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Summary

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Summary

Background

Germany has long been one of the largest traditional donors of official development assistance (ODA). German ODA contributions amounted to approximately EUR 25 billion in 2016.¹

Development policy and development cooperation (DC) play a key role in Agenda 2030 and its 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), adopted by the United Nations in 2015. Germany has made a commitment to this Agenda, with state and civil society working towards its implementation. With the adoption of the Charter for the Future: ONE WORLD – Our Responsibility back in 2014, the German Government set a high level of ambition for fully involving policy-makers, business, civil society and citizens in its engagement for a sustainable future.

Against this background, it is important to find out about public attitudes and whether and to what extent the public² is in favour of development policy and DC. For example, does the public support ODA and the target of spending 0.7 % of gross national income (GNI) on aid? Are citizens familiar with the Agenda 2030, and are they engaged with any of the SDGs?

Currently, the data collected about German public attitudes, knowledge and engagement with DC and sustainable development are patchy at best. This study aims to close this gap, channel feedback from the public to the development community, and provide development actors and a wider public with comprehensive knowledge-based guidance and trend-related data. The outcomes of the study should be used to encourage reflection by development organisations on the strategic direction of this field of policy and action in light of public opinion, and to inform practical work in areas such as communication and civic education strategies.

Key questions and data source

1. The study focuses particularly on the following questions:
2. Which attitudes can be identified among citizens³ in relation to development policy, DC and global sustainable development? How much do they know, and how do they engage?
3. Have knowledge, attitudes and behavioural engagement changed in recent years?
4. Which individual and social factors explain knowledge, attitudes and behavioural engagement (e.g., sociodemographic characteristics, party preference, historical events)?
5. What would a typology of public attitudes look like? How can the public be segmented into meaningful categories regarding their knowledge, attitudes and behaviour patterns?

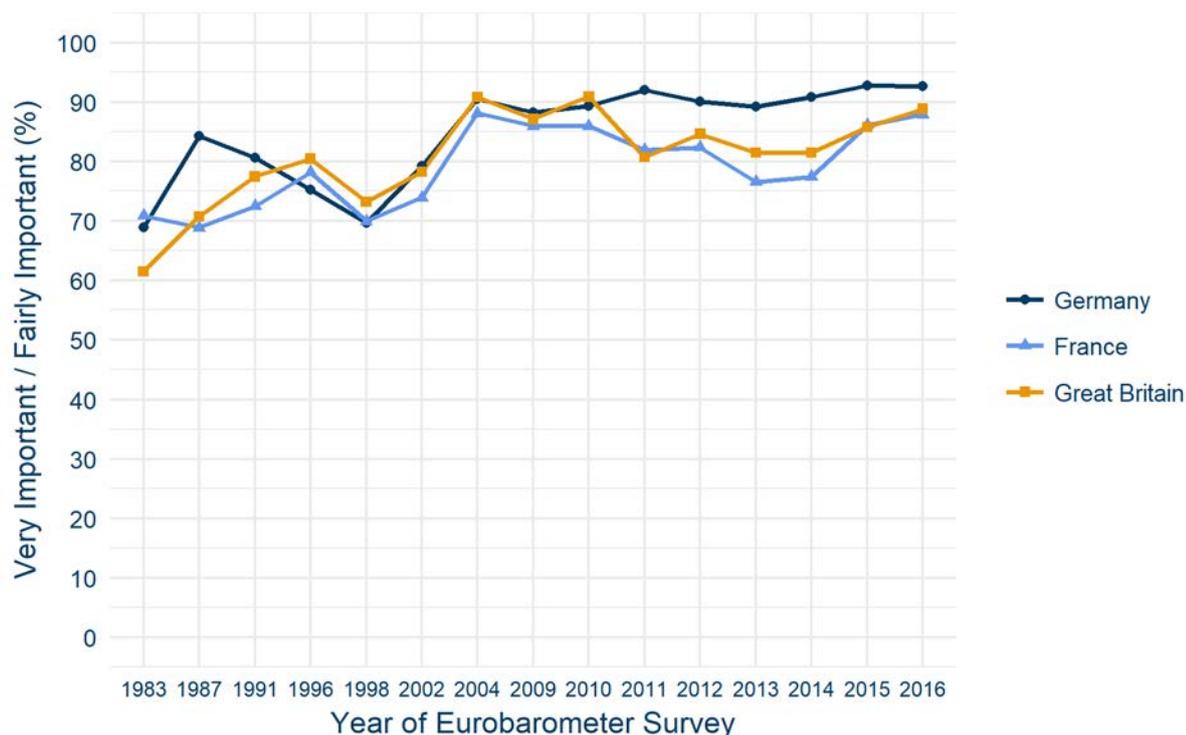
The study is based on data from the *Aid Attitudes Tracker* (AAT), a survey conducted in six-month cycles in Germany, Great Britain, France and the US since 2013, with approximately 6,000 participants per wave and country. The AAT's purpose is to find out about the public's knowledge, attitudes, and behavioural engagement in relation to DC and development issues.

¹ http://www.bmz.de/de/ministerium/zahlen_fakten/oda/geber/index.html

² The term "(German) public" refers throughout the study to the population of Germany, irrespective of citizenship and registered place of residence.

³ The term "citizens" refers throughout the study to persons living in Germany, irrespective of citizenship and registered place of residence.

Figure 1 Importance of Development Cooperation



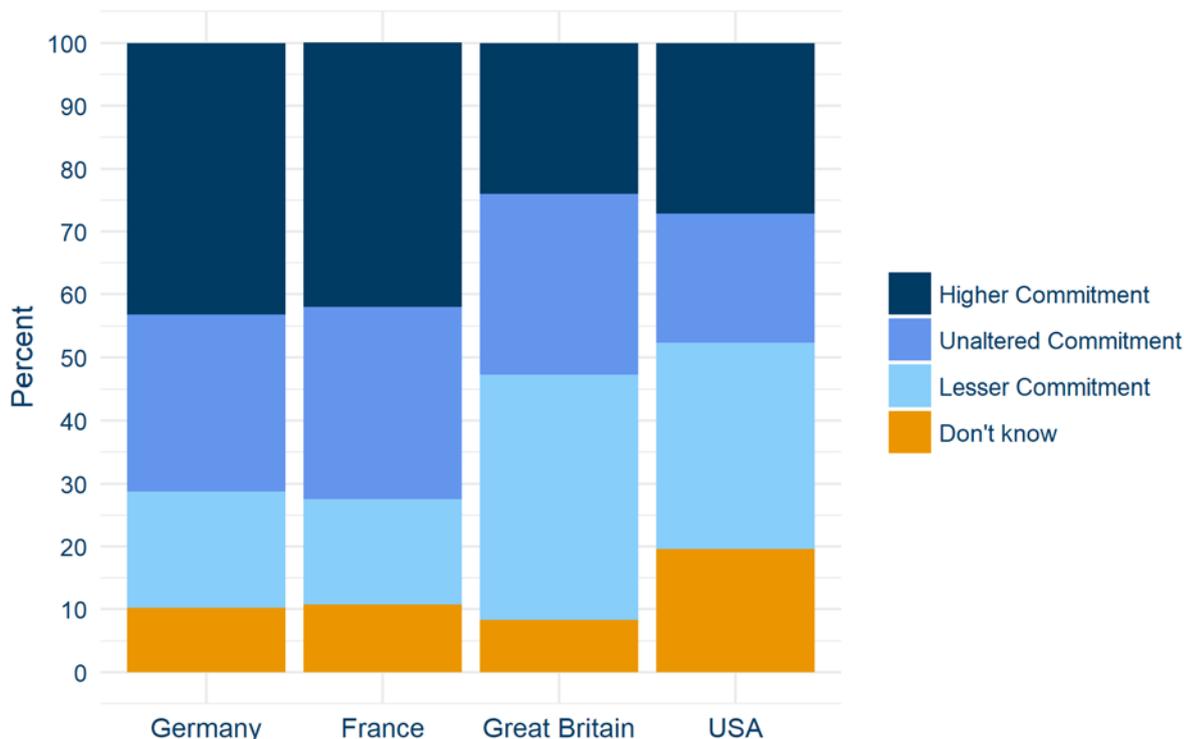
Note: Figure based on Eurobarometer surveys from 1983 to 2016.

In general, there is a consistently high level of support for DC within the German public: around 90 % of the public regard DC as important (see Figure 1), while around 40 % would like to see more engagement for poverty reduction (see Figure 2), and approximately 30 % are in favour of more generous ODA provision. Indeed, around 70 % say they would like Germany to meet or even exceed the 0.7 % ODA/GNI target set by the United Nations. This shows that large segments of the German public assign Germany a global responsibility. At the same time, citizens want poverty reduction in Germany itself to take priority. Furthermore, they rarely differentiate between the various motives behind DC, such as economic and security interests or the need to tackle the causes of migration. The AAT data suggest that the public tends to view the benefits of DC in generalised terms.

Despite the high level of public support, there are also widespread concerns. Around 25 % of the public believe that DC is ineffective; just 10 % believe it is effective. Around 50 % of the public take a position between these two extremes. Citizens assume that roughly 50 % of aid funding is lost to corruption. Views on aid effectiveness correlate strongly with assumptions about corruption.

Compared with other countries, German public attitudes towards development policy and DC are positive. Around 40 % of the French and German public say they are in favour of increasing aid in order to reduce poverty (see Figure 2). Support for such a move is much lower – roughly 25 % – in Great Britain and the US. In all four countries, the desire to see more government engagement for poverty reduction correlates strongly with a left-leaning/liberal political orientation, a sense of moral obligation towards countries in the Global South, and a positive view of aid effectiveness. In addition, young people are more likely than older generations to support increasing the engagement for poverty reduction.

Figure 2 Support for Governmental Commitment to Poverty Reduction in Developing Countries



Note: Figure based on the Aid Attitudes Tracker July 2017. N per country ≈ 6,000.

Citizens engage with global challenges through the media and in personal conversations. However, their knowledge of aid and (global) development issues lacks specific detail. Above all, their perceptions of global poverty, child mortality trends and the scientific consensus on the human contribution to climate change are plainly distorted. The 17 SDGs are largely unfamiliar to citizens, who are indifferent or sceptical on the question whether the SDGs can be reached, believing that they themselves have limited opportunities to exert influence. And yet self-efficacy, i.e. the sense of being able to make a meaningful contribution of one's own, is a key factor for individual engagement in SDG implementation.

Around 20 % of the public donated money in 2017, and 20 % made a conscious decision to buy – or not to buy – specific products in order to positively influence global development and poverty. However, citizens are much less likely to take on voluntary roles. This partly reflects people's individual sense of moral obligation and perceptions of self-efficacy, but education and income are additional factors of relevance to donations and consumption decisions.

Public attitudes to development policy and DC can be segmented into four types. The classification depends on interviewees' sociodemographic background and party preference:

Undecideds (35 %) do not have a clearly identifiable position.

Sceptics (23 %) care about the situation in the Global South and feel a moral obligation, but show only average levels of support for DC and have concerns about its effectiveness and their own scope to exert influence.

Opponents (28 %) care less about the situation in the Global South, do not feel any moral obligation, support DC to a lesser extent and regard it – and personal engagement – as ineffective.

Supporters (14 %) display highly positive attitudes across all areas.

The study focuses particularly on the effects of refugee movements on support for DC. The data from the entire survey period (2013-2017) show that after the so-called refugee crisis reached its peak in September 2015, the public increasingly regarded immigration as a challenge, and public attitudes towards refugees became slightly more sceptical. However, this was accompanied by a slight increase in public support for DC. Before the influx of refugees reached its peak, an increased tendency to view immigration as a challenge correlated with slightly stronger support for DC, as did a shift in political orientation towards the right.

The effect of immigration perceptions was neutralised later, however, while the effect of changes in political orientation weakened. From this, it may be concluded that following the influx of refugees and the debate about DC as a means of tackling the root causes of migration, support for DC increased. However, after the “crisis” peaked, the previously positive impacts of changes in perception and political orientation disappeared.

The implications of the findings on public opinion are discussed at the end of the report with reference to development policy, DC, communication, and civic education strategies.