, 350 million SEK of total aid for the 2024 year which were a decrease from previous years (Sida, 2025). The group of migrants includes irregular migrants, labor migrants, asylum seekers, refugees, internally displaced persons, and persons returning voluntarily. Aid is provided in partner countries that are countries of origin, transit, and destination for these groups. During 2024, Sida has financed activities that contributed to return

and reintegration, including internally displaced persons, within the strategies for DR Congo, Iraq, Regional Africa, and Regional Latin America.

Strengthen humanitarian support and saving lives and alleviating suffering

In the new agenda, humanitarian aid is separated from development aid because it is based on principles of humanity, neutrality, independence, and impartiality, and is distributed based on assessment of humanitarian needs in a global perspective. Cooperation with like-minded donors and organizations will be prioritized to enhance impact internationally and locally. The government's governance of international aid should be strategic and aim to ensure that the government's priorities are implemented (Utrikesdepartementet, 2023).

Aid channels and implementing partners

Civil society organizations have received more priority in this new agenda and important partners in Swedish humanitarian aid and development aid (Utrikesdepartementet, 2023). In the 2024 Regleringsbrev, Sida is to allocate around SEK 40 million for activities in Ukraine, Armenia, Moldova, Georgia, and Belarus, in line with the strategy for Sweden's support to civil society. Support to these organizations will be increased where their activities align with government priorities and are effectively implemented. Recipients of Swedish support must not have links to violent ideologies, extremism or Islamist and must uphold human rights.

In the 2024 Regleringsbrev, private investments, trade, and the role of the business sectors in the implementation of Agenda 2030 was to be strengthened (Regleringsbrev, 2024). In the Regleringsbrev between 2023-2025 it shows that a significant part of development aid is channeled through multilateral development banks as African Development Bank (AfDB), the International Finance Corporation (IFC), and the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development (IBRD). The Regleringsbrev (2025) also shows that humanitarian aid is prioritized, especially to conflict affected regions like Gaza, among others.

Top recipient countries/regions

The Regleringsbrev for 2023-2025 shows priorities within Sida's development cooperation in Asia. Here, Bangladesh, Myanmar and Afghanistan has specific priorities. The 2025 budget for, for example Bangladesh, was up to 350 million SEK and 200 million SEK for Myanmar (Regleringsbrev, 2025). In Latin America, the focus lies on bilateral strategies for Bolivia, Colombia, Guatemala, and Cuba, but also general regional development cooperation for the

entire continent. In both 2024 and 2025, resources remain relatively stable, with SEK 165 million allocated annually for Colombia and SEK 90 million for Guatemala (Regleringsbrev 2025).

In Africa, there is a focus on both bilateral and regional efforts. There are significant resources to countries as Democratic Republic of Congo, Ethiopia, Liberia, and Mozambique. Sida is authorized to use several hundred million kronor per year to implement its strategies (Regleringsbrev 2025). The Regleringsbrev for 2023–2025 show that Sweden’s regional development cooperation in the Middle East and North Africa is characterized by a clear prioritization of stability and responsible closure of efforts in certain countries, while continued financing and support are provided in other parts of the region. The regleringsbrev between 2023-2025 shows that in Eastern Europe, especially on Ukraine, there is focus on energy transition, reconstruction, and democratic processes. This is linked to the strategic goal of contributing to Ukraine’s development in the context of war and ongoing conflicts. Sweden’s reform cooperation also includes Turkey and the Western Balkans, albeit with a smaller budgetary framework compared to Ukraine.