

Chapter 10

How Generous Are Foreign Aid Donors in Media Development? A Descriptive Analysis

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ABSTRACT

Media assistance has arisen as a significant tool of media development and democracy initiatives, particularly in the last 20 years. While the research in foreign aid and democracy aid is rich, studies on media assistance are quite limited in number due to its novelty. Moreover, existing research on media assistance usually focuses on the role and/or impact of media assistance on recipient nations' media capacity or media independence. Differing from this existing research, this study focuses on the donors of media assistance and asks how generous foreign aid donors are in media development and what type of donors provide media assistance. Using data from the OECD, Freedom House, Reporters Without Borders, and Comparative Political dataset, this study finds that democratic countries, countries with higher independence in their media, and governments with center ideology are more likely to provide a higher amount of media assistance compared to others.

INTRODUCTION

Since the Cold War, foreign assistance has become an important foreign policy instrument for donor countries. Donor countries aim to support economic development and promote democracy, including media freedom, through foreign assistance in developing countries. With these aims, the members of the Development Assistance Committee (DAC) have provided 161.2 billion \$ foreign assistance to the developing countries in 2020 (OECD, 2021). Some of this assistance has been shared for media support by the donor countries. According to the Center for International Media Assistance (CIMA), only 0.3 percent of the total amount of aid has been allocated for media support, and bilateral donors (excluding China) have provided an average of 454 million \$ per year for media development between the years of 2010 and 2015 (Myers et al., 2018). Aid for media aims for many targets such as training journalists,

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supporting the development of the media organizations, promoting freedom of expression, and supporting media independence.

Despite the million dollars spent on media development, the function and the impact of media assistance are still debated. Although media assistance is supposed to boost media freedom, and African, Asian, and Eastern European countries are the main target regions of media assistance, these regions still suffer from censorship, violence, and abuse in the media sector. The index of Reporters Without Borders indicates that many African and Asian countries witness intense abuses and violence against their media actors (Reporters Without Borders, 2021). The censorship, abuses, and violence against the media workers have significantly increased in the last decade with the rise of populist and personalist regimes (Repucci, 2019).

The potential benefits of foreign aid on media development have been analyzed by scholars of political science and media; however, these studies have inconclusive findings. Some of these studies find that foreign development or media aid has a positive impact on media development (e.g., Brownee, 2019; Lugo-Ocando, 2018), while some of them find conditional impact or no impact (e.g., Dutta & Williamson, 2016). The problem regarding the impact and effectiveness of media assistance is critical to address because policymakers and aid organizations still spend a high amount of funding, time, and effort on an issue, although its impact is not clearly known. This does not only cause wasting the resources but also could harm democracy or inhibit democratization. Addressing the problem can inform policymakers and organizations to implement more efficient media assistance policies or take specific measures.

Current studies mainly evaluate if the received aid increases the media development or media freedom in the recipient nation (e.g., Dutta & Williamson, 2016; Galus, 2020). However, the research on foreign aid and media development overlooks the impact of donor's regime type, level of media freedom, and government ideology when examining the relationship between aid and media development. On the other hand, research on foreign aid's impact on recipient nations specifically notes that donors' intentions and motivations directly determine the aid effectiveness (Bearce and Tirone, 2010). The studies on donor motivation and intention; therefore, consider the factors such as donor ideology and regime type to understand why aid is given (e.g., Lumsdaine, 1987; De Mesquita and Smith, 2007, 2009).

This study aims to apply this argument on the relationship between donors' domestic politics and foreign aid policies to media assistance policies. Therefore, it examines the relationship between the type of donor and media assistance. More specifically, this study is interested in analyzing what type of donors provide more assistance for media by focusing on the regime type, level of media freedom, and government ideology of the donor countries. Therefore, this study asks, 'to what extent do donors provide foreign assistance for media development to developing countries, how much of their total foreign assistance is spent on the media and what type of donors provide more media assistance to developing countries?'.

This study will contribute to the literature on aid and media development in two ways: First, as discussed above, existing studies predominantly examine the impact of foreign aid on media development or freedom of press in the recipient countries based on the type of recipient (e.g., Dutta and Williamson, 2016). Instead of the recipient countries, this study will focus on the type of donor countries. Second, current literature is primarily interested in the specific country cases such that they examine individual donor country's media aid to only one or two recipient country cases (e.g., Brownlee, 2017; Harris, 2018; Galus, 2020). Because it is difficult to make general inferences from specific country cases, this paper attempts to analyze all donors' efforts to provide an overall descriptive picture of donors of media assistance.

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