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The Influence of Aid Changes on African Election Outcomes

RYAN C. BRIGGS
Virginia Tech and American University

Many African democracies experience highly variable aid flows. This article examines the influence of aid changes on presidential incumbent advantage in Africa. Aid changes influence the odds of incumbents winning reelection, with aid increases helping incumbents, but this effect is only present when the aid change occurs in the year before an election. Aid changes in earlier or later time periods have no influence. Case studies of elections in Ghana and Malawi reveal causal mechanisms linking aid changes to incumbent advantage and support the finding that aid changes have a limited window of influence.

KEYWORDS   Africa, democracy, foreign aid, Ghana, Malawi

Africa has undergone rapid democratization since the end of the Cold War. Between 1989 and 2008, the number of unfree countries in Africa shrank from 34 to 19 (Freedom House 2011). While African[1] leaders from the 1960s to 1980s tended to lose power violently in coups and assassinations, since 1990 the majority of African leaders lost power through institutionalized means such as electoral loss (Posner and Young 2007). While Africa has been democratizing, it has also been receiving tens of billions of dollars of official development assistance (ODA).[2] This number is especially large when compared to most aid recipients' gross domestic products or government budgets. In 1999 in Malawi, for instance, foreign aid accounted for 89% of government expenditure (Bräutigam and Knack 2004). This article examines the links between foreign assistance and one result of Africa's third-wave democracies: elections. Specifically, it asks if changes in foreign assistance can influence African election outcomes.

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[1]From this point on, "Africa" denotes Sub-Saharan Africa.

[2]This article uses the standard OECD definition of nonmilitary assistance that is provided at concessional rates (OECD 2003).

Address correspondence to Ryan C. Briggs, Virginia Tech, Department of Political Science, 531 Major Williams Hall, Blacksburg, VA 24060, USA. E-mail: ryancbriggs@vt.edu

While substantively important, the question also addresses a gap in the literature on aid volatility and leader survival. While we know that aid is volatile and that overall levels of aid can influence regime or leader survival, we are blind to the influence of aid *changes* on any measure of leader survival. The core result of the article shows that aid changes have an effect on an incumbent's likelihood of winning reelection and that this effect is separate from the effect of the overall level of aid that a country receives. The article also examines how aid changes influence leader survival, and the results suggest that Africans in democratic countries are swayed by economic factors when voting. The article first summarizes the literature on aid volatility, leader survival, and African incumbent advantage and then presents hypotheses about how aid changes might influence election results. The first empirical section analyzes a cross-national dataset of African elections in the post-Cold War period. The second empirical section presents case studies of Ghana and Malawi and reveals how changes in preelection aid flows influence election outcomes.

LITERATURE AND THEORY

There have been no systematic cross-national analyses of the influence of aid or aid changes on recipient election outcomes. However, there have been related investigations into the effect of aid levels on leader survival. Kono and Montinola (2009) show that aid improves leader survival for both autocrats and democrats, but that having a large stock of past aid is more important for autocrats and current aid flows are more important for democrats. Morrison (2009) shows that aid helps stabilize regimes in a way that is similar to oil. Licht (2010) shows that aid most helps democratic leader survival immediately after they take office. The present study differs from the previous work in two ways. First, it does not examine all of the ways that a democratic leader can lose power but instead focuses only on the influence of aid changes on election outcomes. Second, it examines aid changes instead of aid levels or stocks of aid.

Highly variable aid flows are the norm in Africa. From 1990 forward, almost one in five African country-years experienced an increase or decrease in aid that was in excess of 5% of the recipient's GDP.[3] More than a quarter experienced an aid change larger than 3% of GDP. While it is known that aid is many times more unreliable than revenue raised locally from taxation (Bulir and Hamann 2008:2050), the magnitude of the variability in aid is striking. There has been little empirical work on the causes of aid volatility, and

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[3]Aid here is net ODA disbursements less technical assistance and debt relief. This figure was calculated directly from the OECD data. The standard deviation of the change in aid as a fraction of GDP for each decade from 1980 forward is between 4 and 5.

one of the only studies that explicitly analyzed the causes of aid volatility shows that domestic politics in donor countries plays an important role. The authors note that "all in all, there are relatively few recipient-country traits that influence volatility in a consistent manner" (Kharas and Desai 2010:24). This implies that the bulk of the responsibility for volatility probably rests on the donor side and is likely the result of a mixture of coordination failures and incentive problems.[4] Coordination failures result from too many donors being active in each recipient country and donors failing to cooperate to smooth transfers over time. The incentive problems exist because recipients have no way to punish donors for volatility, and donors have no other incentive to more effectively tie their hands and commit themselves to hitting their disbursement targets. These coordination problems are well known within the policy community, but they have proven difficult to resolve (Barder 2009; Birdsall 2004). The incentive problems are similarly well known and intractable (Easterly 2002; 2007). Given the difficulty of solving these problems, it is not surprising that overall levels of aid volatility are holding steady over time (Bulir and Hamann 2008).

While donor traits and international interactions seem to drive volatility in general, specific aid changes are sometimes driven by donor responses to events in recipient countries. These individual responses are unlikely to have a significant effect on overall volatility for two reasons. The first is that major events that cause donors to dramatically increase or decrease aid to specific recipients are too rare to explain the consistently high volatility in aid. The second is that donors inconsistently respond to such events. For example, while the British withheld aid to Malawi following the Cashgate scandal (Blas 2013), they apparently considered the theft of tens of millions of pounds of aid to Kenya, Sierra Leone, and Uganda to be "within reason" and did not respond similarly (Rayner and Swinford 2011).

While the literature on leader survival has largely ignored aid changes, the literature on aid volatility has neglected to examine its political effects. Volatility in aid makes the economy harder to manage (Bulir and Hamann 2008) and has a negative effect on economic growth (Lensink and Morrissey 2000), but little is known about how aid changes influence politics. The only study of the effect of aid changes on any political outcome is the one by Nielsen, Findley, Davis, Candland, and Nielson (2011), which showed that large decreases in aid increase the probability of the onset of civil conflict.

Work from Africanists shows that there are good reasons to presume that aid might influence election outcomes. In Africa, incumbent presidents enjoy "an enormous advantage by virtue of their control of the financial purse-strings" (Nugent 2007:253). This advantage typically stems from the

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[4]Kharas (2009) proposes that some aid volatility could be caused by the inherent unpredictability of humanitarian aid. The idea is that if a donor has a fixed aid budget, then increases in aid due to natural disasters will result in development aid being cut.

president's ability to use state resources for campaigning, clientelistic transfers, or to politically target local public goods. In countries that lack state financing of parties, "campaign resources are secured on a freewheeling and self-help basis, with the incumbent siphoning off state resources, and extorting private business, while opposition parties forage" (Gyimah-Boadi 2007:26). Campaign financing is not the only possible link between state funds and electoral advantage. A study of clientelism in Benin found that politicians frequently purchase votes outright (Banégas 2003). Wright and Winters (2010) found that politicians in countries with highly personalistic political systems—like those in many African countries—tend to target aid funds to narrow constituencies and are more likely to be corrupt.

There is also evidence that aid might influence African voters simply by providing them with public goods. Daniel Young (2009) used Afrobarometer data from 16 countries and analyzed what people expect from their politicians. He found that "delivering development" and "improving infrastructure" were second only to the core democratic ideal of "represent the people." Africans proclaim to care deeply about the provision of goods and services. Empirical analyses of the effect of public goods provision on voting behavior support this conclusion, and this effect extends to aid-funded public goods (Briggs 2012; Harding 2011; Jablonski 2013).

Whether the mechanism is based on the provision of public or private goods,[5] aid changes will have an effect on elections that is distinct from overall aid levels if African voters' choices are based in part on their assessment of the recent past. This effect can either take the form of retrospective voting, where voters punish incumbents that performed poorly, or prospective voting, if voters form their opinion on a politician's future performance based on his or her past performance. The basic idea is that if voters were provided with more resources in the past year, regardless of the base level of resources that they started from, then they will be more likely to feel satisfied or expect better future outcomes and thus vote for the incumbent president.[6] There is evidence of this form of economic voting in Ghana (Youde 2005), where voters are sensitive to preelectoral economic growth, or Zambia (Posner and Simon 2002), where voters that previously supported the incumbent withdrew their support in the face of economic decline. African voters have also been shown to respond to the provision of local public goods by increasing incumbent support (Briggs 2012; Harding 2011; Jablonski 2013). While one could argue that voters should be expected to differentiate between aid-funded and tax-funded public goods, this is unlikely to happen, as it is

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[5]Pork spending and clientelistic private goods provision can both sway voters, but the former is generally better for overall development, as it encourages some service provision. For an overview of the numerous developmental issues tied up in the electoral politics of public spending in low income countries, see Diaz-Cayeros and Magaloni (2003).

[6]For an overview of economic voting, see Lewis-Beck and Stegmaier (2000).

usually very difficult to figure out the origin of resources for any particular good.[7] Either way, voters are likely to feel the impact of aid changes. Recipient governments may try to reduce the effect of aid cuts in particular by shifting their spending in response donor changes. While this may serve to reduce the impact of aid cuts on incumbent advantage, aid is often such a large fraction of local development spending that many recipients will have a difficult time offsetting cuts with local resources.

In sum, African governments are often dependent on volatile foreign aid. Previous case study evidence from Africa suggests that state finance, of which aid is often a large part, is a major driver of incumbent advantage. Other studies have shown that Africans seek goods and services from their governments and base their vote in part on a government's ability to provide those goods and services. Therefore, if changes in aid lead to changes in the provision of goods and services, or if aid changes lead to changes in the level of resources available to politicians for private goods provision, then aid changes will influence incumbent advantage. The current study presents the first cross-national analysis of the relationship between aid changes and electoral success in Africa and presents two case studies that further examine the relevant causal mechanisms using process tracing.[8]

Hypotheses

The previous section produces clear hypotheses about the influence of aid changes on incumbent advantage:

> H1: *Aid increases (decreases) will push incumbents toward winning (losing) elections.*

The previous discussion of mechanisms is also useful, as it helps make the analysis more precise:

> H2: *Aid changes will influence presidential incumbent advantage by either changing the level of public or local public goods provided to voters, or aid changes will influence incumbent advantage by changing the level of private goods that politicians use during campaigning.*

Before introducing the data and cross-national analysis, it is worth addressing how the present study will test for the causal influence of

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[7]Further, voters elsewhere rarely make these kind of nuanced calculations. For example, American voters have been shown to punish incumbents for acts of god such as shark attacks, droughts, and floods (Achen and Bartels 2004) or to reward incumbents when local sports teams win the week before an election (Healy, Malhotra, and Mo 2010). If the ill feelings associated with shark attacks or the glory of a home team win both influence voting for the incumbent, then it is not a stretch to suggest that the positive effects of aid increases (or the negative effects of an aid cut) may accrue to incumbents as well.
[8]For more on process tracing, see George and Bennett (2005) and Gerring (2007).

aid changes. Given the lack of appropriate instrumental variables for aid changes,[9] the present study first identifies a robust correlation between aid changes in a very particular time period and incumbent advantage. It then examines if the relationship is causal using a number of tests and arguments. The first is to note that much of volatility in the aid system seems to come from the domestic politics of donors. As an example, consider that in America "when the Republican Party gained control of the Congress in 1995, foreign aid was further cut as part of the efforts to reduce the overall size of government" (Lancaster 2007:47). From 1995 to 1996, American Official Development Assistance disbursements to Africa fell from an already low US$1.5 billion (measured in 2011 USD) to US$866 million (Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development [OECD] 2013). The large role of domestic politics reduces fears of reverse causation, but international politics also clearly influences aid changes. However, while donors may increase aid to friendly countries before an election (Faye and Niehaus 2012) or cut aid to some countries with spectacular corruption, it is considerably harder for donors to target countries where incumbent presidents are likely to win elections. This is because election outcomes (and sometimes the presence of elections themselves) are typically unknown years in advance, and the budgeting processes of donors usually precludes rapid readjustment of spending.

An additional implication of the previous mechanisms is that aid that arrives too early or too late will not influence election results, either because voters tend to have short memories or because the aid cannot reach voters in time to influence their ballot. The following cross-national analysis therefore tests for aid changes in between three time periods and shows that aid changes only influence election outcomes when they happen between two years before the election and one year before. The time period moving into the year before the election seems to be a "Goldilocks period." Earlier changes in aid arrive too early to sway voters on election day, and later changes do not reach voters in time to have an effect. This result is then further examined with two case studies. The cases show that aid changes influence elections through the mechanisms hypothesized earlier. The case study results may not generalize, but the existence of mechanisms connecting aid changes to election outcomes should increase our confidence that the link between aid changes and incumbent advantage is causal.

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[9]While a number of instruments for aid levels have been proposed, these either are not sensitive to annual changes in aid (for example: colonial origin dummies, infant mortality at an earlier time period, initial GDP per capita, or country size) or do not meet the exclusion restriction. For example, while the log of donor GDP combined with affinity with America may capture a sample of foreign aid that is essentially random in relation to conflict onset (Savun and Tirone 2011), this is not likely to be the case with for election outcomes (Faye and Niehaus 2012).

CROSS-NATIONAL EVIDENCE

The following cross-national analysis tests the claim that aid changes influence incumbent advantage and that the timing of the aid change is critical. The dependent variable in the analyses is incumbent loss, and the key independent variable is the change in the level of foreign assistance. Election information, including information on incumbent losses, comes from a dataset created by Lindberg (2009). The dataset includes information on all Sub-Saharan African elections between 1990 and 2006. The sample was restricted to elections where the incumbent, or someone from the incumbent's party or the incumbent's chosen successor, contested the election.[10] The dependent variable is 0 if the incumbent (or his party or his successor) won, and 1 if the incumbent lost. Elections where the incumbent did not contest were dropped. This procedure created a sample of 109 presidential elections in which the incumbent contested. In this sample of incumbent-contested elections, the incumbent lost 22 times. Data on foreign aid come from the OECD Development Assistance Committee's (DAC) Creditor Reporting System (OECD 2011).[11] Aid is measured in millions of 2008 USD and is operationalized as net disbursements of Overseas Development Assistance (ODA) from all donors, less aid that was given for technical cooperation or debt relief. This was done in order to only capture the portion of aid that was capable of producing goods or services in a recipient country.[12] Debt relief was excluded because it does not represent a

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[10]The variable for incumbent loss was constructed by amending Lindberg's turnover variable. In Lindberg's dataset, presidential turnovers were marked with a 0 if there was no turnover of power, 2 if there was a new president, and 1 if: "the new person is an immediate successor to the old president for the same party [or] the new president is representing a new party but has served as a minister or similar in the old president's regime" (Lindberg 2006b). For the purposes of this article, a simple recoding of turnover into incumbent loss would not be appropriate because, among other reasons, elections that the incumbent did not contest always result in turnover and were coded 2. The present article is interested only in elections where the incumbent (or his party or successor) contested, so I examined each election that Lindberg coded 1 or 2 to see if the incumbent or the incumbent's party or immediate successor contested the election. There were nine elections where the incumbent (or party or successor) did not contest the election, usually because the election was held after a coup or civil war. In the original dataset these are marked as turnovers of power, as the leader before the election was different from the leader after the election. I have not included these elections because voters did not have the possibility of voting for the incumbent, and the article examines factors that influence if incumbents win or lose. I also amended a number of elections where the incumbent lost to someone that was previously part of his party. I considered these as incumbent losses, while they are not considered full turnovers for Lindberg. A list of changes to the dataset is available upon request.

[11]For present purposes this is a better dataset than AidData because while AidData includes information on aid from NGOs, it only has data on commitments and not disbursements. While the OECD database has disbursement figures, it does not have disaggregated (for example: sector level) data on disbursements before 2002. Thus, the present analysis uses annual aid totals (minus debt relief and technical assistance) instead of more nuanced but temporally limited data.

[12]Over the years in the present sample, ODA with debt relief and technical cooperation removed correlates with regular ODA at $r = 0.65$.

transfer of funds commensurate with the level of ODA that is reported in the database.[13] Funding for technical cooperation may perhaps lead to valuable knowledge being spread or an increase in politically useful per diems, but a dollar of technical assistance is likely not felt by voters in the same way as a dollar of project aid or budget support.[14] ODA includes both bilateral flows and money that is given to multilateral institutions if it will eventually meet the criteria described earlier.

The article examines the influence that *changes* in aid have on an incumbent's odds of reelection, so aid enters into the analysis as changes in aid from the previous year. The key variable of interest is the change in aid going into the year *before* the election. It will later be shown that aid changes in other time periods have no effect on an incumbent's odds of winning and do not alter the main results.

Initial Analysis

If aid changes influence election outcomes, then aid increases should coincide more frequently with incumbent victories and aid cuts should coincide with incumbent defeats. This is revealed in Figure 1, which divides the elections by incumbent loss and then graphs mean aid levels leading up each group of elections. Aid levels between the two groups only differ in the year before the election, with the average winning incumbent receiving over 100 million 2008 USD more in aid than the average losing incumbent.[15]

Figure 2 examines the influence of the magnitude of aid changes by dividing the sample of elections into four groups based on the size and direction of the preelectoral aid shift, expressed as a fraction of GDP, between times t-2 and t-1. Incumbents lost in about 20% of all elections in the sample, but incumbents lost in half of all elections in which their country experienced a greater than five-percentage-point drop in aid/GDP. No incumbent lost when the country experienced an aid/GDP increase of over five percentage points entering the preelection year. Unsurprisingly, a simple logistic regression of incumbent loss on aid change produces odds ratios of less than 1, with $p = .004$ for constant aid changes and $p = .005$ for changes in aid/GDP. The next section more rigorously examines this correlation.

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[13]If debt is forgiven, then the recipient appears to receive the full amount of debt as ODA, while in reality all that a government saves in the short term is the interest payment (that it may not have been paying).
[14]I would like to thank an anonymous reviewer for pointing out that technical assistance could be politically useful to recipient politicians. The following regression results hold when technical assistance is included. In the period under study, technical assistance disbursements correlate with aid disbursements (less debt relief and technical assistance) at $r = 0.72$.
[15]A two-tailed t-test (unequal variance) yields $p = .025$. The p values comparing aid levels at times t-2 and t are .906 and .507 respectively.
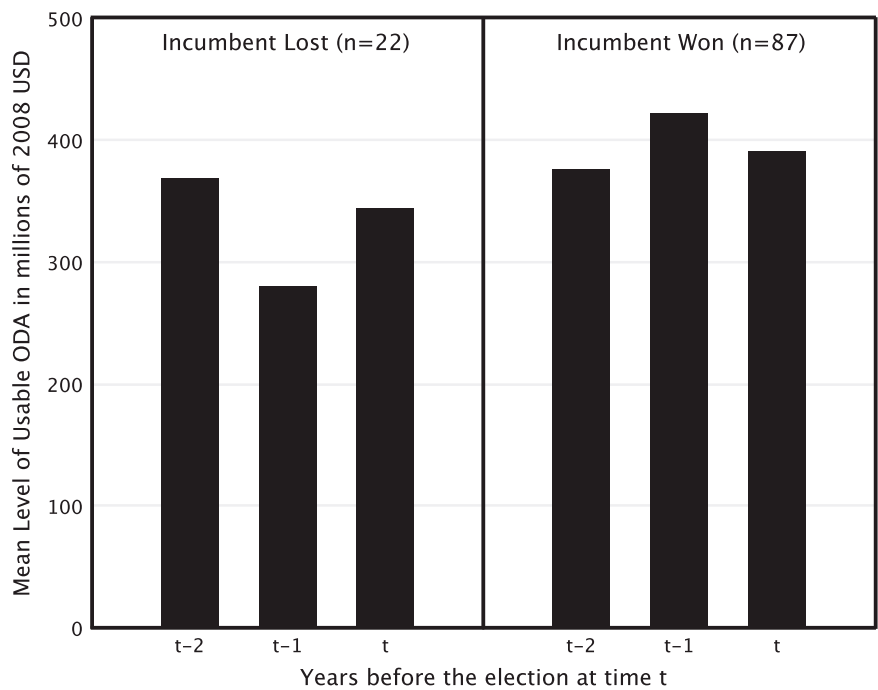
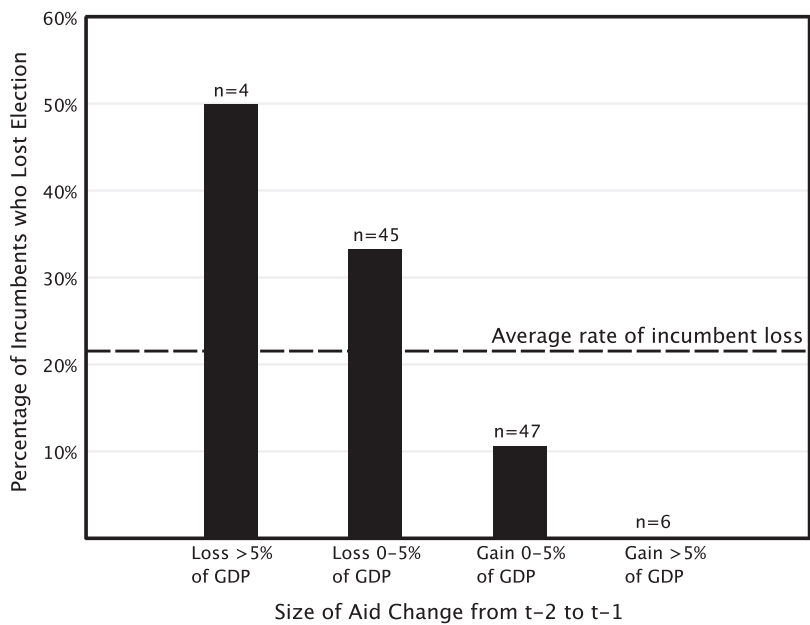**FIGURE 1** Mean aid levels before elections.

FIGURE 2 Influence of aid on incumbent loss.

Regression Analysis

This section examines the previous data using a logistic regression that controls for potentially confounding variables. Free and Fair measures if the election was free and fair and ranges from 0 (unfair, strongly affected results) to 3 (entirely free) and was drawn from Staffan Lindberg's (2009) dataset.[16] This helps ameliorate concerns that donors cut funding to countries if they anticipate that an election will be unfair. Additional variables include the total number of years that each leader (or party, or clique) was in power,[17] and a variable for preelectoral civil war. The latter was constructed from the Uppsala Conflict Data Program/Peace Research Institute Oslo (UCDP/PRIO) Armed Conflict Dataset Codebook, Version 4-2009 (Gleditsch, Wallensteen, Eriksson, Sollenberg, and Strand 2002; Peace Research Institute Oslo [PRIO] 2009) and combines both types of internal armed conflict.[18] A civil war control was included because aid tends to dip during conflict and then spike in the early postconflict period, and it seems plausible that civil war influences incumbent advantage (Collier and Hoeffler 2004).[19] The civil war variable is 1 if there was a civil conflict with over 25 battle deaths and 0 otherwise and is lagged one year. The GDP growth rate was included as a control, and it is expected that higher rates of GDP growth will correlate with more incumbent wins (Lanoue 1994; Youde 2005). GDP growth rate and GDP per capita data come from the World Bank's World Development Indicators. The log of GDP per capita was used, and both variables are lagged by one year.

The dependent variable is a dummy that takes a value of 0 if the incumbent wins and 1 if the incumbent loses and a logistic regression is estimated. Robust standard errors are clustered by country. Binary dependent variables with panel data are likely to violate the assumption of independence of observations required for ordinary logistic analysis (Beck, Katz, and Tucker 1998). Unfortunately, there are too few observations (elections) per country to use Beck et al.'s (1998) preferred approach. Instead, and following Susan Hyde (2011), the regressions include a variable capturing the number of previous incumbent losses in each country and a year variable to catch any remaining time trends. The results are reported in Table 1.

The first two columns in Table 1 report the results using the full sample of elections. Model 1 estimates the effect of a change in aid measured in constant dollars, and model 2 estimates the effect of an aid change divided

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[16]Staffan Lindberg's (2006a) codebook has more information on his codings and his sample.

[17]Bienen and Van de Walle (1991) showed that leaders that were in power longer were more likely to retain power, but they looked at all of the ways that a leader could lose power and their sample ended in 1987. The "years in power" variable permits a test of this pattern in a sample of post-Cold War elections.

[18]It combines types 3 (armed conflict between one state and internal parties) and 4 (internal armed conflict with the intervention of other states).

[19]The main regression results are unchanged if the civil war variable is dropped.

TABLE 1 Influence of Aid Changes on Incumbent Loss

	1	2	3	4
Useable ODA$_{t-2 \to t-1}$	0.993**		0.991*	
	(0.003)		(0.004)	
Useable ODA/GDP$_{t-2 \to t-1}$		0.760**		0.760**
		(0.090)		(0.091)
Log (GDPpc)$_{t-1}$	0.568*	0.567*	0.515**	0.567*
	(0.187)	(0.181)	(0.169)	(0.181)
GDP Growth Rate$_{t-1}$	0.896**	0.919*	0.887**	0.919*
	(0.043)	(0.045)	(0.050)	(0.045)
Civil War$_{t-1}$	0.352	0.407	0.290	0.407
	(0.293)	(0.358)	(0.250)	(0.358)
Free and Fair Election	5.213**	5.640***	6.561**	5.637***
	(3.753)	(3.576)	(5.298)	(3.576)
Number of Previous Turnovers	1.324	1.404	0.990	1.404
	(0.666)	(0.643)	(0.437)	(0.644)
Years in Power	0.988	1.014	0.968	1.014
	(0.041)	(0.036)	(0.039)	(0.036)
Year	0.853**	0.864**	0.885*	0.864**
	(0.062)	(0.054)	(0.060)	(0.054)
n	103	103	96	100
Pseudo-R^2	0.31	0.29	0.29	0.28

Note. Odds ratios are reported and robust standard errors are clustered on countries.
*p < .1; **p < .05; ***p < .01.

by the recipient's GDP. Models 3 and 4 repeat these regressions but drop outlying observations.[20] All of the regression results present odds ratios, so coefficients greater than one correspond to higher odds of incumbent turnover.

The constant dollar change in aid variable is significant[21] and less than one. The magnitude of the effect is small, but it is reporting the effect of a 1 million dollar increase in aid. Many countries experienced aid changes that were over 100 times larger. Aid change as a percent of GDP is significant, and the effects are consistent when outliers are removed. The odds ratio is less than the constant aid change variable—meaning that the effect is larger— which is expected, as it is reporting the influence of a 1% increase in aid as a fraction of total GDP instead of a (smaller) constant US$1 million increase. Across all of the regressions, Free and Fair increases the odds of turnover by about fivefold. The Free and Fair variable is scored on a 4-point scale, so each step corresponds to a large change from unfair to completely fair

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[20]Aid changes larger than US$400 million or 10% of GDP were dropped, resulting in seven fewer observations in the straight aid change variable regressions and three fewer observations in the GDP normalized regressions.

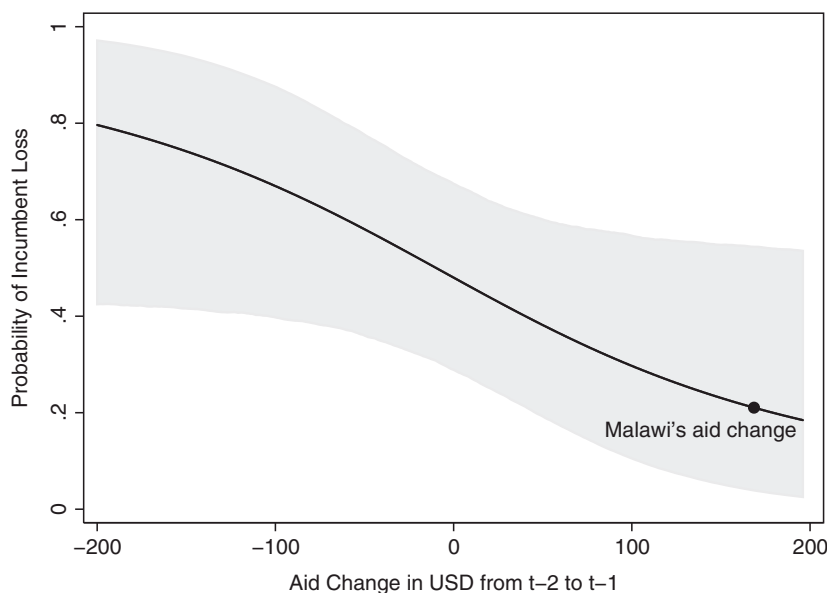[21]In regression 1 p = .027 and in regression 3 p = .054.

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FIGURE 3 Aid changes and probability of incumbent loss.

elections.[22] Intuitively, incumbents are much more likely to lose elections that are fair. Countries that experience GDP growth before the election are less likely to experience turnover, and the result is substantively large. Turnover is also less likely in richer countries. Finally, even after controlling for the other variables, time still matters. Electoral turnover is less likely as time goes on.

Figure 3 graphs the relationship between aid changes entering the pre-election year and the predicted probability of incumbent loss. All variables were set to the values for Malawi in 1999.[23] Malawi's 1999 election is a typical case and will be investigated in detail later on. Aid changes have a large influence, as incumbents that experience a US$200 million loss in aid before an election have an estimated 80% probability of electoral loss, whereas incumbents that see an aid increase of US$200 million are only expected to lose 20% of the time.

Robustness Checks

This section examines the sensitivity of regressions 3 and 4 in Table 1 to changes to the specification and to multicollinearity. First, regressions 3 and

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[22]Replacing the Free and Fair variable with a combined Freedom House measures for civil liberties and political rights in the year before the elections yields substantively similar results. Freer countries (in the year before the election) see much more turnover.
[23]Figure 3 is based on regression 3 in Table 1 and was created using Clarify (King, Tomz, and Wittenberg 2000). The shaded area is a 95% confidence interval.

4 were run while dropping the year variable, then the logged GDP variable, and then both. These variables were identified as potentially problematic because they had a very low tolerance (implying that they were highly collinear to the other independent variables).[24] These changes do not significantly alter the findings.[25] To minimize concerns about time dependence, the regressions were run without the Number of Previous Turnovers variable but with a dummy variable for the first multiparty election in each country. The latter variable is not significant and does not alter the main findings.[26]

The results are robust to a number of additional manipulations of the aid variables.[27] For example, the results are similar if aid changes are measured in per capita terms instead of in constant dollars or as a fraction of GDP. Additionally, it is plausible that aid changes may be tied to aid levels, as countries with abnormally high aid levels in time t-2 may be more likely to see declines (through regression to the mean) than countries with more average aid levels. Adding a control for the level of aid in time t-2 (measured in raw ODA or ODA/GDP, as appropriate) does not significantly alter the influence of aid changes, though in some of the regressions it has a weak independent effect and correlates with lower odds of turnover. Adding a variable measuring the change in aid between t-1 and t and between times t-3 and t-2 does not significantly alter the effect of the preelection aid change variable, and the aid change variables before and after the preelection period are also not significant. This is expected, as aid arriving in the election year does not have time to affect the lives of voters, while aid that arrives years before the election will fall victim to the short memories of voters. These robustness test regressions are more sensitive to minor changes in specification than the results in Table 1, and they are best viewed as a check on the previous results. They reveal that lagged GDP growth and the year variable are somewhat sensitive to model specification. The p value of lagged GDP growth rises as high as .15 and that of Year rises as high as .22. The most consistent results across all specifications come from the Free and Fair and the aid change variable between t-2 and t-1.[28] Changes in aid in the year before an election consistently correlate with an incumbent's odds of winning reelection and more aid leads to fewer turnovers.

Another way to examine if aid changes are likely to be causing incumbent advantage, rather than simply correlating with turnover, is to see if the

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[24] For a longer discussion of tolerances and variance inflation factors, including a caution against relying on simple rules for interpreting variance inflation factors, see O'Brien (2007).

[25] In the cases where the findings do change slightly, the relationship between incumbent losses and aid changes, GDP growth, or free and fair elections only becomes stronger.

[26] The first election dummy is not significant and does not alter the main findings when added to the regressions or when it replaces either the year variable, the number of previous turnovers, or both.

[27] These results are available upon request.

[28] These variables also yield significant ($p < .05$) results in all previous regressions when estimated using a linear probability model instead of logistic regression.

effect holds in more competitive elections. Intuitively, aid changes should have more of an effect in closer or fairer elections. If aid changes do not correlate with turnover in more competitive elections, then the results are more likely to be driven by omitted variables. Running regressions 3 and 4 from Table 1 while dropping the least-free elections produces substantively similar results. Running the regressions in a subsample of elections where the difference between the winning party's vote share and the runner up's vote share was below the mean difference in vote share[29] reduces the sample size by 40, but the aid change variables (in either measure) remain significant in this smaller sample.[30] The substantive influence of the Free and Fair variable also increases in this subsample of competitive elections. Again, the results are consistent with the claim that increases in aid in the year before elections helps incumbents win.

While it is possible that these results may be driven by reverse causation, this is unlikely because it would imply that donors are able to correctly guess election outcomes years in advance and are also able to quickly change their aid allocations in response to their guesses. Further, the regressions pick out a very specific slice of the relationship between aid and incumbent advantage. Aid changes influence an incumbent's odds of winning only when they arrive in the year before the election. Changes that occur earlier or later have no effect. For this to fit a reverse causation story, donors would have to increase aid to likely-to-win incumbents in the year before the election but then stop favoring them in the election year. The fact that aid changes only matter when moving into the year before the election also helps to reduce fears of omitted variable bias. Any omitted variable has to not only drive changes in turnover and changes in aid, it also has to drive changes in aid only in the year before the election and not before or after. Any possible omitted variable also has to exist not only in the complete sample but also in the reduced sample of fairer and more competitive elections. The simplest explanation for the results is that aid changes influence incumbent advantage by changing the resources at the disposal of the president. The next section presents two short case studies that show how changes in aid influenced elections results in Ghana and Malawi.

CASE STUDY VIGNETTES

There a durable correlation between aid changes and election outcomes in Africa and the timing of the effects, the bureaucratic processes of aid donors, and the fact that aid levels are typically decided well in advance of

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[29]Across the sample, the mean value for the difference between the runner up and the winning party's vote share is 36 percentage points.
[30]For constant dollar aid change $p = .038$ and for aid change as a fraction of GDP $p = .086$.

actual payment to recipients suggests that this relationship is causal. To further examine the relationship between aid changes and election outcomes, two case studies are examined. These cases were selected according to the method of nested analysis described by Lieberman (2005). Given that the regression results are robust, the goal of the case studies is to reduce fears of reverse causation or omitted variable bias by showing the existence of causal mechanisms linking aid changes to election outcomes. Thus, I selected cases that were well predicted by the previous regressions and exhibit substantive aid changes and turnover in the expected directions.[31] The case studies reveal the causal mechanisms linking aid to incumbent advantage and show how recipient institutions shape the ways that aid changes influence election outcomes.

The first case covers Ghana in the late 1990s, when aid declined in the preelection period and the incumbent lost the 2000 election. This vignette shows that a decline in aid led to a decline in public goods provision. It then summarizes recent literature on Ghana showing a link between public goods provision and voter behavior. More space is devoted to Malawi in 1999, when a preelection aid increase was followed by incumbent victory. This case study presents original research conducted in Malawi showing how preelection aid increases were siphoned into incumbent party coffers and that this siphoning was being driven by electoral concerns. In neither case was aid the only important factor influencing incumbent advantage, but both reveal a link between preelection year aid changes and election outcomes.

Ghana, 2000

The Ghanaian case shows how a decline in aid in the preelection year can filter down to a decline in the provision of public goods to voters and how this decline in public goods influences voting patterns. This brief case first shows that the aid decline in Ghana led to a decline in public goods provision and then summarizes work that suggests strongly that this decline hurt the incumbent National Democratic Congress (NDC) in 2000. On October 27, 1999, Ghana's Minister of Finance, Victor Selormey, addressed parliament on the state of the economy.[32] This was an important speech, as the economy was sluggish and an election was looming. While his comments were on the general state of the economy, it was "the absence of donor funding that was at the heart of the minister's speech" and during it, he claimed that less than 30% of the aid that was committed to Ghana for 1999 had been disbursed (Economist Intelligence Unit 2000:17). No one donor was responsible for

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[31]This method selects on the dependent variable. This is accepted practice when the goal is process tracing and not making a more general claim about causation. In order to trace a process, you first must pick a case where a process is likely to exist.
[32]The Ghana case draws heavily on Briggs (2012).

this decline in aid, and it seems to have been due to exceptionally bad luck. Both the World Bank and IMF expressed surprise at the fact that Ghana's aid disbursements declined (Briggs 2012), and in the end the government of Ghana responded by reducing development spending to "not less than 60% of total estimates" (Government of Ghana 2000:16). These declines in aid led to declines in developmental spending and thus declines in the provision of new public goods to Ghanaians. Before the 1996 election, the NDC heavily advertised their ability to provide public goods. They put up billboards showing rural areas with new roads and electric lines with the text "Always for People, Always for Development" (Roberts 1996). The NDC was also able to act strategically to distribute aid-funded public goods to key constituencies within Ghana (Briggs 2012). However, thanks to the decline in aid, before the 2000 election the NDC had many fewer newly completed projects to trumpet (Gyimah-Boadi 2001).

This lack of public goods was a problem because Ghanaian voters respond to public goods provision by voting more for the incumbent.[33] For example, Harding (2011) demonstrates that Ghanaian voters responded to road quality when voting in presidential elections in 2004 and 2008, and Briggs (2012) shows that Ghanaian voters responded to electrification in 1999 by increasing their vote for the incumbent in 2000. The mechanism is straightforward: The aid decline in Ghana led to lower provisions of public goods, and this led Ghanaians to vote less for the incumbent NDC than they otherwise would have. This public goods mechanism implies that for aid to have an effect, it must change from a deposit in a bank account to a tangible good that can influence voters. This process takes time. Thus, it is not surprising that the aid decline in Ghana took about a year to filter down into fewer projects being started or completed. The same effect should be expected in regard to aid increases, as aid disbursed does not immediately equal goods provided.

Malawi, 1999

Malawi experienced an aid increase between 1997 and 1998, and in 1999 incumbent President Bakili Muluzi and his United Democratic Front (UDF) won the election. This case examines how aid for education, which was both a large portion of Malawi's overall aid and an even larger portion of Malawi's preelectoral increase, was stolen. It also shows that this stolen aid was likely used by UDF politicians during their election campaigns.

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[33]Ghanaian voters have been shown to be sensitive to preelectoral economic growth (Youde 2005). Ghanaian voters are also much more likely to vote based on evaluative measures, such as party platform (prospective voting) and government accountability (retrospective voting), than on nonevaluative measures like common ethnicity (Lindberg and Morrison 2008).

When Muluzi and his UDF party won Malawi's first multiparty election in 1994, he took the helm of a government that was aid dependent and barely functioning. In 1997, "external grants and borrowings were equivalent to 10 percent of GDP and 40 percent of government expenditure" (World Bank 2006:3). State malfunction was clearly evident in the education sector. In 1994, Malawi had a primary education enrollment rate of 67%. Worse, the two-thirds of Malawian children who were enrolled were part of an education system where "on average it took learners 15 years to complete an 8 year primary education cycle" (World Bank 2001:2). Upon being elected in 1994, Muluzi quickly announced that he was abolishing school fees. As a result, over a million new students entered the education system. This increase exacerbated "the already acute shortages of qualitative education resource inputs such as instructional materials, qualified teachers, [. . .] and increased the shortfall in teaching space to about 38,000 classrooms" (World Bank 2001:2).

Donors responded to Malawi's situation by directing aid to education.[34] Before Muluzi's second election in 1999, spending on education increased dramatically. The economic report for 1999 notes that "the allocation of resources to the development budget for the past three years have increased mainly due to increased pressure emerging from construction of new schools" (National Economic Council of Malawi 2000:111). Malawian economic reports explain that this rise in development spending was due to aid increases: "This [1999's] massive rise in development expenditure over previous levels can be predominantly explained by a surge in donor funded development projects" (National Economic Council of Malawi 1998:116). While this increase may have helped Muluzi simply by allowing Malawian citizens more access to education, there is also evidence of corruption around education funding. This corruption occurred primarily during the procurement of contracts to build or repair schools. This education scam is one of the more obvious examples of how "misappropriation around procurement was the main source of illicit funding in the Muluzi years" (Cammack and Kelsall 2011:91). This case study shows that aid was stolen, that this increase in theft was due to politicians' expectations of an expensive election campaign, and that handing out cash was common during Malawi's election in 1999.

While low-scale corruption very likely existed earlier, the first reported evidence of malfeasance in education occurred in reports from Malawi's Auditor General, Henry Kalongonda. He stated:

> Between 2000 and 2001, I issued five reports and one special report on management public works contractors in the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology. The reports highlighted serious weaknesses in

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[34]Throughout the latter 1990s, education took between about 15% and 25% of the development budget, typically making it the single largest sector in each year.

> dubious awarding of contracts to Contractors to build school blocks,
> failure to monitor the construction works and wrong payments to
> contractors. (Kalongonda 2002:157)

In total, these weakness led to at least 187 million kwacha (approximately US$6 million measured in 1998 USD) going to contractors who had either not carried out their work, abandoned their work, or overcharged for the work done (Kalongonda 2002, 157). There were similar problems surrounding the procurement of educational materials between 1998 and 2000.[35] All of the officers implicated in these scandals continued to work for the government. Between December 1996 and February 2000, about 11.5 million kwacha worth of contracts for educational materials were paid to contractors who failed to fulfill the contract. The contractors kept the cash.[36] Finally, between June 1998 and December 1999, another 11.5 million kwacha were overbilled to the government due to contractors falsely claiming that they bought supplies overseas when the kwacha was devalued (Kalongonda 2002:161). As was typical, "No action had been made to recover the irregular payments from the suppliers" (Kalongonda 2002:161).

While all of these scams mattered, by far the largest surrounded contracts for school construction. This mainly involved "contractors that were over-paid huge sums of money for work [. . .] which was either not done or abandoned" (Malawi National Assembly 2005:11). In one illustrative case, a contractor was hired to build six pit latrines at Mtukwa Primary School in Mchinji district. These would generally have cost 20,000 kwacha each. The contractor billed the government for a total of 1,878,000 kwacha and then only built four of the latrines. In addition to the failure to complete work and uncompetitive billing, "'new contracts' were awarded fraudulently by using old contract forms previously signed by officers who had left the Ministry" (Malawi National Assembly 2005:11).

The Permanent Secretary for Education at the time the scams were being carried out was Sam Safuli. After being arrested and interviewed by Malawi's Anti-Corruption Bureau, his testimony was leaked to the press. He cited "political pressure as the main reason for the manner in which the contracts were handled" (Kamlomo and Nyoni 2000). In Safuli's own words:

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[35] In this case, officers had signed off on textbooks and other educational materials having been received even though they were not in storehouses. They were never recovered. The value of this loss was estimated at about 120 million kwacha (Kalongonda 2002:157). Between 1998 and 1999, another 10 million kwacha worth of additional educational materials were removed from storehouses through a voucher scam.

[36] The audit report is not clear on this point, but it appears that these contractors were paid in advance of the completion of the contact. This occurred with other scams in the Education Ministry, so it would not be surprising here.

> This [the corruption] was even worse when we were approaching the 1999 Presidential and Parliamentary elections. A lot of the UDF politicians came to the ministry to get contracts in order for them to raise money for their political campaign [sic]. (Kamlomo and Nyoni 2000)

The idea that electoral pressure was responsible for the depth of the corruption around school construction was reinforced in an interview with a former high-ranking investigator from the Anti-Corruption Bureau. He was assigned to the school corruption case within days of the Anti-Corruption Bureau learning about the matter. In his view, the political motivations behind the corruption are clear:

> There is no doubt at all in my mind, with or without Safuli's statement that the proceeds of these scams were for political campaigning, the statement of Safuli was taken [sic] just collaborates what we already knew . . . [37]

While it is impossible to know precisely where the hundreds of millions of kwacha for school construction ended up, a lot of cash was handed out during campaigning:

> There are also reports that officials from Mr Muluzi's ruling United Democratic Front (UDF) have been handing out cash to crowds at campaign rallies. The source of such funds is unknown, but such reports suggest that the government will indeed spend lavishly in the run-up to the elections. (Economist Intelligence Unit 1998b:28).

While the exact source of the money is impossible to trace, the fungibility of cash certainly suggests that there would have been fewer resources in UDF campaigns without the education scam. The argument for a more direct link is bolstered by the fact that the number of fraudulent school construction contracts increased during this time, and both a key perpetrator and one of the main investigators linked the stolen resources to UDF campaigning. Finally, there is the link back to donors and foreign aid. There were a large number of donor projects for education and school construction in Malawi during this time, from the Primary Education Project ($22 million) and Secondary Education project ($48 million) to the third Education Sector Credit ($55 million), and aid to education was increasing. Malawi's Auditor General found financial weaknesses in a number of these projects, including one by the African Development Fund. The World Bank's transparency is quite good compared to many other donors, and so one World Bank project was examined to see if their resources were involved in the scam.

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[37] The subject requested anonymity. Interview conducted on 18 January 2013 via e-mail.

The World Bank gave US$11.8 million to build 1,600 classrooms and to build and furnish 75 new schools between 1996 and 2000 (World Bank 2001).[38] About half of the total classrooms were never built. Of the 858 classrooms that were at least partially built, 340 were "left unfinished" (World Bank 2001:8). Of the 75 new schools, 59 were built, and of those 59, just under half were furnished. This means that the World Bank met about one-third of its target for classrooms and new schools. In characteristic understatement, the report asserts that "implementation of this component was unsatisfactory" and more tellingly that the failed construction projects "contributed to the premature depletion of funds for other component activities" (World Bank 2001:8). The section of the report that analyzes borrower performance includes numerous phrases like "the Government failed to provide the necessary oversight," "accounts were not well maintained," and "records were not properly kept" (World Bank 2001:15). The section of the report that analyzes the actions of the local implementing agency mentions that "there was virtually no supervision of works on site or management of the on-going contracts certificates and performance" and that they were "not following the contractual procedure and their valuations resulted in over compensation to the contractors" (World Bank 2001:47). The evaluation of borrower performance concludes that "in view of the serious lack of oversight for the project's activities at the Ministry, and particularly so for the use of consultants, Borrower performance is unsatisfactory" (World Bank 2001:16).

In this project, the Bank managed to spend all of its resources and only produce about a third of its expected outputs. Money clearly leaked out to contractors, and the report is constant in its criticism of the Ministry of Education, where the scam originated. While this is not direct evidence that World Bank money for school construction ended up in UDF campaigns, it is about as close as one can get when relying on donor self-evaluations. It is difficult to know the specifics of other donors because they are generally not as admirably transparent as the Bank, but it seems unlikely that this problem was restricted only to the World Bank, as other donors were similarly involved in school construction during this time. The evidence from Malawi suggests that an increase in aid to education in 1998 ended up being channeled into campaign spending and cash handouts in the 1999 election. The process of turning aid into campaign spending was not as simple as moving money from one bank account to another. Instead, it involved the setting up of construction companies and various kinds of contract fraud. These processes took time, and aid arriving in the election year would have been less likely to filter through these processes than aid arriving the year before the election.

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[38]Additionally, in April 1998, the World Bank announced a loan for 1.2 billion kwacha (about $45 million) to build 20 secondary schools in Malawi and increase female access to education (Economist Intelligence Unit 1998a:32).

CONCLUSION

Aid to Africa is highly volatile, and the political effects of this volatility have largely been ignored. This article shows that there is a correlation between aid changes and incumbent advantage in post-Cold War African presidential elections. Further, it demonstrates that the relationship between aid changes and incumbents winning reelection is sensitive to the timing of the aid change. Aid changes only matter when they occur entering the year before an election. The case studies show how changes in aid can lead to changes in a citizen's willingness to vote for the incumbent. In Ghana, aid cuts led to reductions in the provision of preelectoral infrastructure like roads and electricity. In Malawi, aid increases for school construction were turned into campaign finance and clientelistic transfers through corrupt contracting practices. In either case, the processes linking aid changes to voter behavior were shaped by local context and took time to unfold.[39] For aid to influence voters through the mechanisms highlighted in the cases, it has to arrive in a "Goldilocks period" when it is close enough to the election to be remembered but far enough before the election that the aid has time to be turned into goods or services.

On a more practical note, the research presented here serves as a reminder that foreign aid is always political. Changes in development aid influence election outcomes in Africa. International donors cannot eliminate this form of political influence, but they could lessen its impact and arbitrariness by coordinating to reduce aid volatility.

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[39]The case studies examined a small number of causal processes to see if there were links between preelectoral aid changes and incumbent reelection. While they found evidence of links between aid changes and incumbent advantage, there are many more possible mechanisms that could be examined in future research. For example, aid changes may be interpreted by voters as a signal of the quality of the incumbent, and in this way aid changes could shift how voters vote without providing them with any resources.

ORCID

Ryan C. Briggs   ⓘ http://orcid.org/0000-0002-3933-8119

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