



Strategic Reorientation vs. Austerity: Explaining Divergence in Swedish and German Foreign Aid Approaches (2020–2025)

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I. Executive Summary

This thesis studies the divergent approaches to foreign aid taken by Sweden and Germany between 2020-2025 in the midst of unprecedented budget cuts. Sweden has pursued an approach of strategic reorientation toward an “aid for trade” model and directly linking aid to foreign policy objectives on migration. Meanwhile, Germany has imposed austerity on its aid programs with no strategic alternative adopted and implemented in conjunction. Using a qualitative semi-structured elite-level interview design, the study targets five potential factors to explain this divergence. Findings revealed that a significantly higher rate of non-structural politicization in Sweden, and entrenched bureaucratic rigidity and competition in Germany are the most important causes of this difference. Additionally, some evidence was found that the role of aid as a tool of soft power and a deep-rooted, but evolving, historical identity connected to a strong tradition of foreign aid have some effect in Sweden. In addition, budgetary pressures were found to be slightly higher in Germany than Sweden. Public opinion was found to have minimal impact in both the strategic decisions of either state, as well as in explaining their divergence. Path dependent behaviours were noted frequently among German participants, but do not in and of themselves explain Germany’s aid approach nor the divergence. The results suggest that while many large donor-countries are reducing their budgets for foreign aid, the reasons, triggers, and mechanisms by which it happens can show significant variation. Making sense of this complexity can help donor and recipient states better anticipate shifts in aid prioritisation and adapt quicker.

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III. Introduction

Sweden and Germany are two of the largest aid-donor states in the world, ranking second and third, in global overseas development aid (ODA) per capita and among the top ten humanitarian donors in the world every year between 2020-2025 (OCHA, 2025; OECD 2025).

However, despite their prominent positions within the development and humanitarian aid sectors, they have not been immune to global trends. Across the OECD's Development Assistance Committee- (DAC)-member states, including the United States and Europe, drastic reductions in aid budgets have become increasingly common (Scottish Government, 2026; Kim, 2025; Shah, 2025; Torres-Raposo et al., 2025). The OECD's 0.7% of Gross-National-Income (GNI) target has faced "effective abandonment" (Simpson, 2026, pg. 11), while 2024 alone saw a 7% global drop in development aid from the prior year (Bohne and Walter, 2025). The exact starting point for this trend is a subject of significant debate, however, with some pointing to the Ukraine War in 2022 as the key starting point (Kim, 2025, Simpson, 2025; Wagner-Robinson, 2025), others the Covid-19 pandemic in 2020 (Schneider et al., 2022), the Refugee Crisis of 2015 (Simpson, 2026), the 2008-2009 Financial Crisis and Eurozone Crisis (Omar & Djemal, 2025; Scottish Government, 2026), while some even argue the September 11th attacks marked the beginning of the downturn (Carlsson, 2025; Gebrehiwot, 2025; Guppert, 2026).

The most abrupt and publicized shift was the Trump administration's dismantling of USAID in 2025. While this event led to increased global attention to the direction of foreign aid, elsewhere, it largely obscured a longer-running process that was already underway across Europe, including Germany and Sweden. Yet, despite the shared trend, Germany and Sweden are not copying the US approach. Nor are they, for that matter, copying each other.

Both states have reduced their aid budgets, this is undeniable. However, Sweden has pursued a complete strategic reorientation of its foreign aid strategy since 2022, when a rightwing coalition government came into power. It has explicitly linked its aid objectives with trade and migration, with the motto by former aid and

trade minister Johann Forssel that a state can “do good and earn money at the same time”¹ (Dagens Nyheter, 2023). Meanwhile, Germany has not made such extensive changes, and in practice its humanitarian and development aid portfolios have not on a fundamental level shifted their focus or prioritization areas beyond a traditional aid remit in practice² (with the exception of support for Ukraine), despite continuing year-on-year budgetary cuts. The research therefore centered around the question of why this is - why are the two states diverging in their adaptation to a changing global aid environment?

I chose to focus on Germany and Sweden in this study for six reasons. First, both countries have some of the highest reputations among leading donor states, due to their financial generosity and greater historical emphasis on humanitarian principles, and not national geopolitical objectives, than by peers such as the United States. Second, despite their reputations, both countries have made significant cuts to their aid budgets in the time period from 2020-2025. Third, neither country has made a dramatic institutional change in that period, no agencies, ministries, or fundamental operating models were dissolved, assimilated, or launched that would render them incomparable or make tracking historical continuities into the period of study difficult to track in the same way. Fourth, both have continued up to the present day to emphasize an important role for aid, despite their budget cuts - a fundamentally different attitude from that seen in Washington. Fifth, the German and Swedish aid institutions, as leaders in their field, are considered to be norm-setters and also frequently engage with each other. Finally, I speak Swedish and German, allowing me

¹ Original Swedish quote: man kan “gå att göra gott och tjäna pengar samtidigt” (Dagens Nyheter, 2023)

² It should be noted that there has been some rhetorical shifts in their development strategies, in particular, while outside the research period, the 2026 Development Aid Strategy (BMZ, 2026) announced that “development policy [is] an integral part of German security policy” and that “international solidarity ... is a strategic imperative” (pg.4), however this position was not present in the 2020 BMZ 2030 Reform Plan (BMZ, 2020), nor was it present in the 2021 Sustainable Development Updated Strategy (Die Bundesregierung, 2021). The 2024 Humanitarian Aid Strategy, despite mention of an “Integrated Security Concept”, acknowledges the still-aspirational nature of that approach (pg. 7), with no outline of how it intends to do so (Auswärtiges Amt, 2024). Furthermore, even in the 2025 strategy, the adoption of securitized language is also unaccompanied with any hard details on how it intends to increase integration. In other words, there is a mismatch between actions and words, and any shift post-2025 has not, to date, represented a clean break to the extent that Sweden has demonstrated.

to access materials in both countries that would be otherwise difficult to obtain and review.

There are certainly important limitations to the comparison, notably, the size of the two countries is rather distinct. However, despite the potential implications of this, (which will be considered in the hypotheses), there is reason to suspect this alone does not render the comparison impractical. Indeed, despite their size, neither country has a historical record prior to 2020 of overt aid securitisation, explicit linkages with migration or security policy, nor intentional weaponisation in a geopolitical context. Indeed, if size does matter, it is likely to only come into play in the aid approach taken in the current era, in which case, it is then important to prove the extent of this effect.

But considering the widespread similarities across the two states, it is even more interesting that Sweden's push for a fundamental reorientation of its aid strategy has no corollary in Germany, and that instead the imposition of austerity is the key defining trait of the apparent German strategy.

The following sections will proceed as follows. First, I will review the relevant literature and theoretical framework which I have applied to this study (IV). Second, I will apply this framework to develop five core hypotheses, and also formulate three alternative hypotheses (V). Third, I will outline my methodology and research design (VI). In the fourth section, I will review the cases in closer depth and contextualize each states' individual developments (VII), before turning to review my results in the fifth section (VIII). Finally I conclude the study with the key research findings and identify areas for future research.

IV. Literature Review

Due to the inherent tension between aid's altruistic objectives and the national interests of the states funding (and receiving) it, studying foreign aid behaviour necessitates an integrated theoretical approach.³ As a starting point, realist and constructivist approaches are most useful for capturing this dual tension in foreign aid, and have long been applied as such, because their respective strengths complement each other in explaining the aid policies and strategies which states adopt (Sharma, 1967; Egeland, 1984; Nossal, 1988; Zhang, 2020; Simpson, 2026).

Realist theory was first applied to aid scholarship in 1962 by Hans Morgenthau, the founder of classical realism. He conceptualized aid – and development aid in particular – as a tool of state coercion. Robert Packenham built on this idea, acknowledging that while moral and humanitarian motivations may contribute to a state's development of aid policy, it does not change the fact that aid is a manifestation of, not a deviation from, the centrality of states' self-interest, as realism would predict (1966). Even in the 1990s – a period where realist theory was viewed by some as irrelevant in the modern era (Legro and Moravcsik, 1999) – others were noting that aid allocations were hardly independent of the national interests of donor states, and that democracy-promotion and poverty-reduction objectives represented an alignment of interests, not a sidelining of them (Alesina and Dollar, 2000). Modern aid scholarship reinforces this view, arguing that the recent (and ongoing) decline in aid spending is attributable to, and predictable by, the prioritization of states' (both donor and recipient) strategic interests (Carlsson, 2025; Kiss, 2025; Simpson, 2026).

Foreign aid is also an altruistic state act, using state funds to achieve humanitarian and welfare goals frequently only indirectly, if at all, rooted in power-projection or power-building – something that realist theory cannot fully convincingly explain with its focus centered on "power and material interests" (Zhang,

³ Foreign aid can also be understood as covering non-state contributions, via remittances or other means. This study covers only aid contributed via states, regardless of the number of intermediaries between donor and recipient. See the report by the Swedish Equality Commission (Jämlikhetskommissionen, 2020, 64) to see how a broader definition can distort the definition of aid in practice, and the responding CONCORD report (2020) to see the consequences of expanding the definition beyond consensus.

2020, p. 33). Therefore, applying a constructivist theoretical framework in addition to realist theoretical assumptions captures a more complete picture of state behaviour on foreign aid. Constructivism makes two key contributions to foreign aid theorization; first, it notes that common moral and altruistic justifications for aid *do* shape the development and execution of a state's aid policy (Malacalza, 2019)⁴; and second, that the design of a state's aid policy may reflect a "transfer of domestic principles and practices" far beyond the pursuit of state interests (Lumsdaine, 1993, p. 23). Of particular relevance to this study is Lumsdaine's finding that states with strong social welfare programs are also historically among the largest aid donors, wherein strong support for domestic poverty alleviation correlated to support for foreign aid, and vice-versa. A constructivist framework helps explain divergent strategic behaviours between Germany and Sweden by emphasizing the "socially constructed" nature of donor states' identity and the need for donors to preserve their legitimacy and reputation (both external and internal) (Omar & Djemal, 2025, p. 26; Zoenso-Ryd, 2025).

Realist and constructivist theories, when applied to foreign aid, are limited in their conception of a mostly monolithic state. The practice of foreign aid is handled in both Germany and Sweden – as with most Development Assistance Committee (DAC)-members⁵, within a complex, evolving, and diverse institutional framework. Institutional theory rejects the monolith assumption, noting that those responsible for designing aid policy in any given state are shaped in their views and preferences by their domestic and individual institutional context (March & Olsen, 1989). To an extent unique in the foreign aid context, institutional effects interact with national interests and social constructions of identity, where the bureaucratic-level institutional interaction effect may bear on the purpose and form of the foreign aid strategy

⁴ An extreme example of this is the way that commitment to humanitarian principles above national interests shaped the Scandinavian donor response in Myanmar in the 2010s, which was depoliticized at both the donor and recipient ends to the point it contributed to further conflict on the ground (see Matelski 2024, pp. 128-129)

⁵ The DAC is an elite grouping of states within the OECD who collectively are some of the largest bilateral aid donors in the world, making up 96% of global contributions as of 2023 (OECD, 2024). DAC standards and policies are considered global best practice, and the Committee carries significant political and normative weight on a global scale (Moorehead, 2025).

ultimately taken by any state. The result, as noted by Guy Peters, a leading scholar in new institutionalism, is that “administrative institutions represent important social and ... cultural values”, a feature which renders their steering a politically valuable asset (1992, p. 212). Peters also points out that, in line with an environmental dependency approach, most attempts to reform and/or reorganize institutions are constrained by that institution’s relative political “vulnerability”, and “dependence upon external political forces” (p. 206). Therefore, when comparing Swedish and German strategic decisions on aid, it is necessary to integrate an institutionalist perspective within the analysis, given significant institutional differences (and their consequences) which realist and constructivist paradigms cannot fully explain.

Finally, it is important to note the phenomenon of accountability relocation in foreign aid policymaking, wherein “accountability has shifted almost exclusively towards taxpayers in donor countries, rather than to the communities the aid is intended to help” (Matelski, 2024, p. 132). This is not entirely new, as both Germany and Sweden have undergone periods in the history of their foreign aid programs where they have had to turn their focus inward to justify and support foreign aid to their domestic audience. What is unique in recent years is the intensity, simultaneity, and existentiality of the accountability relocation (Lundberg, 2026; Rehbaum, 2026). This shift suggests the possibility that public opinion and budgetary pressures are relevant factors in Germany and Sweden.

Existing scholarship on Swedish and German developments in official foreign aid policies post-2020 is not plentiful. Where it does exist, it focuses solely on a single donor country, with particularly weak coverage on Germany (Esser & Janus, 2025; Hövelman & Südhoff, 2022; Petersson, 2024; Zoenso-Ryd, 2025). Alternatively, the focus is confined to broader trends that lack deeper explanations of why and how states diverge in their strategic approaches to foreign aid within the broader trend of budget cuts (Kim, 2025; Simpson, 2026). This study seeks to address this gap by directly comparing the way that Germany and Sweden are undertaking similar changes to their aid policy, integrating state-level and intra-state frameworks in a

comparative analysis. This allows for both precision and a degree of generalizability, strengthening the relevance of the study.

V. Hypotheses

This study applies the aforementioned theoretical framework to formulate five hypotheses, and three alternative hypotheses. The first four explain why, as both Sweden and Germany were reducing their aid budgets from 2020-2024, Sweden chose as strategic reorientation of its aid policy, while Germany has to a greater extent simply deprioritized and imposed growing fiscal constraints on its aid program. Then, a fifth hypothesis is derived from a document comparison suggesting differing degrees of budget pressures. Three alternative hypotheses are formulated, first relating to the role of mass publics, and the final two incorporating alternative institutional explanations of bureaucratic competition and path dependency.

The first hypothesis builds from realist theory centered on the self-interested nature of aid donor states (Kiss, 2025; Morgenthau, 1962). Sweden is a significantly smaller state than Germany, only possessing a fraction of its economic or industrial resource weight. Therefore, it may be inclined to – given its long-standing historical strength in development and humanitarian aid – preserve its influence in areas where it can bear leverage and exert influence in the international system (Lake, 1987). Thus:

H₁: *As a smaller state than Germany, aid serves as a greater source of soft power for Sweden, and therefore it may be more inclined to reorient its aid than impose austerity alone.*

Second, there is extensive documentation of strong Swedish self-perception as a good moral actor, in large part due to its global reputation as a generous aid donor it has earned (Zoenso-Ryd, 2025; Månsson, 2025; MacKinnon, 2026; Nilsson, 2026). It has been hypothesized, but not tested, that the Swedish decision to reorient, and not sideline, its foreign aid programs, is in part the result of the way in which a socially constructed identity constrains and shapes foreign policy behaviour of states (Carlsson, 2025). There is some evidence, however, that any identity effect may have been stronger in the past, but is increasingly weakened (Nilsson, 2026), or that “Sweden’s self-image as a development aid donor” has entirely shifted into something else (Zoenso-Ryd, 2025). This is distinct from the role of soft-power in a crucial way; the self-perception of being a good moral actor on the world stage is an entirely

separate discussion from the ways in which Sweden has, or may, instrumentalize that perception. Indeed, referring back to Lumsdaine's finding on states with strong social welfare systems being the largest aid donors, a constructivist framework complements the realist assumption of power incentives (1993). Together, they would suggest separate, but mutually inclusive, causal pathways for the soft power benefit, and the identity affirmation effect, to determine a state's foreign aid strategy. With this in mind, I will test the role of identity as follows:

H2: *Because Sweden's historical reputation regarding foreign aid is more deeply connected to its self-image, it was less willing to simply cut it, making reorientation the path of least resistance in a way that Germany never had to navigate.*

Third, there are notable institutional differences distinguishing the German and Swedish cases that may influence strategic decisions on aid policy. Notably, there is significant evidence that Sweden, whose development and humanitarian programs are integrated or subordinate to the Foreign Ministry, are relatively more politicized than in the German context (Pettersson, 2024; Landqvist, 2023). Some have gone so far as to argue that German aid policy has been historically based on "relevant international agreements ... and has so far largely avoided prioritising its own self-interest" (Lippert & Mair, 2026). It has been theorized that the German level of depoliticization may not only explain the current German strategy, but render German foreign aid more vulnerable than its Swedish counterpart (Hövelmann & Südhoff, 2022; Lippert and Mair, 2026). Because aid institutions are both politically vulnerable and socially and culturally symbolic, according to the Peters' framework, it can be expected that a more politicized agency will be relatively less capable of resisting political steering. This hypothesis also covers the role of party politics and political activity outside of direct governance actions, such as campaign rhetoric, emphasis in interviews and articles, and speeches delivered not announcing or initiating policy actions. This idea is expressed and tested as follows:

H3: *The difference in Sweden and Germany's aid strategies can be explained by Sweden's higher politicization of foreign aid, making it easier to align its aid strategy with government priorities than in Germany, whose foreign aid is less politicized.*

The fourth hypothesis is a related but distinct theoretical argument, namely, that the extent of strategic integration may also explain divergences in foreign aid strategies. The key distinction is the non-mutual inclusivity of politicization and integration, exemplified by the fact that Sweden's development aid agency has been integrated into its Foreign Affairs Ministry since 1995 without any indication of overt politicisation until recent years (Petersson, 2024). The concept builds on the environmental dependency theory, where the foreign aid strategy of a state, and those responsible for its implementation and design, adapt to their environmental conditions (Peters, 1992). In this process, institutions and actors responsible for aid policy design and implementation are not active, but passive actors within the state apparatus. This integration of realist and institutionalist thinking tests the effect of the extent of explicit and structural integration of foreign aid into a state's decision to reorient or deprioritize aid (see: Bell, 2011)⁶. Scholarship has highlighted Sweden's greater degree of foreign policy integration of its aid policy than in Germany, allowing this theory to be tested (Lundberg, 2026; Bohne & Walter, 2025; Hövelmann & Südhoff, 2022). Notably, an 2018 study of the German aid strategy in the MENA region even found that institutional "fragmentation" was the key driver of foreign aid policy incoherence in certain regions (Furness, 2018). Thus:

H4: *Because Swedish foreign aid is more strategically integrated into Swedish foreign policy than German foreign aid is into Germany's foreign policy, it is less vulnerable to deprioritization and instead reformed.*

Finally, as referenced earlier, it is posited that Sweden is facing less budgetary pressure than Germany, in turn leading to more willingness to pursue a reorientation versus further reduction. This budgetary difference is inferred from a review of

⁶ Bell discusses three relevant points here. First, the ways that it is "the stable components of institutions that may provide the context in which other parts change" (pg. 898), where applied to the Swedish case, since all aid has been under the roof of the MFA since 1995, its ability to remain "independent" while flexing in the direction of the political environment demonstrates this pattern to provide an illusive state of stability. Second, he notes that structure "can help constrain and empower agents", for example to the extent that state power is centralized. Third, he notes that institutions are the result of human agency, reasoning, and their actions, but cannot be reduced "to agents to what they think ... at any given time", which, in other words and applied here, means that individual aid actors "reproduce or transform social structures rather than create them" (quote by Bell of Archer, *Realist Theory*, p.1), included in references.

Germany's humanitarian (2024) and development strategies (2021, 2023, and 2026⁷), and Swedish equivalents (humanitarian: 2021, 2025; development: 2023). No Swedish strategy ever mentions budgetary pressures. For Germany, it is omitted from all except the 2026 strategy, which acknowledges pre-existing budgetary pressures, although avoids directly blaming them. For this reason, it is necessary to test if there exists over the 2020-2025 period a pattern of differentiated budgetary pressures that may explain the strategic shifts. Statements made by respective ministers for aid, Svenja Schulze (Germany) and Johan Forssell (Sweden) further outline a different rhetorical emphasis on budgetary pressures (Szent-Ivanyi, 2021; Radio Sverige, 2025; Utrikesdepartement, 2023). Thus:

H5: *Sweden was able to reorient its aid policy due to less severe budgetary pressures than those present in Germany.*

These hypotheses – with the exception of the fifth⁸ – integrate realist, constructivist, and institutionalist explanations to capture both internal and external dynamics behind the divergence in Swedish and German aid strategies. They do not, nor can they, cover every possible explanation for state behavior. I have selected three alternative hypotheses, one that helps contextualize H2 and H3, and two others offering alternative pathways presented by institutionalist theory which I have not adopted. Given the integration of realist/constructivist frameworks with an institutionalist one, the institutionalist alternatives were rejected as probable given their weakness in accounting for external dynamics, something that foreign aid demands.

The first alternative hypothesis is that I do not expect the influence of public opinion (**aH1**) to be a significant driver of these strategic shifts, nor to explain the Swedish-German divergence. Recent scholarship has pointed to the fact that, at least in Germany, public opinion on foreign aid has remained relatively stable despite major budget and policy shifts (Schneider et al., 2025). The assumption is that this trend carries over to Sweden, and that in both cases, as a result, elite actors do not rely on

⁷ While published in January 2026, it was drafted and prepared over the course of months in 2025, reflecting German aid thinking and prioritization over that period, and therefore is included.

⁸ See above.

public opinion when making budget and policy shifts relating to foreign aid. This assumption is grounded in two key findings: first, the well-documented public-elite gap in awareness of, and interest in, foreign aid policy (Milner & Tingley, 2013; Karol, 2018); and second, that elite opinion tends to drive foreign aid significantly more than mass opinion does (Landqvist, 2023; Rye-Olson, 2001). Additionally, the effect measured under public opinion may serve as an umbrella for many other processes (Milner & Tingley, 2013). Therefore, direct causal effects are likely better represented via H2 and H3. Thus:

aH1: *Public opinion had minimal direct effect on, and does not distinguish, Sweden and Germany's strategic decisions on aid.*

Second, competition between domestic and foreign priorities may also be speculated to explain how states craft their aid policies. This position is drawn from Peters' institutionalist⁹ model, placing government officials, including those within the bureaucracy, as active agents operating with regard to a collective interest (1992). I did not emphasize this explanation, however, for two reasons. First, H4 covers structural integration and likely captures any effect that aH2 may present. Second, I did not find any evidence in my pre-interview research that there is any pattern of either significant individual or collective action taken within the German aid agencies in the name of competition relating to the strategic direction of the agency. Thus:

aH2: *A higher level of bureaucratic competition in Germany can explain its non-reorientation of its aid strategy.*

An additional explanation proffered by institutional theory is that the German context suffers from a higher degree of institutional competition which rigidifies, and silos, policies and leads to resistance to change (**aH3**). This is a related idea to H3 and H4, but is not emphasized because a) the argument struggles to accommodate external factors and lacks descriptive depth, and b) there is reason to believe that path dependency is largely an indirect symptom of several other factors, so its testing is useful contextualisation for H4 and aH2, but not as a primary means of explanation

⁹ The institutionalist model is a more specified approach under a set of broader institutional approaches, such as purposive action and environmental determinism (Peters 1992).

(Peters, 2009). Some evidence for path dependency does exist¹⁰, but the study does not precisely distinguish it from politisation (H3) and structural integration (H4), requiring more distinct testing (Furness, 2018), aH3 is in some ways an inverse of H4, wherein structural constraints under aH3 work bottom up, not top-down. In relation to aH2, the institutional actor – not the state – is still centered in focus. However, it is assumed to be a passive and not active actor - wherein the act of passive reciprocity would itself be an explanation for Germany's non-orientation of aid should path dependency actually meaningfully explain the divergence. Thus:

aH3: *Path dependency has no direct effect on either Germany or Sweden foreign aid strategy decisions and does not explain their divergence.*

These eight hypotheses – primary and alternate – are drawn from the theoretical framework established in section IV¹¹, and target both internal and external dynamics of policy change on foreign aid in both Germany and Sweden.

¹⁰ Furness' study explores Germany's ODA response in the MENA region since the Arab Spring.

¹¹ With the exception of H5 on budgetary differences, derived from document and rhetorical evidence.

VI. Research Design

The widespread decline of aid budgets among DAC-donors, a trend visible from 2020 in some states, and 2022 in most others (including Germany and Sweden) (OECD, n.d.) present several obstacles for research. First, the process in many states is still ongoing, but not necessarily at the same speed or direction in different places; second, there appears to be a large number of factors that triggered this spending shift; third, foreign aid is an ever-evolving field, and differentiating between negative spending shifts – versus a normal fluctuation – is not always straightforward. The research is designed to overcome these hurdles to the greatest extent possible, first by limiting the time period of interest to the period between 2020 and 2025. This is done for several reasons. First, the literature revealed that the Covid-19 pandemic was a large external shock which affected both DAC-wide aid policy and German and Swedish aid. Second, this time frame captures the onset of the war in Ukraine, as well featuring increasing competition with new donors such as the Gulf States and China. Third, the window captures a similar political shift in both Sweden and Germany, where a center-left party loses to a center-right party, while a stronger far-right nationalist party emerges as a powerful actor in the shadows, a situation which remains the same in both through the end of 2025. These large external shocks are hypothesized to help differentiate between longer trends and sharp policy shifts.

The key drawback of this time frame is that there is a low quantity of relevant literature and materials. In large part, what literature does exist treats the trend of aid-reduction across DAC-states as overly-monolithic, and comparative domestic studies have not been done. Further, because the process is still ongoing in both countries, the framing of individual domestic studies is difficult to generalize. For this reason, I have pursued a qualitative comparative case study design drawing on semi-structured elite interviews, supplemented by primary and secondary source material.

I chose to conduct semi-structured interviews for three reasons. First, information is largely unavailable on the reasons decision-makers in Germany and Sweden have adopted their current foreign aid strategies outside of public rhetoric,

which a) is often oriented to domestic audiences, and thus cannot fully portray inter-state strategic calculations, and b) does not necessarily represent the views of those inside government without a public microphone and audience. Second, my hypotheses cover a wide set of possible explanatory variables, but are by no means exhaustive – and given the recency of the events being studied, it is essential to be able to take in new information that I had not known to anticipate, or that raise important lines of inquiry. The third reason is psychological. Foreign aid is under growing critique, and the political situation in both Germany and Sweden is increasingly tense. The potential consequences of non-politicians in particular speaking on the subject, such as potential backlash or job insecurity, are serious enough that the format must allow for trust to be built between interviewer and interviewee. For the exact structuring of the interviews, I relied primarily on Robert Kaiser's 2021 handbook "Qualitative Experteninterviews"¹², with supplemental reference on style from Anne Galletta's seminal 2013 guide specifically on semi-structured interviews.

Because budgetary and policy developments are ongoing processes in both Germany and Sweden, I chose to divide my interviews into three groups: political/bureaucratic officials in Germany, political/bureaucratic officials in Sweden, and members of civil society involved in one or both countries. The idea is that those inside the system will have relevant knowledge, but in the case that their view is biased by their involvement, those outside of government may provide an external perspective to balance that out. It is not assumed that either group is more or less biased than the other in any one way, but only that their perspectives are expected to potentially differ and complement each other. 12 interviews were conducted in total. Five participants formed the German group, six the Swedish group, and one interviewee had sufficient expertise to speak on both. I did my best to balance both the quantity in each group, as well as the type in each group, resulting in a fairly even distribution of political, bureaucratic, and external/civil society participants.

¹² Specifically pgs. , 72-73, 76, 92, 95, 102-103, and 165-167

<i>Country</i>	<i>Code #</i>	<i>Role</i>	<i>Date</i>
Sweden	Sv1	Swedish Riksdag, MP, Member of the Social Democrats	24 April 2026
Sweden	Sv2	Swedish Riksdag, MP, Member of the Social Democrats	13 April 2026
Sweden	Sv3	Researcher at SIDA	15 April 2026
Sweden	Sv4	CEO of major Swedish aid NGO	14 April 2026
Sweden	Sv5	Former SIDA administrator (2018-2024)	13 April 2026
Sweden	Sv6	Advisor at major Swedish aid NGO	10 April 2026
Sweden/ Germany	Sv7/ De1	Development Studies Researcher at Malmö University	17 March 2026
Germany	De2	Senior Consultant at a German global development consultancy	26 February 2026
Germany	De3	Advisor at German Ministry for Development and Economic Cooperation (BMZ)	14 April 2026
Germany	De4	Senior Official at German Ministry for Development and Economic Cooperation (BMZ)	23 March 2026
Germany	De5	Senior Official at German Ministry for Development and Economic Cooperation (BMZ)	8 April 2026
Germany	De6	German Bundestag, MP, Member of the Alternativ für Deutschland (AfD)	21 April 2026

Figure 6.1

While each interview is semi-structured, I asked each of the respondents a set of questions pulled directly from the five hypotheses, and addressed each of the controls and alternative hypotheses. These questions are listed in Appendix.IX. The transcripts from each were then coded to mark their responses in line with this format, where each question was coded as (+) or (-), for either Sweden or Germany, in order to distinguish the patterns in each.

Thus, where the

factor relevant in that question did affect that country, then it was coded as (country +), and vice versa. The calculation of the frequencies was not differentiated between the different groups of interviewees, as to do so would pre-emptively seek to explain the specific elites responsible for the aid approach a state takes, something which may be dependent on the results of the hypothesis testing and which may not be

consistent across the two states, nor across time. The coding frequencies were thereafter visualised in two ways, first to highlight hypothesis (non-)alignment (sv+/de-, sv-/de+), and contrasts (or lack thereof) between the cases (sv+/de+, sv-/de-).

H1, relating to soft-power and based on realist theory, was coded (+) with statements positing a positive relationship between their state's foreign aid engagement and their influence on the global stage. Statements to the contrary were coded (-). If H1 is true, then Sweden will have a higher proportion of H1(+) codings than Germany, although Germany may still be net positive.

H2, as introduced above and relating to identity, was coded (+) in cases where interviewees acknowledged, either on their own or during questioning, any significance in identity in shaping the policy development process, and (-) in cases of the opposite. A lack of acknowledgement was coded as (-) in a handful of instances where the implication was derivable from the context and notable in comparison to similar responses by Swedish interviewees.

H3, relating to politicization, was coded (+) in cases where interviewees acknowledged or pointed to politicization in their respective countries. While there was significant overlap with aH1 (partisan politics), statements outlining solely political competition, and not politicization of aid policy issues, were not included. Codes were negative in cases where statements were made making clear articulations of low or negligible politicization in that country.

H4, arguing that strategic integration disincentivizes deprioritization, was coded (+) in cases where policymakers considered aid to be integrated into the state's foreign policy strategy or to be a state priority (the implication and overlap is such that both point to the same mechanism). It was (-) where either of the above considerations were either rejected or modified¹³ by the interviewee.

H5, relating to hypothesized weaker budgetary pressures in Sweden, required a bit more inference to code, and thus is a less precise measurement. This is because respondents are generally only familiar with their own state, and lack a budgetary

¹³ This is because interviewees are not likely to admit that their work is not a priority or is not part of the state strategy if it diminishes their work, due to the high level of insecurity present in both countries around the sector. Thus, sometimes amending the claim revealed less of a nuance, and more of an incongruence resulting from distorted self-perception.

awareness of other states on a deep level. Thus, when respondents argued that budgetary pressures were not a key factor whatsoever, I uniformly coded this as (-). However, I did not code statements alleging that the budget was a key factor until the respondent had been asked to assess the basis for that statement, because the literature has repeatedly shown that the budget is a common rhetorical means of justifying ideological positions by politicians. Therefore, in light of global economic trends running downward, a statement that the budget was irrelevant to the shifts was marked uniformly as (-). Statements to the contrary were coded (+) regardless of timing, but only weighed up to 30 or 70 once the candidate had been asked to evaluate the extent to which the budget can explain the strategic decisions in their respective country.

Control variables and alternative hypotheses covered under aH1-aH5 were also tested in the study. **aH1**, relating to public opinion, understood to be an expression of other mechanisms, was coded (+) where it was claimed to be a key driver in either state, and coded (-) in cases where it was rejected as such. **aH2**, **aH3**, relating to path dependency theories, was coded in instances where it was implied, and due to issues discussed prior, it was only ever inferred from related statements and not directly asked about to the respondents. Language that indicated institutional practice of maintaining status-quo operations and beliefs is coded (+), and statements demonstrating institutional flexibility in relation to methods, goals, and focus areas were coded (-).

It should be noted that many respondents on select issues, (notably, the budget) viewed the issue as multicausal to the extent that the factor in question was simultaneously relevant and irrelevant. In these cases, that factor was coded under both (+) and (-). Given the testing method of using ratios, these statements do not necessarily affect the results, and in fact, point to a lack of consensus, which in and of itself is an important finding should it occur.

Based on the theoretical framework and hypotheses, the expected results are listed below. It should be noted that H3 and H5 are structured differently, comparing a relative difference more than a difference in feature or practice.

H1:	sv(+)+de(-)	>	sv(-)+de(+)	aH1:	sv(+)+de(-)	≈	sv(-)+(de+)
H2:	sv(+)+de(-)	>	sv(-)+de(+)	aH2:	sv(+)+de(-)	≈	sv(-)+(de+)
H3:	sv(+)-(sv-)	>	de(+)-de(-)	aH3:	sv(+)+de(-)	≈	sv(-)+(de+)
H4:	sv(+)+de(-)	>	sv(-)+de(+)				
H5:	sv(+)-sv(-)	<	de(+)-de(-)				

Figure 6.2

The frequencies capture *all* frequencies from *all* participants - this, of course, may be suspected of biasing the data should, for any one variable, members from the other country are strongly opinionated. Therefore, to isolate the views of those within each country, the mean and median number of frequencies within *only* that country group are calculated. Therefore, should a German respondent make dozens of passing references to Swedish aid policy and soft power outside of the normal frequency of the Swedish respondents and in the opposite direction, the distortion should be removed from the data in this way. Furthermore, any outliers within that group should be easily identified, either through the average or through any discrepancy between the average and median scores for that variable (see Appendix.VI).

There are certain critical limitations to methodology used in this study. First, the number of interviews. I contacted nearly 90 different individuals across both Sweden and Germany, and due to a series of factors, such as no reply to initial follow-up contact requests, unresolvable scheduling conflicts, disinterest in participation, etc., received only 31 responses, of whom only 14¹⁴ were willing to participate, and only 12 of whom I was able to actually sit down with. Additional limitations include the inherent subjectivity-bias of respondents from such a sample size (something I did my best to minimize by calculating both total and average frequencies), and the difficulty in reaching other respondents that may have been able to provide critical information left out of this study. However, despite the low response rate received, I did manage to achieve a fairly even distribution of

¹⁴ One Swedish member of Parliament was willing, but unable to meet within a reasonable time frame, and so I made the decision not to move forward with the interview. In addition, their inclusion may have rendered too strong an imbalance in representation across existing participants without a German equivalent. Another Swedish bureaucrat agreed to an interview before, without providing an explanation, not responding to the scheduling proposal, nor to any follow-up attempts after the fact.

participants with political and bureaucratic experience between the two states, which hopefully has reduced the representation problem to some extent regarding different levels responsible for aid policy development.

Finally, there is the problem that within the interviews themselves, there is the risk that given the semi-structured nature of the discussions, it can be difficult to compare their answers. In some ways, the frequency charts get around this, with the assumption that should someone believe something is important, they will emphasize it more frequently than someone who does not. However, this is not a perfect solution, and in cases where the frequencies do not paint a full representation of the content of the conversations, I have pulled on statements from the interviews themselves to convey the main takeaways on the issue.

There is also a potential that the high number of hypotheses dilutes the depth into which I was able to review any of them individually. While I do acknowledge this, I believe that the explanation of the policy divergence between the two countries requires an integrated theoretical framework, which necessitates a wider capture of processes and mechanisms. Instances of correlation and relation between the variables are discussed in the results section (VIII), as well as the hypotheses section above (V).

VII. Cases

In this section, I will review the individual developments independent of the hypotheses in both Sweden and Germany. I have begun with Sweden, as the contrast is clearer in this order. The section will seek to explain the processes underway which informed the development, and contextualizes the later results, of the aforementioned hypotheses.

7.1 Sweden

At first glance, until 2022, there were no large-scale indicators of the dramatic coming changes to Sweden's foreign aid strategy. Sweden had long been a leader in humanitarian and development aid alike, a practice rooted in principles of solidarity, humanitarianism, and progressive faith in the ability of multilateral and market-based reforms to reduce poverty and increase global welfare (Lundberg, 2026; Omar & Djemal, 2025; Bigsten et al., 2016). Already by 1975, Sweden hit the GNI target of 0.7% spent on foreign aid, and until 2023, maintained its 1.0% GNI budget target, one of the highest in the world (MacKinnon, 2026). At this point, Swedish aid was intertwined with Sweden's longtime status as a neutral power.¹⁵ The state had undertaken in the 1960s years-long public-relations campaigns to build domestic support for the state's foreign aid policies, an approach that – with respect to the rates of public support up until the present day for foreign aid in Sweden¹⁶ – proved highly successful (AtKisson, 2026; Lundberg, 2026; MacKinnon, 2026; Landqvist, 2023).

Throughout the 1990s and early 2000s, Swedish foreign aid policy remained focused on a consistent set of issues: poverty-reduction, gender-equality, democracy-promotion, sustainability, and income inequality (Lundberg, 2026; Dahlén,

¹⁵ This position was given up in 2022 following the Ukrainian invasion, when Sweden began the NATO accession process, completed in 2024.

¹⁶ A March 2025 poll by Diakonia, a Swedish faith-based development organization, found that support for increasing foreign aid spending had doubled in a year, from 19% to 42%, possibly influenced by the dismantling of USAID around the same period in 2025 (Diakonia, 2025). A SIDA survey study in 2024 found that 75% of Swedes find it important that Sweden provides development aid to poorer countries, and only 24% advocated for a reduction in aid spending (SIDA, 2024).

2024; Bigsten et al., 2016).¹⁷ While it is true that the strategy temporarily fluctuated due to budget cuts during the 2008 financial crisis, with allocations temporarily shifting to cover in-donor refugee costs from 2015-2016, and that there was a temporary downsizing of the bilateral aid profile, the core principles and foci remained constant. The only exception to this consistency was the introduction of a feminist foreign aid policy in 2014 (Månsson, 2025; Omar & Djemal, 2025; Hagen, 2015, OECD, n.d.). Up until this point, Swedish humanitarian assistance was handled directly by the Swedish Ministry for Foreign Affairs (MFA), while development assistance was handled via the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (SIDA), a nominally independent agency integrated into the MFA in 1995 (Vähämäki & Alexius, 2024).

In 2022, two key events took place which moved Swedish aid strategy in an unprecedented direction. First, the outbreak of the Ukraine war following Russia's invasion. Second, the election of a rightwing coalition to lead Sweden, including the far-right Sverigedemokraterna (SD) Party. The Sverigedemokraterna maintained a role outside the coalition as a coordinating member, affording them sufficient leverage to force the coalition to adopt many of its demands (Simpson, 2026). My initial belief was that 2022 marked the turning point for Swedish foreign aid, but in fact, further research revealed that the pattern began somewhat earlier. SD first proposed cutting ODA between 30-50% in 2020, from a historical 1% of GNI, halving Sweden's annual contribution (Åkesson et al., 2020; CONCORD, 2021; Omvärlden, 2020¹⁸). The proposal made little headway at the time, however - but marked one of the earliest official calls for Sweden to change course. Still, this was not an isolated indicator. An ad-hoc Commission formed by the government in 2020 proposed a temporary reduction in the aid budget, due to belief that an increase in remittances

¹⁷ While Carlsson (2025, pg. 31) points to September 11th as a turning point for Swedish aid policy, little of significant consequence changed in practice until much later. She acknowledges as much in the same piece, naming the outbreak of the war in Ukraine as the most important turning point.

¹⁸ Article from time of initial access is no longer available due to a URL change on the website, but remains clearly cited elsewhere online (Diakonia, 2020). Additional support for the claim is supported via the original Swedish parliamentary motion and CONCORD's 2021 Aid Watch Report. Both are included because the 30% reduction was the parliamentary proposal, while the 50% target was articulated in rhetorical and campaign-related messaging by the Sverigedemokraterna at the same time period.

would make up the difference (Jämlikhetskommission, 2020). The Christian Democrats, a center-right party and part of the current coalition government – although in opposition at the time – proposed in September 2020 shifting aid money to build more humane prisons in other countries, to which Sweden could send foreigners convicted in Sweden (Adolfsson, 2026). This collection of proposals, mostly empty rhetoric that led nowhere at the time, were clear indicators that something was fundamentally shifting in the inertia of Sweden's foreign aid policy.

The 2022 Tidö agreement that emerged from the 2022 election formed the current governing coalition of center-right, right, and far-right Swedish parties. The agreement had three key shifts for Swedish foreign aid policy: abolition of the 1% GNI target, abandonment of a feminist foreign policy approach, and explicit linkage of migration to foreign policy, including development and humanitarian aid (Liberalerna et al., 2022). The Tidö agreement revealed a plan to overhaul Swedish aid at the most fundamental level, one that was far too intricate to represent simply a populist backlash (CONCORD, 2022). The Agreement's plan focused not on the complete elimination of aid, but a transformation of the institutions and policies subordinate to, if not in direct service of, Swedish national security and economic interests (Petersson, 2024; Wagner-Robinson, 2025).

SIDA was particularly affected by the new approach, at both a policy and institutional level. Due to its integration within the MFA, its nominal independence was a weak form of insulation from a government with less restraint than its predecessors in its steering of the agency (Månsson, 2025; Petersson, 2024). Prior to 2022, parliament had a significant role in the shaping of Swedish aid policy via SIDA, with minimal substantial politicization of that process (Petersson, 2024). Furthermore, SIDA held significant power in its ability to develop its own priorities and strategies within the space afforded by the government to do so. After 2022, however, both the role of cross-party work in Parliament and internal-SIDA leadership were significantly weakened. The government began to rely on "regleringsbrev", or appropriation letters, in place of parliamentary bills, and created "new arenas for knowledge production and policy formulation" outside of SIDA filled with "like-minded political

leaders” (Petersson 2024, 57). SIDA’s presence abroad was drastically reduced, both through closure of entire embassies, as well as the elimination of all bilateral development work in a partially overlapping set of countries, although, in states of either situation, humanitarian aid was left untouched (Sida 2025, December; Scott, 2025). The most drastic change to SIDA’s operations was the direct linkage with trade and migration that the coalition introduced. While the connection exists on several levels of Sida’s operations, the most controversial effort to date has been the government’s secret deal with Somalia, revealed after an investigation by Sverigesradio in late 2025, where Somalia agreed to take back Somali nationals deported from Sweden, in exchange for SEK 100 million diverted from the aid budget, primarily targeted towards “projects close to the country’s prime minister” and funneled through the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) (Roxvall & Persson, 2025; Scott, 2025).

Controversy aside, the government has been very clear about its intentions to shift Swedish foreign aid into a new “aid for trade” model, with a growing ambiguity as to how much is entailed under trade (MacKinnon, 2026). Indeed, in December of 2023 when Sweden introduced its new development assistance strategy marking the official end of decades of relative consistency, there were as many variations of the strategy’s alleged objectives as there were parties in the coalition. Former minister for trade and development cooperation, a new integration the coalition government introduced, argued the new strategy allowed Sweden to “leverage Swedish corporate strengths in sustainability and social responsibility” in order to “address societal challenges through investments and innovation”, while far-right SD MP Aron Emilsson framed the strategy as introducing a “dual focus on the promotion of Swedish interest and humanitarian assistance”, while also providing a “foreign policy tool” to facilitate and enforce “expulsions of illegal immigrants and combat human trafficking”; meanwhile, the Christian Democrats’ spokeswoman Gudrun Brunegård noted “increased support for CSOs” (Regeringskansliet, 2023). While it is clear that there is strong variation in how one may interpret the new aid approach, what is clear is that it

is not simply being cut, but getting transformed into a tool for several ends, even if they may or may not be entirely complementary (Dahlén, 2024).

Swedish foreign aid policy today functions on significantly reduced budgets from both before 2020 and 2022, while at the same time, is now structured and oriented with an entirely different set of priorities in mind, to which it is being instrumentalized. Indeed, the language of the current Minister for aid and trade, Benjamin Dousa, in late 2025 is telling, as he stated the new approaches being adopted by the government represent “the largest reprioritisation of aid in Swedish history”, something which he justified, however, not as a political decision, but a necessary budgetary and logistical one (Sveriges Radio, 2025). What is not evident from these statements and the above trajectory, however, is exactly why Sweden chose to embrace a strategic reorientation of its aid program, while Germany has not replicated this behaviour to a comparable degree.

7.2 Germany

German foreign aid has nearly just as long a history as Sweden, and shares its decades-long reputation as a leader in its field, particularly in development aid. An interesting distinction emerges around its inception, however – unlike Sweden, Germany did not need to convince its population to support aid, and even later when it launched similar public relations efforts, they were modeled off the Swedish model and not organically developed (Rehbaum, 2026). It was not until the 1970s that Germany’s institutional setup took its modern shape, in the form of split competencies between the Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ), and the Foreign Office (AA), responsible for humanitarian aid. At this point, a more independent role for aid in German policymaking was already apparent and by 1973 BMZ had 95% control over development aid and its own budget (Guppert, 2026). At the same time, as public backlash to aid appeared for the first time, it grew apparent that the BMZ was an actor removed from German society, viewing its mandate as responsible for shaping the global south, and at the same time, reshaping German society (Rehbaum, 2026). This self-perception has not entirely disappeared from the modern workings of the BMZ, which remains to the present day a

significantly more independent and self-referential institution in comparison to its Swedish counterpart.

There have been only slight deviations from this trajectory of independence, such as the 2006 integration of the Development aid minister into the Bundessicherheitsrat (Guppert, 2026) and the release of an integrated humanitarian aid strategies by the AA in 2012 (Auswärtiges Amt, 2012). In the meantime, the budget of BMZ into the 2000s and 2010s continued to grow until the end of the Merkel Era and the beginning of the Covid-19 pandemic (OECD, 2024). As one BMZ official noted in the interviews, it was one of the rare times that the Chancellor called the agency to coordinate a response, something rare enough to be seen not as an intervention, but instead recognition (De4). At the time, German aid, via both BMZ and the AA, did deserve recognition - they were within the top ten donors in the world, and had an enormous footprint around the world (OECD, n.d.). Yet, unlike Sweden, who channeled its aid influence readily into global influence¹⁹, the BMZ in the Merkel years “did not view itself as a policy-shaper in the humanitarian sector” and restrained from exercising “the soft power of aid”, to the point that some other states and civil society actors have questioned Germany’s apparent inability to provide leadership (Hövelmann & Südhoff, 2022, pgs. 15-16, 19). Thus, the German situation as the new Ampelkoalition came into power in 2021 was that of a powerful state with a powerful foreign aid apparatus, one which it had made little headway on aligning with its foreign policy strategy or national interests, if it had even tried at all (Lippert & Mair, 2026).²⁰ It is true, however, that attempts to reverse this trend have emerged, but concrete changes outside of rhetorical shifts are scant. The 2024 Humanitarian Aid Strategy, for example, does argue that humanitarian aid is a part of German foreign policy, but outside of significant promises to streamline BMZ-AA cooperation (pg. 21)

¹⁹ Such use of influence in the Swedish case was not necessarily always overtly political in nature, often more of a means of advocating for positions not directly of benefit to the Swedish economy or national interest, but rather the global welfare. While not always the case, it was a frequent pattern. (Lundberg, 2026; Omar & Djemal 2025; Zoenso-Ryd, 2025)

²⁰ This is not as simple as it may first appear— in part due to the role of aid during reunification (Guppert 2026), in part due to a long-standing position that a separate aid strategy WAS in the German interest (Rehbaum 2026), and in part due to a lack of an integrated foreign policy strategy for much of the past decade (Furness, 2018).

and further integrate humanitarian aid into the national security strategy (pg. 7), there is little tangible action suggested. This may or may not be related to the fact that the humanitarian aid strategy was slated to be cut by 50% that year.

This downward trend of German aid funding is not new. The BMZ's budget, separate from that of humanitarian aid, was nearly cut by 13% in 2022, before getting reduced by more than 12% in 2023 (Bundesministerium der Finanzen, n.d.). This was not without its own preceding signals, such as the decision in 2020 to withdraw from a third of German bilateral development aid cooperation partners as part of the BMZ 2030 strategy (Hein & Schäfers, 2020). One BMZ official in the interview process argued the cuts could "rightsize" an agency that had grown too big, although this risks masking the fact that a continually shrinking aid budget along with a new focus on efficiency, are themselves not sufficient to mark a reprioritization instead of a persistent downward trend.

The consistent budgetary trajectory present in Germany was immediately apparent, as was the fact that "conversations around the budget have dominated where aid is concerned" in the German context, far more than any discussion of reorientation or strategic integration (Hövelmann & Südhoff, 2022, 4; Schneider et al., 2022; Slavik, 2024; Kröner, 2025). Budgetary changes are normally attributed in these discussions to the war in Ukraine, slow economic growth, and even ideological pressure from far-right parties such as the *Alternativ für Deutschland* (AfD) in Germany. As my research progressed however, I came to identify another problem in the German context, one which differs tremendously from its Swedish counterpart: the institutional structure.

The German government's executive apparatus is structured in line with what is referred to as the "Ressortprinzip", outlining strict delimitations of power between the different ministers, avoiding any one growing too powerful, and limiting the ability to expand the executive control of the Chancellor. It also implies that each minister is accountable themselves for the work of their ministry, a fundamentally more decentralized approach than exists in Sweden (Fleischer et al., 2018). Furthermore, the position of agencies responsible for aid within this system is even more

decentralized; BMZ is responsible for setting the broad agenda and strategy in line with the general direction provided for by the government, while its simultaneously subordinate and co-equal peers the German Society for International Cooperation (GIZ) and the Reconstruction Loan Corporation (KfW) implement and develop their own projects relating to development cooperation and development financing, respectively (Kuhn, 2011). All the while, humanitarian aid is located in the AA in partnership with partner organisations and NGOs (Hövelmann & Südhoff, 2022). The ministry is structurally separate from BMZ, and there is no single authority that can force policy integration between them; instead, that must emerge at the inter-ministerial level²¹. The proliferation of political foundations doing similar work further complicates the picture, although at least this facet is replicated somewhat (controversially) in Sweden (Lindberg, 2026).

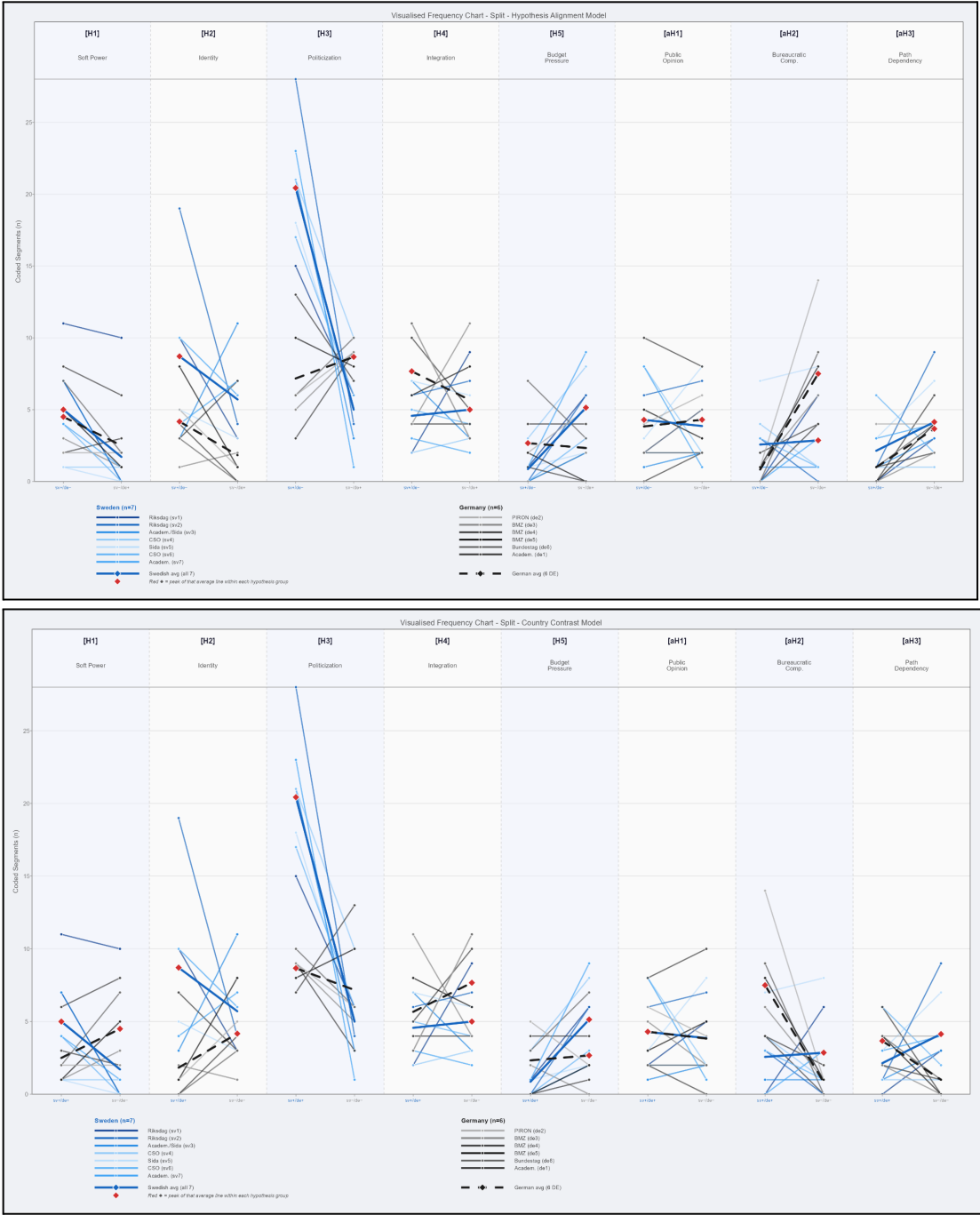
The structure has very direct consequences for how Germany's aid strategy is perceived by other actors within and outside of the ministry. First, the fragmented system along with the expanding nature of what constitutes aid and its interdisciplinary features triggers significant interministerial tension over competencies, separate from any external or internal shifts underway affecting foreign aid. Esser & Janus note that BMZ's internal structure and operational style renders it opaque to outsiders and "vulnerable to falling prey to cabinet-level structural reorganisation" (2025, 401). They also point out the problem that given BMZ's relatively significant strategic autonomy, and its role as the figurehead of Germany's aid apparatus, its role is somewhat precarious insofar as it remains a non-central actor in German foreign policy and national strategy-building. Further, the ministry has demonstrated a stark resistance to undertaking self-initiated reforms, has proven slow at adapting or anticipating political shifts, not to mention the severe institutional obstacles it would face if it did attempt to address these problems (Esser & Janus, 2025; Hövelmann & Südhoff, 2022; Janus & von Schiller, 2025). There has also been an emergent existentialist fear of loss of autonomy, likely attributable to the very same structure (Janus & von Schiller, 2025).

²¹ There has been some growth in this regard, but this newfound coordination in no way necessarily implies that a merger is on the horizon (Auswärtiges Amt 2024, noted in interview with De2 (PIRON)).

The downward trend in German foreign aid allocation has continued relentlessly (OECD, n.d.). The current Merz government has made similar appeals as its predecessor; however, it has made little progress on any serious integration of the BMZ into its foreign policy strategy, nor has put any action to promises it has taken to steps that Sweden has taken to reorient its program to a focus on trade and state-interest, despite significant rhetorical shifts. The situation is certainly different from actions by the United States in 2025, with the dissolution of USAID – Germany has, as of yet, made no attempts to attack its aid institutions wholesale as part of its official policy, and so far remains committed to its role as a leading global donor. And yet, while its proposed budget for 2026 further eliminates large chunks of its past aid budget in line with the global trend, and its rhetoric is turning sharply towards a more securitized and self-interested model (BMZ), the reality of the changes underway is one of paralysis and slow suffocation. What has emerged, thus, is an aid policy subject to not deliberate reform and reorientation, but the absence of both and no viable strategic alternative on the table - austerity without a replacement for what has been cut.

VIII. Assessment and Findings

The following section provides the analysis of the elite interview process. The analysis revealed a mixed pattern of emphasis, wherein certain factors seem to hold greater explanatory power than others, notably H3 and aH2, while others proved less significant than expected, and even more complex than anticipated, such as H4. I will now review these in turn.



Top: Figure 8.1 (Hypothesis Alignment); Bottom: Figure 8.2 (Contrast Alignment)

Above are two coding-segment frequency charts providing an overview of the trends of the study, Figure 8.1 aligned based on the hypotheses' prediction, (sv+/de-, sv-/de+), and Figure 8.2 a direct country comparison (sv+/de+, sv-/de-). The results are the same, but one may be more useful or clear depending on the hypothesis, so both are shown for clarity. An important note: the graphs display only coded segments by speakers from that country. Coded segments by participants from one country opining on the other country are not displayed, but are included in the raw frequency counts in each proceeding section. Such instances were rare and almost always indirect, and were left out of the data visualization to avoid overly complicated graphs. These coded segments are included in raw frequencies presented below, but not in the average calculations, which are calculated as a robustness check on the frequency data. The reason is that a side comment, not grounded in deep familiarity, is capable of massively distorting the average frequencies of participants actually from the country at focus.

Before diving into the hypotheses, however, I want to highlight one interesting finding regarding the base assumptions. Interviewees demonstrated a cross-group lack of consensus on the exact inflection point for foreign aid policy shifts between the two states. In fact, two BMZ officials suggested a downward momentum of no return may not have happened yet at all. This is likely due in part to the fact that changes in foreign aid are not purely budgetary, but also ideological and functional: securitization of aid and eroding solidarity norms run as a parallel current throughout the period (Kim, 2025; Månsson, 2025). This being said however, the impact of the Ukraine war is without a doubt the fastest and most rhetorically drawn upon of the above explanations, and the numerous alternative explanations do not change the enormous impact the war's outbreak had, regardless if it was an acceleration or incentive for change. At the same time, the perception of Ukraine as either an inflection or acceleration point was not equal, as Swedish participants noted it as an inflection point more often than their German counterparts.

For my **first hypothesis**, I had expected to find evidence that foreign aid is a stronger source of soft-power for Sweden, therefore incentivizing reorientation of

that influential asset to a greater extent than in Germany. On the whole, this has been largely confirmed as a relevant factor. Given the prediction that:

$$H1: sv(+)+de(-) > sv(-)+de(+)$$

It can be shown that:

$$H1: 38+27 > 12+15 \rightarrow 65 > 27 \text{ (raw frequency)}$$

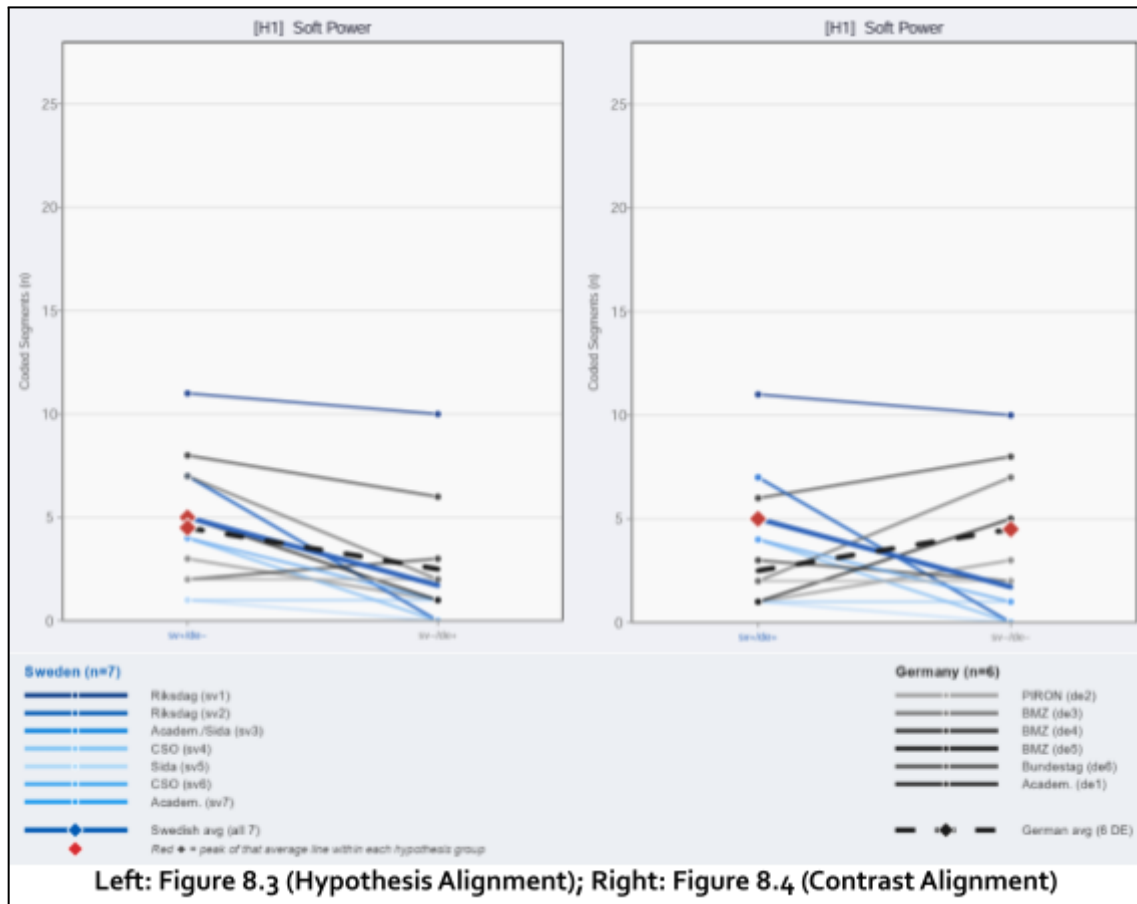
$$H1: 5+4.5 > 1.71+2.5 \rightarrow 9.50 > 4.21 \text{ (mean frequency)}$$

Compared to the Germans, the Swedish interviewees attribute the current policy to foreign aid's significance to Swedish soft-power more than double as often. This does not necessarily indicate that foreign aid is irrelevant for German soft-power; rather, the implication is that the relative soft-power benefit which Sweden derives from its foreign aid program from Germany is far greater. While no participant from either state argued that foreign aid was not a significant source of soft power, Swedish recipients correlated Sweden's foreign aid much more directly with their state's ability to project power and shape outcomes on the global stage in a way that German respondents did not. Both Swedish MPs (Sv1+2, Socialdemokraterna) interviewed made the argument that one objective of Swedish foreign aid is to reduce conflict globally, with the idea that a more conflictual world is a geopolitical threat to Sweden. Others extended this argument to its fuller realist logic, such as Sv3 (Researcher at SIDA) who noted that Sweden is losing some of its "punching-above-our-weight" ability because of our decreased international engagement", giving as an example the leverage Sweden successfully was able to apply in its bid for a seat on the UN Security Council in 2017.

The Germans speaking about soft power struck a different tone. A senior official at BMZ (De4) described Germany's historic foreign aid strength as functioning not as a means of punching above its weight, but as a replacement for hard power which it cannot yet produce. Another BMZ official (De5) entirely rejected the idea of foreign aid being an active instrument of soft power, instead casting it as a way to make good use of economic growth and diversify Germany's export of "capacity".

An interesting observation from the interview process regarding H1 is that, despite what the data says, the Swedish participants tended to resist framing foreign

aid as a soft-power tool at the outset, although they quickly conceded it with further probing. The Germans, meanwhile, more willingly noted the soft-power role earlier in the conversation, but thereafter frequently minimized or avoided further engagement with political and geopolitical dynamics at play in the German context.



For my second hypothesis, I tested the theory that Swedes have a strong connection between their role as an aid “powerhouse” and their own self-perception. It was theorized that to the extent that being a “good” actor abroad is part of the Swedish identity, it may incentivize strategic reorientation over austerity. An important note is that this theory does not posit that a strong identity alone could prevent a state from eliminating its aid program, such would be an overreliance on constructivist theory. Furthermore, it is not expected that Germans have no weight attached to their self-perception as global actors regarding aid, but simply that the effect is significantly weaker. Given that the prediction is:

$$H2: \quad sv(+)+de(-) \quad > \quad sv(-)+de(+)$$

It can be shown that:

$$H2: 63+24 > 41+11 \rightarrow 87 > 52 \text{ (raw frequency)}$$

$$H2: 8.71+4.17 > 5.71+1.83 \rightarrow 12.88 > 7.54 \text{ (mean frequency)}$$

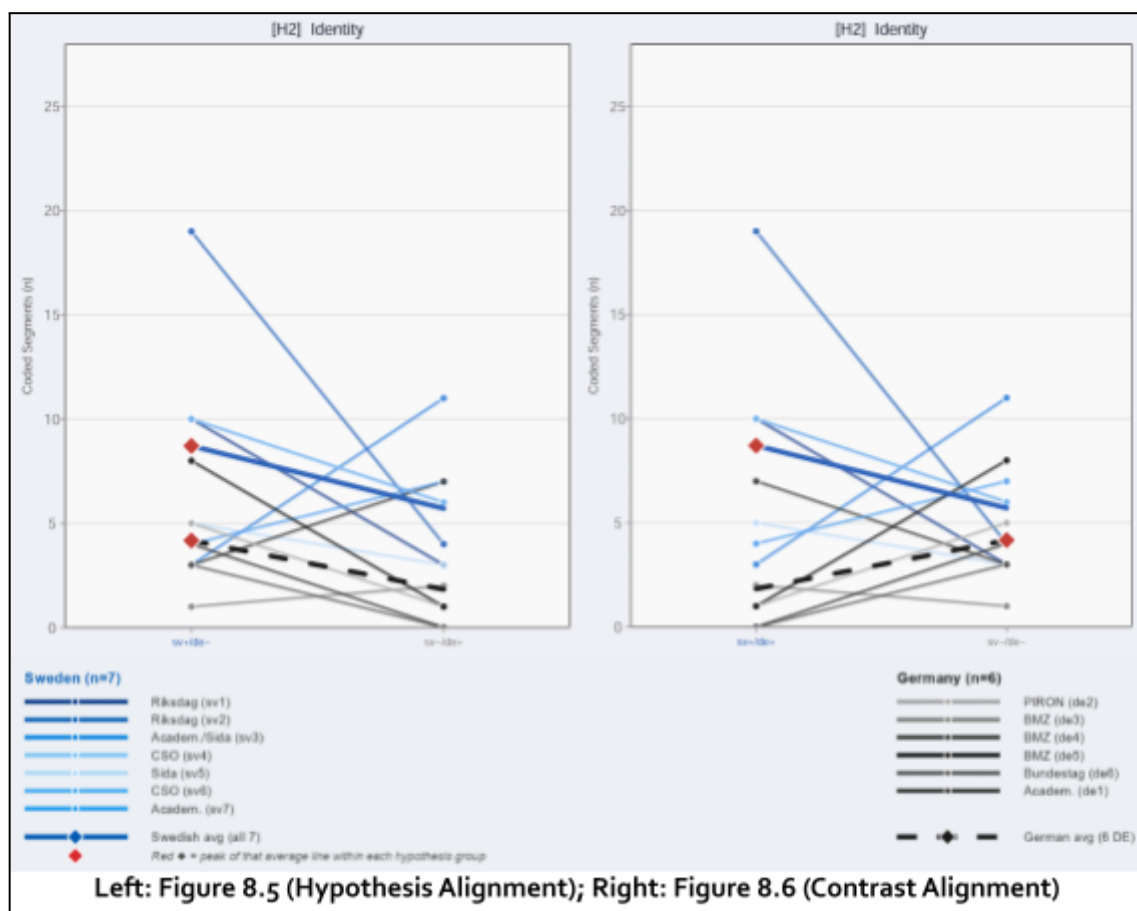
There is a higher number of frequencies among Swedish participants referencing their identity as a “good” moral state actor on the global stage when discussing shifts in Sweden’s aid policy, compared to the German case, reflected in both the total and mean ratios. In the interviews, German participants put significantly more emphasis on their global obligations, where aid is something that is right to do, but not something they do because it is who they are. In other words, the Germans demonstrated a more non-self-referential sense of responsibility, versus a more collective one in Sweden. When reflecting on identity as a factor, most Swedish participants were familiar with the reputation of their state as a leader in foreign aid and were able to provide a more concrete answer. Most German participants, however, did not, or could not, do so. Some turned the conversation to domestic bureaucratic politics (De1, De4), some drew on an international identity as source of obligation (De2, De5), while others quickly dropped any discussion about identity and pointed to economic interests as playing a far greater role (De3, De5). An interesting finding was the far-right German MP (De6), who made no attempt to portray a German identity as intertwined with its foreign aid work, but also argued for reforming, not eliminating, German development aid and increasing humanitarian aid.²²

Despite the rhetorical distinction, it is also important to bear in mind that the distinction is not black and white, and German interviewees did not reject outright *any* influence of their own self-perception on their decisions. Likewise, the Swedish group on the whole largely recognized that a historical self-perception was once an important characteristic of Swedish society, there was far less consensus on the extent to which it remained so today, and even less so on if it played any role in recent policy developments. Numerous participants reiterated the limits of this constructivist framing on the Swedish case in comparison to other states, with the common

²² In doing so, the participant was speaking on behalf of the party position, and not ap personal opinion, although they clarified that the two were the same .

observation that while social identity may have inertia, it can, and frequently does, evolve and change.

At the same time, that should not minimize the depth in which Sweden's role as a leader in development and humanitarian aid is valued and engrained into the Swedish self-perception. Interviewee Sv1 (Swedish Riksdag, MP, Socialdemokraterna) noted widespread "disappointment at [the] attempt to remove the Swedish identity [as] the moral voice of the world" in reaction to the changes made by the current coalition government. Furthermore, the reputation of Sweden as a positive moral force is one that Swedes not only have internalized, but which many also feel an urge to protect in defense of a collective identity, as noted by interviewee Sv5 (former administrator, SIDA). The importance of this extends even to the current coalition government, who Sv7 (Development Studies Researcher, Malmö University) argues takes care to avoid too overtly hostile rhetoric against aid so as not to open themselves up to a broader backlash.



For my third hypothesis, I expected to find that the topic of humanitarian aid was more heavily politicized in Sweden than in Germany, looking only at non-institutional factors. It is well established that in both countries aid is politicized, however, I expected to find that in Sweden the politicisation was higher and a more central feature of political debate, rhetoric, and ideological competition - the theory being that a politically irrelevant topic is likely to receive less attention and prioritization from a government, possibly incentivizing a perspective shift in which actors seek to utilize aid for their own benefit, rather than eliminating something that carries political value. In Germany, it was therefore expected the opposite, that due to a relatively lesser degree of politicisation, there was less political value to gain or lose in putting in the effort to reorient aid closer to German foreign policy and self-interest. Given that the prediction is:

$$H_3: \quad sv(+)-(sv-) \quad > \quad de(+)-de(-)$$

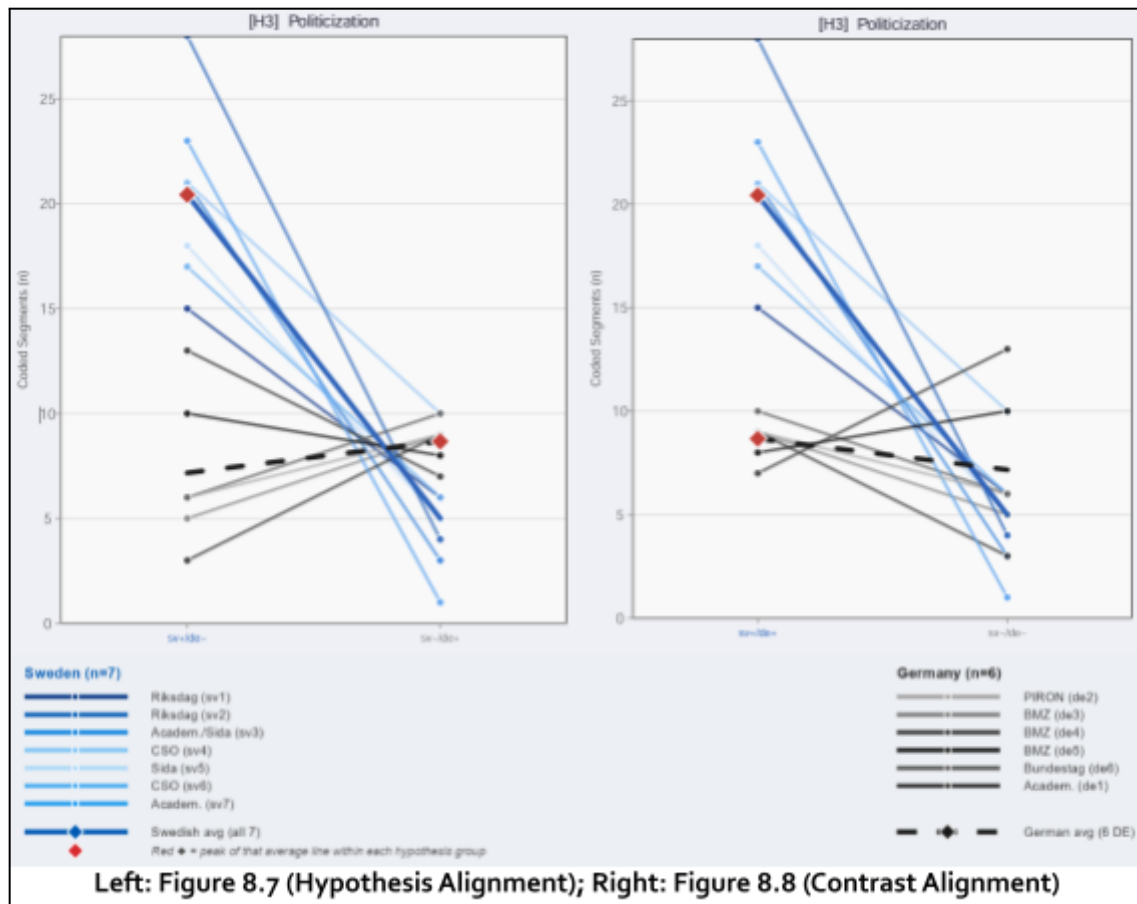
It can be shown that:

$$H_3: \quad 147-35 > 58-43 \quad \rightarrow \quad \mathbf{112 > 15} \text{ (raw frequency)}$$

$$H_3: \quad 20.43-5 > 8.67-7.17 \quad \rightarrow \quad \mathbf{15.43 > 1.50} \text{ (mean frequency)}$$

This the strongest difference in any of the tested hypotheses. When averaged out to address outliers, the result remains significant. While the literature did suggest a larger degree of politicization in Sweden, the extent to which was measured far surpassed that expectation, and indeed, raises questions about what would happen had the data-sample been different. I interviewed two members of the Swedish Parliament, both in the opposition, but also both center-left. The single member of the Bundestag to sit down and speak with me was a far-right politician, but also in the opposition. While both Swedish members heavily emphasized the role of party politics and competing political ideologies, the German politician portrayed the matter as one of technicality and pragmatism. It is very possible that had I spoken with a member of the Swedish Democrats (SD) and the German left-wing either in or outside the current coalition, that I may have uncovered less skewed results. At the same time, however, the trend was not limited to politicians, and while the gap may have narrowed, there is firm evidence from the interview results that foreign aid

remains a relatively more technical and pragmatic discussion in Germany than it does in Sweden, where efficiency and best-practices take up far more of the debate than normative questions on the justifiability of the current model and the appropriateness of linking aid directly to foreign economic and security objectives.²³



For my fourth hypothesis, I tested the theory that a more centralized government structure in Sweden where the foreign aid is more institutionally and strategically integrated than in Germany protects Swedish foreign aid by making it easier to reorient in line with government policy. In theory, the decentralized German system was believed to make it more difficult for the government to steer, disincentivizing the effort to reorient it. In other words, a top-down institutional constraint. Given that the prediction is:

$$H_4: \quad sv(+)+de(-) \quad > \quad sv(-)+de(+)$$

²³ It should be noted, however, that the German context *is* politicized, just relatively less than its Swedish counterpart - hence the hypothesis testing calculation (see: Schneider et al., 2025).

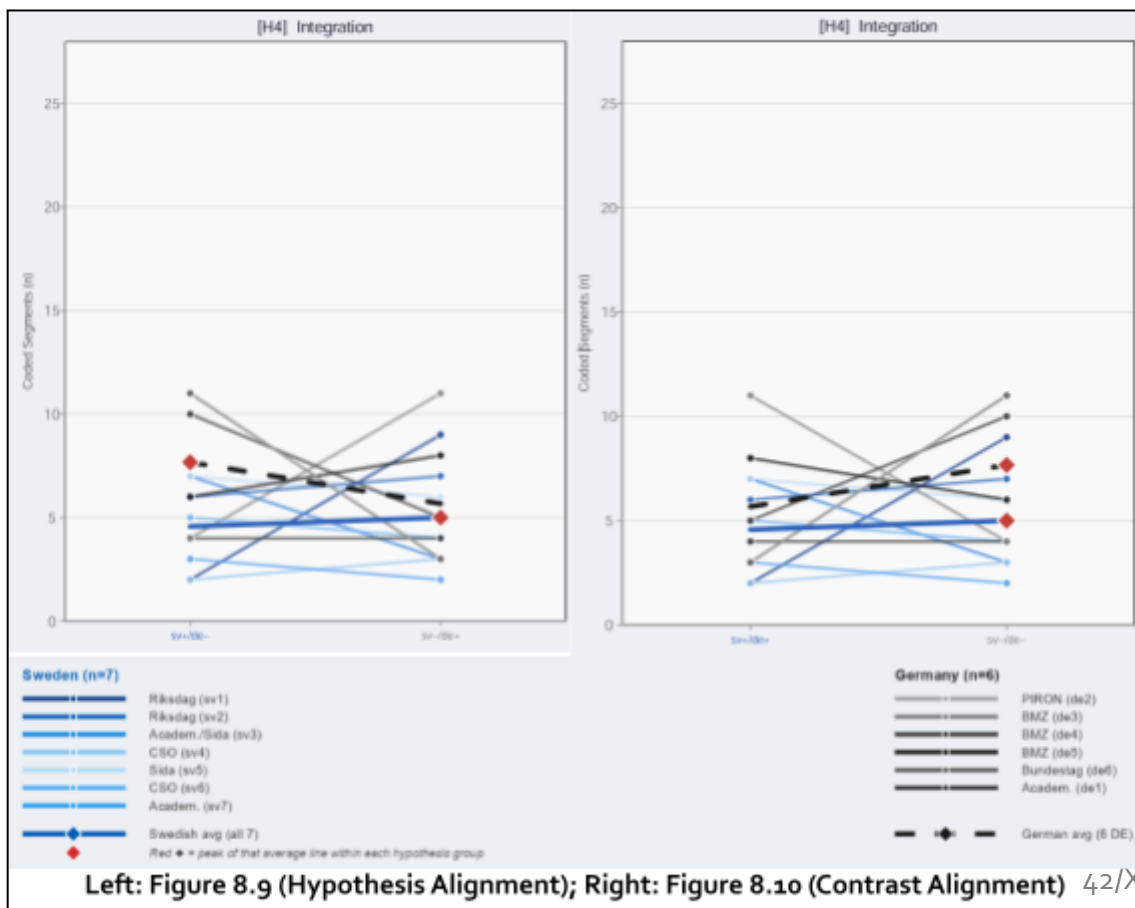
It can be shown that:

$$H_4: 37+46 > 35+34 \rightarrow 83 > 69 \text{ (raw frequency)}$$

$$H_4: 4.57+7.67 > 5+5.67 \rightarrow 12.24 > 10.67 \text{ (mean frequency)}$$

While it is true that there is more evidence for the hypothesis than otherwise, the calculation alone masks severe asymmetries between individual participants in either group, hinted at by the 69 coded segments that would favor rejecting the hypothesis and visualized in the Figures 8.9-10. And in fact, I found substantial evidence that not only is the support for this hypothesis somewhat weak, but that it very well may be working in the other direction, wherein Swedish foreign aid is more vulnerable within the centralized Swedish system than German aid is, which is in comparison relatively shielded from direct executive control.

While this finding is confusing on the surface, it suggests a more complex institutional comparison is needed to understand this dynamic, an area for future research. But as it is, it is also an interesting finding that the answer to this question may be “yes”: centralization may both safeguard and render vulnerable the same policy and program in different ways, similar to the pros and cons found in any institutional set-up – but again, further research is needed to clarify what these are in more detail than is possible here.



For my fifth hypothesis, I tested the assumption that Germany is undergoing more severe budget pressures, despite the utilization of budgetary rhetoric by both states in their aid policy shifts. It was assumed that both states have budget pressures, but are unevenly affected by them, leading to unequal effects in policy approaches to aid. Given that the prediction is:

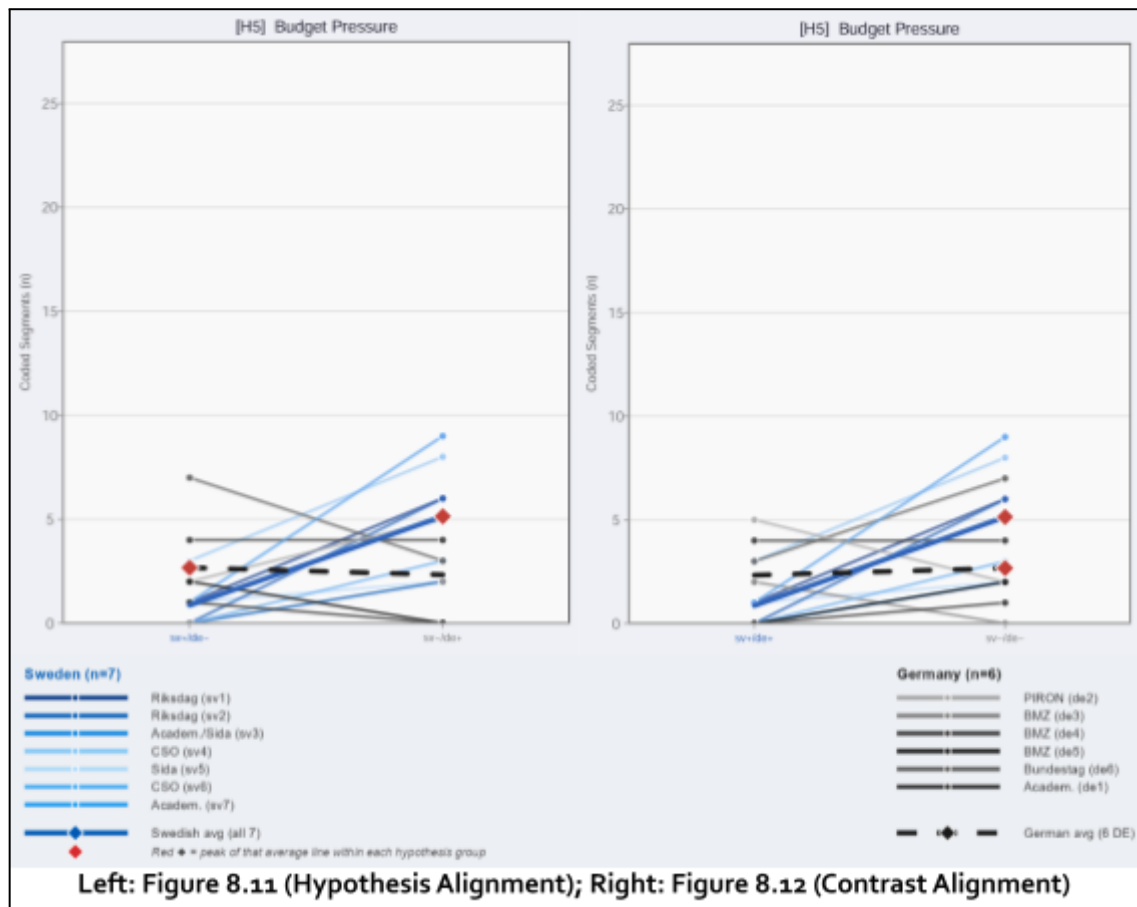
$$H5: \quad sv(+)-sv(-) \quad < \quad de(+)-de(-)$$

It can be shown that:

$$H5: \quad 6-37 > 15-16 \quad \rightarrow \quad -31 < -1 \text{ (raw frequency)}$$

$$H5: \quad 0.86-5.14 > 2.33-2.67 \rightarrow \quad -4.28 < -.34 \text{ (mean frequency)}$$

This result demonstrates that in general, most participants viewed the budget to not be a relevant factor at all, however, the consensus was slightly higher in Sweden that budget pressures did not play a key role in Sweden's shift towards reorientation. German participants, on the other hand, demonstrated slightly more uncertainty about the degree to which the current German aid strategy is attributable



to budgetary pressures. This specific finding was one of the most consistent across all participants.

Swedish interviewees made particularly strong indications as to their view of the budget as a decisive factor, stating that justifying aid policy changes due to budgetary pressures is not “an argument at all” (Sv3, Academ./Sida), “not a legitimate claim” (Sv7/De1, Professor at Malmö University), and that to the extent that it may be relevant, it is only a “secondary argument” (Sv2, Swedish Riksdag, MP, Socialdemokraterna).

German participants tended to not dismiss budgetary arguments, but instead replace them or qualify them. Interviewee De2 (Senior consultant at a German global development consultancy) argued it was really “a moral crisis”, while a senior official at BMZ (De5) posited that poor allocation, not budgetary pressures, was the problem. A German Afd-parliamentarian (De6) toed the line between, arguing that budgetary pressures are real and do affect decision-making on aid, but are only one aspect.

Now turning to my alternative hypotheses, I had a mixture of expected and unexpected results.

For my first alternative hypothesis, I tested my theory that public opinion plays very little role in the development of foreign aid strategies in Germany and Sweden, and in the case that it does, is not responsible for distinguishing their approach. Given that the prediction is:

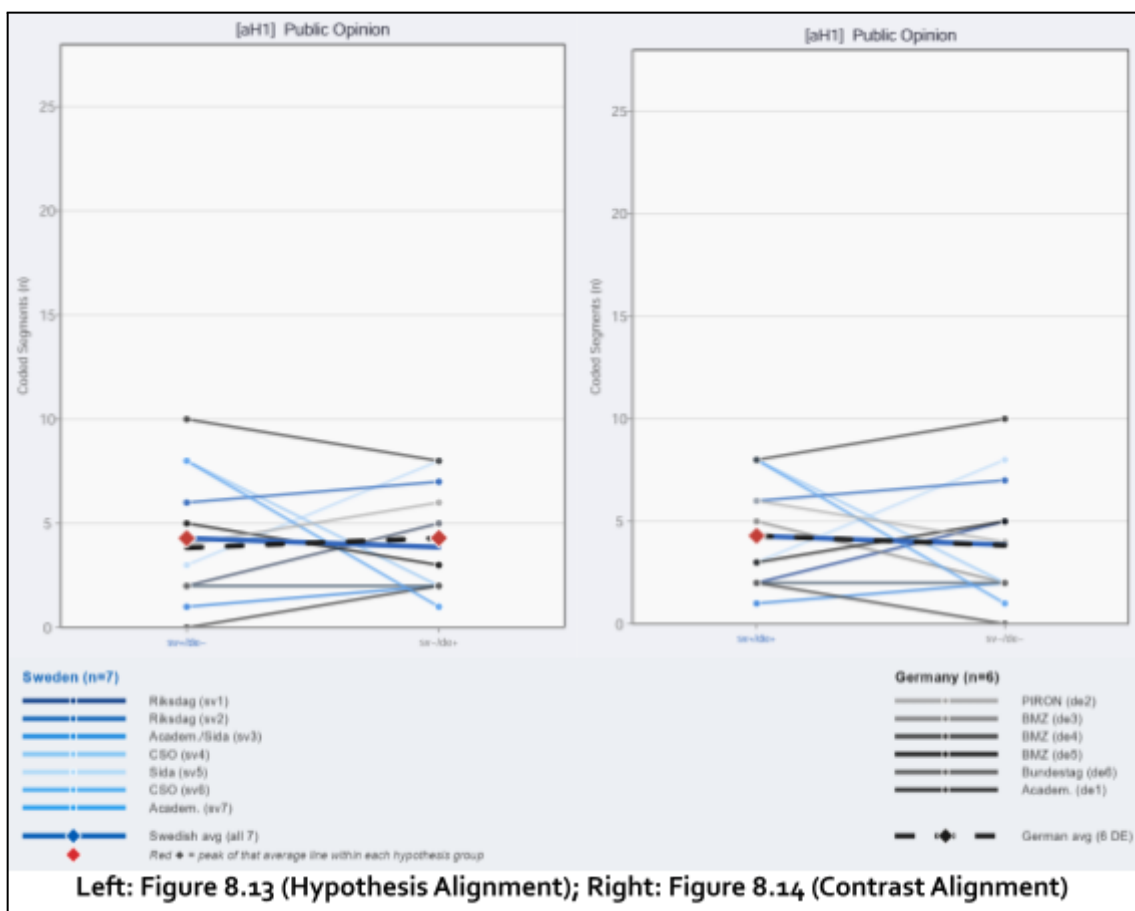
$$aH1: sv(+)+de(-) \approx sv(-)+(de+)$$

it can be shown that:

$$aH1: 30+23 \approx 27+26 \rightarrow 53 \approx 53 \text{ (raw frequency)}$$

$$aH1: 4.29+3.83 \approx 3.86+4.3 \rightarrow 8.12 \approx 8.16 \text{ (mean frequency)}$$

The frequencies from the interviews are exactly identical in the raw count, and nearly identical when averaged out. This strongly supports the idea that there is no stronger role of public opinion in either state. Across all coded segments, there is a clear cross-state consensus on the minimal role of public opinion in the foreign aid strategies of Germany and Sweden, not only from 2020 onwards, but for the past several decades.



It is notable that neither of the two Swedish, nor the German members of parliament, make any serious attempts to argue that the shifts in aid policy stem primarily from public demand. In fact, one Swedish participant (Sv6, advisor at a major Swedish aid NGO) even went so far as to state rather bluntly (although in no way a contradiction of the general consensus), that the public doesn't "know s*** about aid". It is important to clarify here, though, and as is evidenced by the near equal frequencies above, topical ignorance may reduce the influence of mass opinion, but does not necessarily imply its complete irrelevance.

For my second alternative hypothesis, I found very unexpected results, although in hindsight the effect may have been predictable. I had initially focused primarily on top-down institutional constraints, and dismissed bottom-up institutional constraints as not powerful enough to shape aid strategy outcomes sufficiently enough to impact either Sweden or Germany's aid strategy. However, I massively underestimated the ability of bottom-up institutional behaviours to affect strategic development in the German context. Thus, given the prediction was:

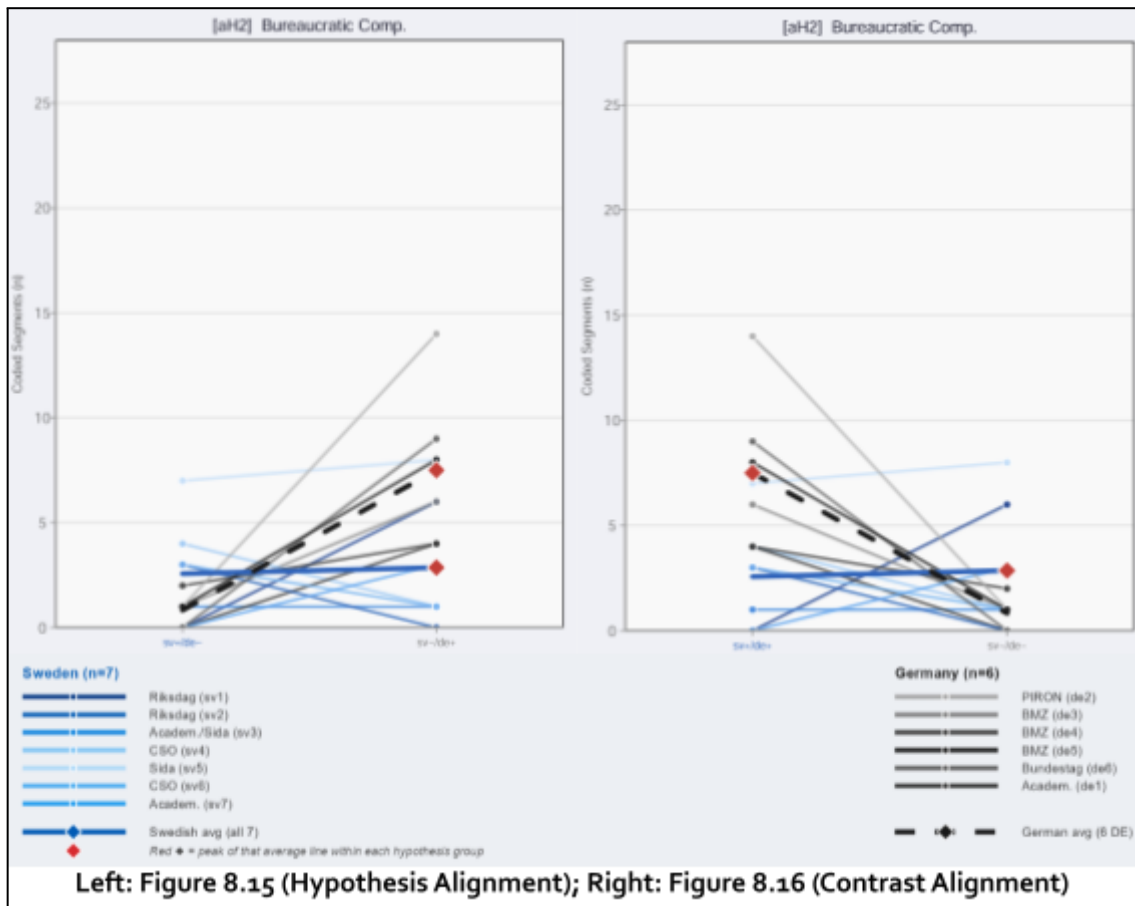
$$aH2: sv(+)+de(-) \approx sv(-)+(de+)$$

it can be shown that:

$$aH2: 19+5 \approx 22+45 \rightarrow 24 < 67 \text{ (raw frequency)}$$

$$aH2: 2.57+0.83 > 2.86+7.5 \rightarrow 3.4 > 10.36 \text{ (mean frequency)}$$

This result demonstrated a near tripling of the effect of bureaucratic competition and emphasis on institutional self-preservation on the direction of German aid strategy, in a way not comparably relevant in Sweden. The major takeaway from this finding is that in Germany, institutional mechanisms are not only more constraining on the government's ability to reorient its aid program similar to Sweden, but it is enacted via both top-down and bottom-up effects which likely exacerbates the paralysis in German aid strategy development.



This finding is linked closely to what I found in my third alternative hypothesis, which simply further explains not only the institutional choice, but also the institutional incapacity to ever replicate the Swedish reorientation under current institutional circumstances. In examining the degree to which the institutional

behaviour of path dependency can explain the difference in German and Swedish strategic behaviors, I had expected similar results, such that:

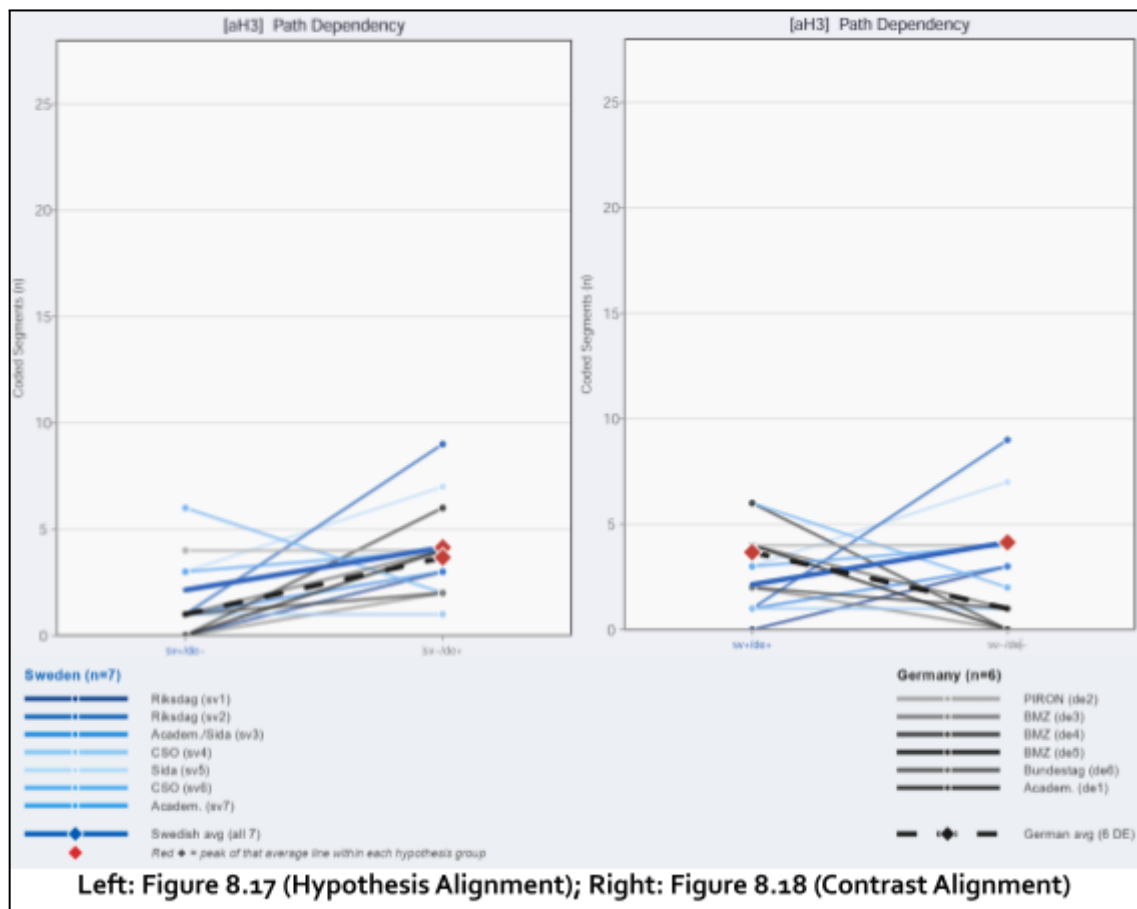
$$aH3: sv(+)+de(-) \approx sv(-)+(de+)$$

but instead found that:

$$aH3: 15+7 \approx 31+22 \rightarrow 22 < 53 \text{ (raw frequency)}$$

$$aH3: 2.14+1 > 4.14+3.67 \rightarrow 3.14 > 7.81 \text{ (mean frequency)}$$

This was a clear indication that German policy-makers are far more reliant on continuing the status quo in their strategic approach, relative to their Swedish counterparts. This finding suggests not an unalterable behavioural pattern, but rather, a compounding behaviour made likely resulting from earlier discussed factors. This does not produce a guaranteed outcome, as institutional theory does not dismiss institutional agency (see aH2). It does, however, complicate any hope for a simple, or quick, change in the current German approach, save for some unexpected external shock capable of spurring one.



Altogether, my findings stress the importance of politicization and institutional dynamics most critically as determinants for the divergence in German and Swedish aid strategies, suggesting lesser but still relevant impacts of historical soft-power utilization and identity linkages. Budgetary and public opinion factors have been dismissed as key drivers of Germany and Sweden's aid strategy developments as well as the shared trend of aid reduction between them.

IX. Conclusion

There should be no illusions about the changing nature of development and humanitarian aid in Sweden and Germany – movements towards greater securitization and increasing emphasis on economic self-interest are underway in both states. The focus of this study was not whether or not Germany and Sweden are participants in this trend, but rather, the way in which they participate. Sweden's strategic adoption of an "aid-for-trade" model and its institutional restructuring are significant steps that simply are not matched by Germany. German foreign aid strategy remains in practice largely similar to past decades, and few substantial changes have been made to either its thematic foci or institutional system. The difference is less obvious on (and under) the surface, compared to say defense or climate policy, but is nonetheless highly consequential for other donor states, aid-recipient states, civil society and NGO organizations involved in aid delivery to understand and anticipate, for three key reasons. First, the choice of a bilateral partner may be affected if there is evidence that one state's willingness and ability to maintain funding is more stable. Second, understanding the indicators that correlate with shifts in a donor state's aid allocation quantities or priorities may make more predictable the direction of the donor-recipient relationship for both parties. Third, for those in Sweden and Germany who seek to affect the direction of their respective state's aid strategy, being capable of identifying the pressure points which lead to policy change may greatly simplify that process. Indeed, the results of this study suggest that those pressure points can show strong variation between different states.

The Swedish case demonstrated a significantly higher elite perception of non-structural politicization than Germany, with much less institutional competition present. The lack of bureaucratic competition as a relevant factor is not enormously surprising, given the full control over foreign aid by the Swedish Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA). What is surprising is the historically unprecedented levels of politicization, for the simple fact that there was no such institutional-politicization

correlation present in public rhetoric until 2020, and even then, no large-scale breakdown in public consensus in support of the historical 1% of GNI target until 2022, yet the MFA has held responsibility for both development and humanitarian aid since 1995. While the agency responsible for development aid, SIDA, is nominally independent, it has been shown under the recent government that this was not a strong protection against political steering, raising questions about what took so long for this behaviour to emerge. There was not full consensus on what exactly drove this shift, but its effects on democratic resilience in Sweden are significant enough to warrant further research.

Sweden is unique in its perception of aid as a tool for soft power, because it is able to leverage it as a result of its aid work. At the same time, the constructivist argument that Swedish self-perception as a humanitarian superpower may incentivize reorientation was not strongly supported. Swedish respondents did largely recognize that such a self-perception did exist to some extent in Swedish society, but that its effect, if not today evolved into something else altogether, was not a significant driver of policy.

Germany demonstrated in turn significantly lower rates of perceived non-structural politicization among elites, instead distinguishing itself most strongly from its Swedish counterpart on the institutional front. Results were very mixed on the impact of institutional and strategic integration directly, where both Swedish and German participants viewed their respective foreign aid programs as more vulnerable due to their integration (Sweden) or lack thereof (Germany)²⁴. More research is required to understand precisely how integration affects prioritisation. What *is* clear is that the German institutional setup constrains its ability to enact reform, even in the case it saw fit to do so. This paralysis renders strategic reorientation prohibitively costly in terms of effort, cross-party support required due to inter-ministerial competition dynamics, and lack of policy relevancy given the significantly lower rates of politicisation. In the words of De1/Sv7 (Development Studies Researcher, University of Malmö)", aid is "just not important enough to get rid of." In other words, the current

²⁴ The lack of consensus, however, is what makes this result interesting - and hints at a more complex and potentially stratified causal system than was tested in this study.

German approach is less a coherent and intentional downsizing, it is the result of a deprioritization and policy incoherency, compounded by a lack of any alternative strategic solutions.

This study also found that several factors could not fully explain the divergence, such as differing budgetary pressures (although it was not entirely irrelevant) and the role of public opinion (which saw near perfect consensus across both groups) in driving Germany and Sweden's respective policy directions since 2020.

In future research, aid vulnerability in different institutional arrangements and the effects of long-term policy paralysis are strong candidates for further study. A deeper institutionalist examination of the German context may be warranted as well, to make more precise mappings of the inter-ministerial, sub-ministerial, and supra-ministerial dynamics interacting in the development of German foreign aid policy from 2020 to the present day. However, for comparative purposes and in light of a rapidly evolving situation, the trends illustrated in this research sufficiently highlight the distinguished pressure points within each system, driving the divergence between both states.

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XI. Appendix

A.I.I

Background Information: Coded Segments - Swedish Participants

	Riksdag(sv1)	Riksdag(sv2)	Academ./SIDA (sv3)	CSO (sv4)	SIDA (sv5)	CSO (sv6)	Academ. (sv7/de1)	SUM
Behaviours	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Behaviours > Seeks to Reform over Cut	2	3	6	6	9	5	2	37
Behaviours > Seeks to Cut over Reform	0	0	0	2	0	0	5	16
Behaviours > Long history of seperation of aid from FP changing	0	3	3	0	2	0	1	27
Behaviours > Increasing Institutional Integration	1	1	6	0	5	4	3	23
Behaviours > Limited Aid Integration to FP framework	0	4	0	0	0	0	2	35
Behaviours > Preservation of Hum. Aid	1	2	4	1	4	0	2	16
Behaviours > NOT a gradual shift	0	1	0	0	1	0	0	2
Behaviours > Change in CSociety relations	4	0	0	1	1	0	4	18
Behaviours > Increase in Aid as a Cost Rhetoric	1	2	0	2	0	1	0	8
Behaviours > Less Pol. Oversight and Consensus	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	1
Behaviours > Global --> Regional Focus	1	1	1	0	0	2	2	10
Behaviours > Slower pull back of aid	0	1	0	1	0	1	1	4
Behaviours > Aid Phase-Outs	0	1	0	0	0	1	2	4
Behaviours > Shift to realist logic	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Behaviours > Shift to realist logic > Economic<-->Aid Nexus Growing	3	8	1	3	4	4	3	47
Behaviours > Shift to realist logic > Humanitarian-->Security	1	6	5	2	1	3	4	26
Behaviours > Redefining of what aid is	1	3	3	2	4	2	1	17
Behaviours > BTS-->in public	0	0	2	0	0	1	0	4
Behaviours > Changing Rhetoric (Sv + De)	3	6	5	3	2	3	3	39
Behaviours > Aid-Migration Linkage	1	6	4	5	0	4	9	31
Constructive --> Coercive Use	0	1	0	0	1	3	0	6
Dev vs. Hum	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Dev vs. Hum > De	0	0	1	1	0	1	0	14
Dev vs. Hum > Sv	1	3	2	2	4	1	1	16
Dev vs. Hum > Broad	0	1	0	0	1	0	4	6
Broad aid trends	1	3	5	3	1	1	10	42
Junction Points	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Junction Points > 2022 Election Sv	0	2	1	0	1	0	0	4
Junction Points > Ukraine War	1	0	2	4	2	3	4	16
Junction Points > Covid	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	4
SUM	112	167	117	124	130	112	178	1486

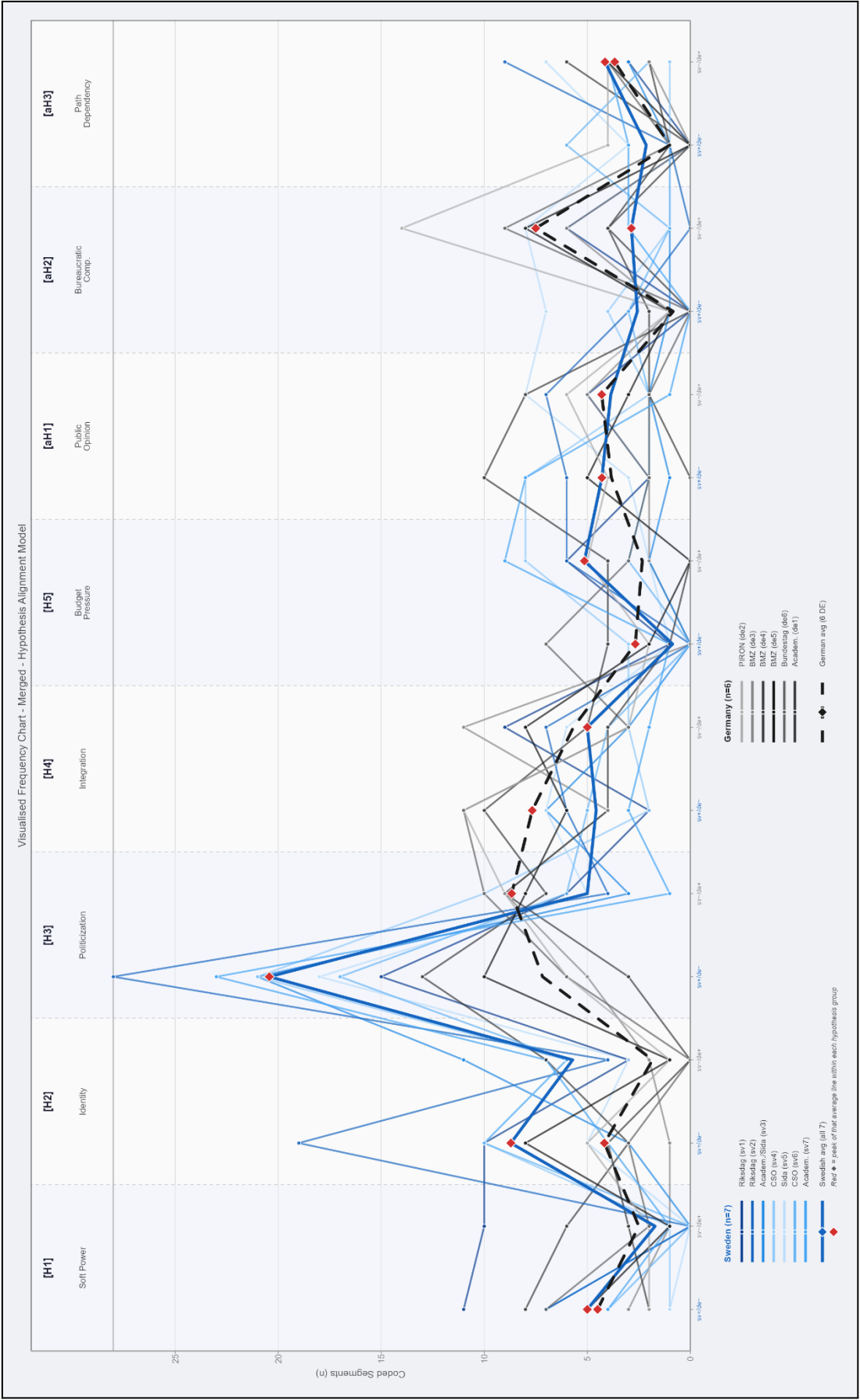
A.I.II

Background Information: Coded Segments - German Participants

	Academ. (sv7/de1)	PIRON (de2)	BMZ (de3)	BMZ (de4)	BMZ (de5)	Bundestag (de6)	SUM
Behaviours	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Behaviours > Seeks to Reform over Cut	2	0	0	0	1	3	37
Behaviours > Seeks to Cut over Reform	5	4	3	1	0	1	16
Behaviours > Long history of seperation of aid from FP changing	1	4	5	7	2	0	27
Behaviours > Increasing Institutional Integration	3	3	0	0	0	0	23
Behaviours > Limited Aid Integration to FP framework	2	3	11	13	2	0	35
Behaviours > Preservation of Hum. Aid	2	0	0	0	0	2	16
Behaviours > NOT a gradual shift	0	0	0	0	0	0	2
Behaviours > Change in CSociety relations	4	6	1	0	1	0	18
Behaviours > Increase in Aid as a Cost Rhetoric	0	1	1	0	0	0	8
Behaviours > Less Pol. Oversight and Consensus	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
Behaviours > Global --> Regional Focus	2	0	0	3	0	0	10
Behaviours > Slower pull back of aid	1	0	0	0	0	0	4
Behaviours > Aid Phase-Outs	2	0	0	0	0	0	4
Behaviours > Shift to realist logic	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Behaviours > Shift to realist logic > Economic<-->Aid Nexus Growing	3	1	6	9	1	4	47
Behaviours > Shift to realist logic > Humanitarian-->Security	4	2	0	2	0	0	26
Behaviours > Redefining of what aid is	1	0	0	0	0	1	17
Behaviours > BTS-->in public	0	1	0	0	0	0	4
Behaviours > Changing Rhetoric (Sv + De)	3	3	6	3	2	0	39
Behaviours > Aid-Migration Linkage	9	2	0	0	0	0	31
Constructive --> Coercive Use	0	1	0	0	0	0	6
Dev vs. Hum	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Dev vs. Hum > De	0	3	1	1	4	2	14
Dev vs. Hum > Sv	1	1	0	0	1	0	16
Dev vs. Hum > Broad	4	0	0	0	0	0	6
Broad aid trends	10	10	1	3	2	2	42
Junction Points	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Junction Points > 2022 Election Sv	0	0	0	0	0	0	4
Junction Points > Ukraine War	4	0	0	0	0	0	16
Junction Points > Covid	0	2	1	0	0	0	4
SUM	178	137	93	137	94	85	1486

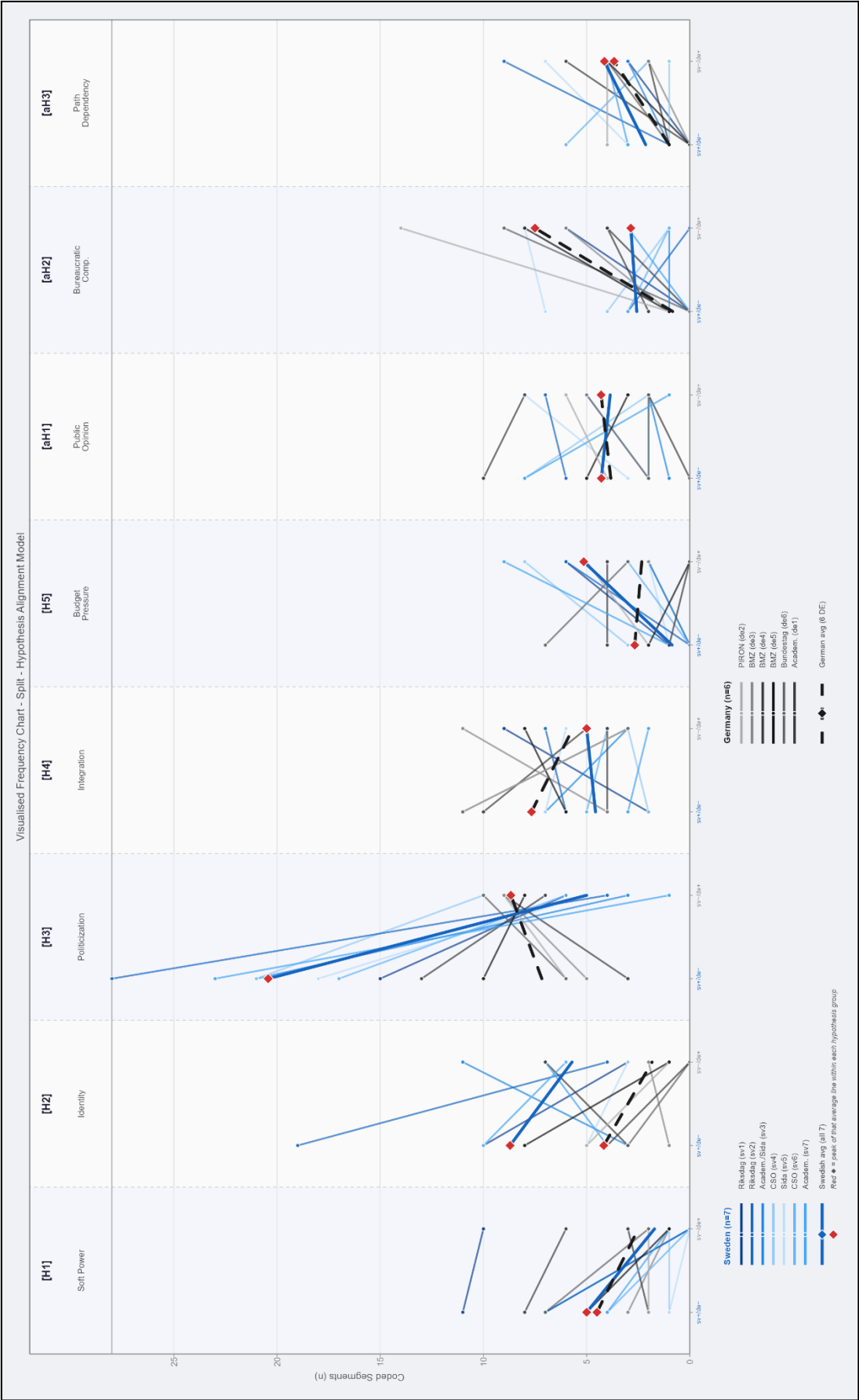
A.II

Visualized Frequency Chart - Merged - Hypothesis Alignment



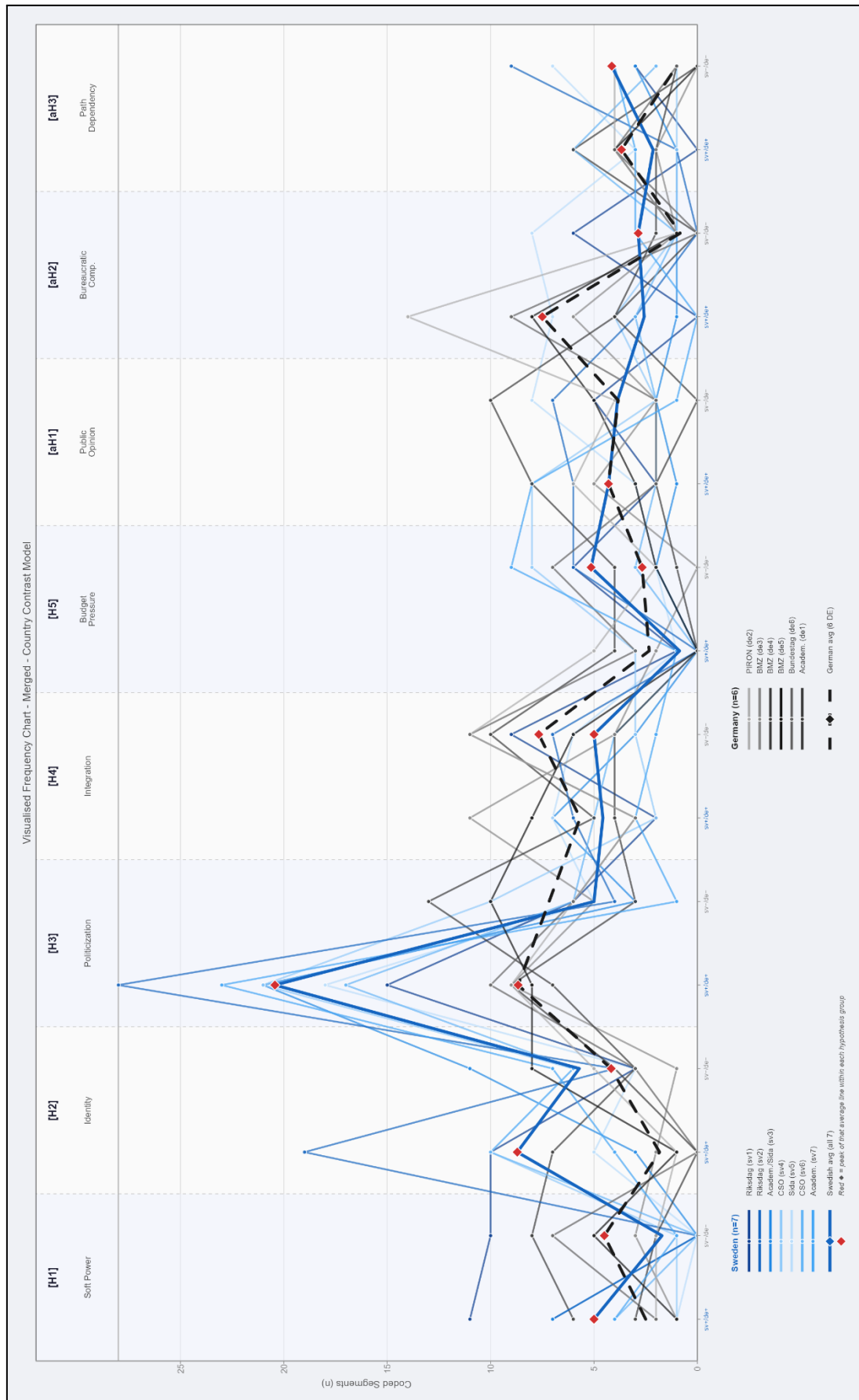
A.III

Visualized Frequency Chart - Split - Hypothesis Alignment Model



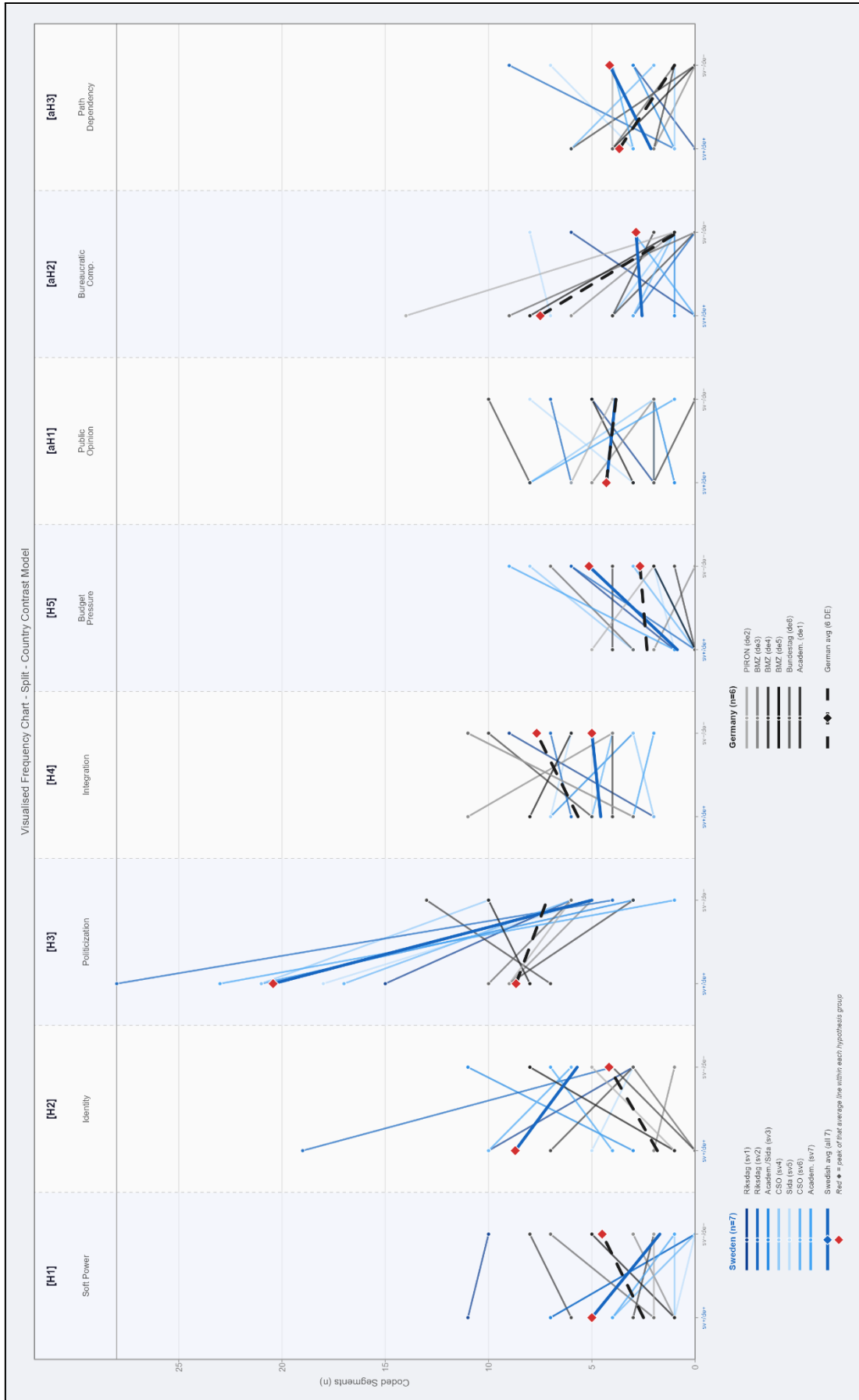
A.IV

Visualized Frequency Chart - Merged - Country Contrast Model



A.V

Visualized Frequency Chart - Split - Country Contrast Model



A.VI

Average & Median
Values in Frequency
Data (Country Groups
Only)

[H1] Soft Power

	avg	median
sv+	5.00	4.0
sv-	1.71	1.0
de-	4.50	4.0
de+	2.50	2

[H2] Identity

	avg	median
sv+	8.71	10.0
sv-	5.71	6.0
de-	4.17	4
de+	1.83	2

[H3] Politicization

	avg	median
sv+	20.43	21.0
sv-	5.00	5.0
de-	7.17	6.0
de+	8.67	9.0

[H4] Integration

	avg	median
sv+	4.57	5.0
sv-	5.00	4.0
de-	7.67	8.0
de+	5.67	4.5

[H5] Budget Pressure

	avg	median
sv+	0.86	1.0
sv-	5.14	6.0
de-	2.67	2.0
de+	2.33	3.5

[aH1] Public Opinion

	avg	median
sv+	4.29	3.0
sv-	3.86	2.0
de-	3.83	4.0
de+	4.30	4.0

[aH2] Bureaucratic Competition

	avg	median
sv+	2.57	3.0
sv-	2.86	2.0
de-	0.83	1
de+	7.50	7.0

[aH3] Path Dependency

	avg	median
sv+	2.14	2.0
sv-	4.14	3.0
de-	1.0	1.0
de+	3.67	4.0

*** Values correspond only to the participant group (Swedish; German); coded segments outside of those groups are not included so as not to distort the data, but can be found in **A.VIII** below, and are included in the hypothesis calculations.

A.VIII

Raw Frequency Data from MaxQDA (with Heatmap)

Code System	Riksdag(sv1)	Riksdag(sv2)	Academ./SIDA (sv3)	CSO (sv4)	SIDA (sv5)	CSO (sv6)	Academ. (sv7/de1)	PIRON (de2)	BMZ (de3)	BMZ (de4)	BMZ (de5)	Bundestag (de6)	SUM
Behaviours													0
Seeks to Reform over Cut	2	3	6	6	9	5	2				1	3	37
Seeks to Cut over Reform				2			5	4	3	1		1	16
Long history of seperation of aid from FP changing		3	3		2		1	4	5	7	2		27
Increasing Institutional Integration	1	1	6		5	4	3	3					23
Limited Aid Integration to FP framework		4					2	3	11	13	2		35
Preservation of Hum. Aid	1	2	4	1	4		2					2	16
NOT a gradual shift		1			1								2
Change in CSociety relations	4			1	1		4	6	1		1		18
Increase in Aid as a Cost Rhetoric	1	2		2		1		1	1				8
Less Pol. Oversight and Consensus						1							1
Global --> Regional Focus	1	1	1				2			3			10
Slower pull back of aid		1		1		1	1						4
Aid Phase-Outs		1				1	2						4
Shift to realist logic													0
Economic-->Aid Nexus Growing	3	8	1	3	4	4	3	1	6	9	1	4	47
Humanitarian-->Security	1	6	5	2	1	3	4	2		2			26
Redefining of what aid is	1	3	3	2	4	2	1					1	17
BTS-->in public			2			1		1					4
Changing Rhetoric (Sv + De)	3	6	5	3	2	3	3	3	6	3	2		39
Aid-Migration Linkage	1	6	4	5		4	9	2					31
Constructive --> Coercive Use		1			1	3		1					6
Dev vs. Hum													0
De			1	1		1		3	1	1	4	2	14
Sv	1	3	2	2	4	1	1	1			1		16
Broad		1			1		4						6
Broad aid trends	1	3	5	3	1	1	10	10	1	3	2	2	42
Junction Points													0
2022 Election Sv		2	1		1								4
Ukraine War	1		2	4	2	3	4						16
Covid		1						2	1				4
[H1] Aid elevates status, soft power (gen.)													0
Aid elevates status, gives soft power (sv+)	11	7	7	1	1	4					3		38
aid elevates status, gives soft power (de-)							2	2	3	8	5	7	27
Aid elevates status, gives soft power (sv-)	10			1			1						12
aid elevates status, gives soft power (de+)							3	2	1	6	1	2	15
[H2] Identity (gen.)		1											1
Identity (sv+)	10	19	3	10	5	10	4				2		63
Identity (de-)							4	5	1	3	8	3	24
Identity (sv-)	3	4	11	6	3	6	7	1					41
Identity (de+)								1	2	7	1		11
[H3] politicization (gen.)													0
politicization (sv+)	15	28	21	21	18	17	23	1	1		2		147
politicization (de+)	1			4	1		9	9	9	7	8	10	58
politicization (sv-)	6	4	3	10	5	6	1						35
politicization (de-)							3	6	5	13	10	6	43
[H4] Integration --> protection (gen.)													0
Integration --> protection (sv+)	2	6	7	2	7	5	3	4	1				37
Integration --> protection (de-)							4	11	4	10	6	11	46
Integration --> protection (sv-)	9	7	3	3	6	4	2				1		35
Integration --> protection (de+)							4	3	11	5	8	3	34
[H5] Budget (gen.) (inverse)													0
budget (sv+)	1			3	1		1						6
budget (de-)							1	2		4	2	7	16
budget (sv-)	6	6	2	8	2	3	9	1					37
budget (de+)				1				5	2	4		3	15
[aH1]public opinon --> aid strategy (gen.)													0
public opinon --> aid strategy (sv+)	2	6	1	8	3	2	8						30
public opinon --> aid strategy (de-)								4	2	10	5	2	23
public opinon --> aid strategy (sv-)	5	7	2	2	8	2	1						27
public opinon --> aid strategy (de+)							2	6	5	8	3	2	26
[aH2] bureaucratic competition (gen.)													0
bureaucratic competition (sv+)		3	1	4	7	3		1					19
bureaucratic competition (de+)							4	14	6	4	8	9	45
bureaucratic competition (sv-)	6		1	1	8	1	3	1	1				22
bureaucratic competition (de-)							2	1	1		1		5
[aH3] path dependency --> key driver (gen.)													0
path dependency --> key driver (sv+)		1	1	1	3	6	3						15
path dependency --> key driver (de+)							2	4	2	6	4	4	22
path dependency --> key driver (sv-)	3	9	3	1	7	2	4	2					31
path dependency --> key driver (de-)					1		1	4				1	7
SUM	112	167	117	124	130	112	178	137	93	137	94	85	1486

A.IX

To access transcripts and available interview profiles, see:

<https://docs.google.com/document/d/1M3128EVaBXbl8nX6xeracrD9SDQ6786eB43Lskqo3do/edit?usp=sharing>

A.X

Interview Questions:

Starting Base-Setting Questions

- How is aid changing in general as an industry?
- How do you distinguish that trend between development and humanitarian aid, both globally and within your country?

On H1 - Soft power →

- On Germany → How does Germany view aid as a tool of statecraft?
 - ◆ Beneficial or a cost?
 - ◆ A positive sacrifice, or an investment?
 - ◆ Does it have more political or moral rationale for its work?
- On Sweden → How does Sweden view aid as a tool of statecraft?
 - ◆ Beneficial or a cost?
 - ◆ A positive sacrifice, or an investment?
 - ◆ Does it have a more political or moral rationale for its work?
- Comparative → How does the purpose of aid in Germany and Sweden differ?
 - ◆ What do they want to achieve differently by it, and how is that changing?

On H1 - Identity →

- On Germany → do you think that aid forms part of how Germany views its own identity as an actor on the foreign stage?
 - ◆ Is aid a crucial part of its identity and legacy?
- On Sweden → do you think that aid forms part of how Sweden views its own identity on the world stage?
 - ◆ Is aid a crucial part of its identity and legacy?
- Comparative → How would you compare the role of aid in the way that Germans and Swedes perceive their identity on the world stage?
 - ◆ Is aid a crucial part of their identity and legacy?

On H3 - Politicization / aH2 - Public Opinion / aH2 - Bureaucratic Competition²⁵ →

²⁵ These topics tended to get clustered together and the answers often flowed into one another, the distinction was drawn out through follow-up questions during the interview depending on the response. Often, the participant would jump to answer yes, before crafting their answer into a multi-part answer. I anticipated this, given their familiarity would be largely confined to their own state,

- On Germany → do you consider aid to be politicized in Germany?
- On Sweden → do you consider aid to be politicized in Sweden?
- Comparative → how would you compare the role of politicization in a changing aid policy in Germany and Sweden?
 - ◆ If yes → is this politicization occurring at a bureaucratic level, or a mass politics level? Or something in between?
- On Germany → do you think public opinion affects decisions on aid in Germany?
- On Sweden → do you think public opinion affects decisions on aid in Sweden?
- Comparative → how would you compare the role of public opinion on decisions on aid in Germany and Sweden?

On H3 - Budget²⁶ →

- On Germany → do you think a/the budget crisis is affecting decisions on aid in Germany?
- On Sweden → do you think a/the budget crisis is affecting decisions on aid in Sweden?
- Comparative → how do you think budget constraints are affecting aid decisions in Germany vs. Sweden?

On H4 - Integration²⁷ →

- On Germany → do you think that aid was a priority under Merkel, the Traffic Light Coalition, or is a priority under the current Merz Government?
- On Sweden → do you think that aid was a priority under the Löfven governments (2014 - 2021), the Andersson cabinet (November 2021 - October 2022) or the current Kristersson cabinet (October 2022 - present)?
- Comparative → How has aid been prioritized differently over time in Germany and Sweden?
- On Germany → What are the reasons that Germany has / has not prioritized aid?

so their ability to answer the question objectively would be limited, this approach therefore allows them also to play with the idea in their heads to figure out what they want to say and portray a larger vision of how they conceptualize the system.

²⁶ This question was also set up with the expectation that the participants would answer no, (which most did), because it then provides the opportunity to ask them to elaborate on what they identify then as key drivers, if not budget pressures, at which point in the conversation they had many ideas ready to go and were more comfortable speaking.

²⁷ This question links to integration, in answering this question, the respondents communicated the extent to which the government views aid as important (strategic integration) and which they seek to control or influence it, at which point the second question allows me to get at the institutional factor. Where this failed, I would ask a follow up to get a more direct answer.

- On Sweden → What are the reasons that Sweden has / has not prioritized aid?
- Comparative → How would you compare the way the two countries have prioritized aid?

- On Germany → Why does Germany (not) prioritize aid?
- On Sweden → Why does Sweden (not) prioritize aid?
- Comparative → Why do they (not) prioritize aid differently in Germany in Sweden?

XII. Statement of Authorship

I hereby confirm and certify that this master thesis is my own work. All ideas and language of others are acknowledged in the text. All references and verbatim extracts are properly quoted and all other sources of information are specifically and clearly designated. I confirm that the digital copy of the master thesis that I submitted on 5 May 2026 is identical to the printed version I submitted to the Examination Office on 5 May, 2026.

Signature

5 May 2026, Sydney Wilhelmy

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Signature

A handwritten signature in dark ink, consisting of a long, horizontal, slightly wavy line with a small upward flick at the end.

5 May 2026, Sydney Wilhelmy