

Interest, Need, or Reputation? Determinants of Qatar's Foreign Aid

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The literature on the motivations behind emerging donors' foreign aid contributions—with the exception of larger countries such as China, India, Brazil and Turkey—lacks original data and empirical analyses. This article addresses this gap by providing a novel, detailed dataset of the foreign aid allocations of one resilient, relatively small emerging donor, Qatar, for the period from 2014 to 2021. The contents of our database, which we dub Qatar Aid Database, encapsulate the features of Qatar's international aid. To illustrate our dataset's efficacy, we investigate whether Qatar's foreign aid operations aim to satisfy donor interests, recipient needs, or something else. Our empirical findings affirm that although Qatar's aid allocation decisions prioritize recipient needs, its aid provision depends more on Qatar's foreign policy interests in the targeted countries.

La literatura en materia de las motivaciones que se encuentran detrás de las contribuciones de ayuda exterior por parte de países donantes emergentes (con la excepción de países más grandes como China, India, Brasil y Turquía) carece de datos originales y de análisis empíricos. Este artículo aborda esta brecha debido a que proporciona un conjunto de datos novedoso y detallado de las asignaciones de ayuda exterior por parte de un donante emergente, resistente y relativamente pequeño, Catar, para el período entre 2014 y 2021. El contenido de nuestra base de datos, a la que denominamos QATAR AID, resume las características de la ayuda internacional otorgada por Catar. Con el fin de ilustrar la eficacia de nuestro conjunto de datos, investigamos si las operaciones de ayuda exterior que lleva a cabo Catar tienen como objetivo satisfacer sus intereses como donante, las necesidades de los receptores o algún otro motivo diferente. Nuestros hallazgos empíricos afirman que, si bien las decisiones de asignación de ayuda por parte de Catar priorizan las necesidades de los receptores, su provisión de ayuda depende más de los propios intereses de Catar en materia de política exterior en los países objetivo.

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À l'exception des plus gros pays tels que la Chine, l'Inde, le Brésil et la Turquie, la littérature relative aux motivations qui se cachent derrière les contributions d'aide étrangère des donateurs émergents manque de données inédites et d'analyses empiriques. Cet article remédie à cette lacune en fournissant un ensemble de données inédit et détaillé sur les attributions d'aides étrangères de 2014 à 2021 d'un donateur émergent résilient et relativement petit : le Qatar. Le contenu de notre base de données, que nous appelons QATAR AID, regroupe les caractéristiques de l'aide internationale qatarienne. Pour illustrer l'efficacité de notre ensemble de données, nous nous intéressons à l'objectif des opérations d'aide étrangère du Qatar : satisfaire les intérêts des donateurs, les besoins des bénéficiaires ou autre chose ? Nos résultats empiriques affirment que bien que les décisions d'attributions d'aide du Qatar accordent la priorité aux besoins des bénéficiaires, sa fourniture dépend plus des intérêts de politique étrangère qatariens dans les pays cibles.

Introduction

Amid a period of subsequent regional and international crises, Qatar has emerged as a significant non-traditional donor in the Global South. Although this new donor role has raised questions among foreign aid scholars, there is a limited number of studies on the modalities of Qatar foreign aid in the academic literature. While much of the existing research on aid is focused on mainstream actors within the framework of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) Development Assistance Committee (OECD-DAC), there is a growing discursive shift toward non-traditional donors. Yet, this attention is often captured by larger states with expansive regional and global clout, such as China, India, Brazil, and Turkey. Such a narrative tends to obscure the diverse array of aid practices in the Global South, reinforcing a simplistic West versus non-West dichotomy. Qatar's foray into foreign aid challenges this binary framework by illustrating a multifaceted approach that reflects the plurality of the Global South in foreign aid. Moreover, Qatar's utilization of aid underscores a distinctive paradigm; it exemplifies how foreign aid, often perceived as a tool of expansionist or revisionist powers, can also serve a defensive and strategic function for smaller states. Through its aid policies, Qatar demonstrates that aid can be an instrument of nuanced diplomacy and national fortification rather than a tool to leverage dominance and hegemony.

Taking into consideration the gap in the literature on small-state foreign aid, we compiled a new dataset on Qatar's foreign aid interactions between 2014 and 2021 in order to conduct a quantitative analysis of the modalities of Qatar's emerging donor role. The Qatar Aid Database (QATAR AID) is designed to capture all foreign aid operations, both bilateral and multilateral, that Qatar facilitated between 2014 and 2021. QATAR AID is the most detailed data available on Qatari aid for this period. This data was supplemented by interviews with senior employees of private aid organizations and high-level bureaucrats from state institutions in Qatar.

This study aims to explore the complex dynamics of Qatar's foreign aid, questioning whether such contributions are driven more by donor interests, recipient needs, or something else. This research is the first statistical study reflecting Qatar's foreign aid operations. The prior absence of a systematic statistical analysis signifies a significant gap in the relevant literature, which demands attention for at least three reasons. First, Qatar holds a prominent position in the arena of international cooperation and is committed to the principles outlined in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. It is noteworthy that Qatar's official develop-

ment assistance (ODA) has experienced substantial growth in recent years, totaling USD 676.6 million in 2021. Second, the extant literature on foreign aid distribution exhibits a bias towards Western nations. While there's been some exploration of non-Western aid actors, the focus has largely been on major powers like China. This neglects the increasingly prominent role of small, resource-rich states in global development assistance. Yet, small and wealthy states like Qatar also give aid, and as mentioned above sometimes substantial amounts. This study contributes to the literature by adding a new non-Western case to the discussion because it considers a small state. Finally, Qatari foreign aid serves as a strategic instrument to advance the country's distinct political objectives both regionally and globally. While self-interest motives underpin this aid provision, Qatar's approach stands out in its utilization of aid as a tool for survival and national fortification in a volatile geopolitical environment. Qatar's pursuit of indispensability within a hostile regional landscape manifests in its evolving foreign policy roles. This includes engaging in mediation efforts to resolve regional conflicts, fostering relationships with opposition groups across the Arab world, and leveraging soft power to enhance its international influence.

In the following sections, we will delve into the literature on foreign aid, Qatar's foreign policy and its foreign aid allocation, building upon existing research in these areas. Subsequently, we introduce our novel dataset, presenting descriptive statistics that shed light on Qatar's foreign aid. Following the presentation of the data, we introduce four hypotheses concerning Qatar's aid behavior. These hypotheses are derived from the existing literature, Qatar's foreign aid interactions, and the interviews we have conducted. Then, we describe our methodology and quantitative analysis. Finally, we present our results and discuss the findings in the conclusion.

Background Literature

Foreign Aid in Perspective

The traditional understanding of foreign aid focused on the self-interest of donors. This perspective viewed foreign aid as a tool for advancing the political and economic interests of donor countries, rather than being primarily driven by the development needs of recipient countries. This could involve extracting policy concessions, gaining political leverage in international negotiations, or promoting specific ideologies like democracy. Studies like [Dietrich \(2021\)](#) support this view, demonstrating that public support for aid channeled through non-state actors increases in countries with weaker governance structures. This suggests that donors may perceive non-state actors as more flexible and less subject to government control, better serving their strategic interests. The "self-interest" perspective often utilizes models like the "payoff maximization" framework proposed by [de Mesquita and Smith \(2009, 317\)](#). This framework views aid as a means to obtain strategic concessions from recipient states, assuming that aid can be utilized interchangeably and has a uniform effectiveness regardless of its specific application. In this framework, the quality of governance in the recipient country is crucial for effectively targeting interventions and achieving the desired outcomes for the donor ([de Mesquita and Smith 2007](#)).

However, "donor self-interest" and "strategic utility" narratives face challenges when confronted with the growing trend of "bypass aid," which channels funding directly through non-state actors. In 2009, members of the DAC allocated USD 15.5 billion, or 13 percent of total aid disbursements, to and through non-governmental organizations (NGOs). Separately, the OECD reports that NGOs themselves raised at least USD 22 billion in the same

year.¹ Traditional state-centric approaches to foreign aid are inadequate in today's complex landscape. Effective aid requires frameworks that consider the multifaceted nature of aid and the recipient country's governance capacity (Dreher et al. 2024, 4). This is particularly important in the context of the Millennium Development Goals, where development and security are intertwined. Directing resources towards states with strong governance structures not only advances development goals but also contributes to stability, aligning with broader security objectives in fragile environments (Patrick 2007).

While research increasingly emphasizes the positive impact of aid on development outcomes, a substantial body of work within political economy underscores the significant role of geopolitical considerations in shaping aid allocation. Research evidence suggests that foreign aid is frequently utilized to bolster political alliances, provide support for strategically significant nations (including former colonies), influence UN General Assembly voting patterns, and advance broader foreign policy objectives (Zhang 2023). This insight is supported by studies conducted by Alesina and Dollar (2000), Bearce and Tirone (2010), Essex (2013), and Dreher et al. (2022). Additionally, economic interests play a major role in aid allocation, as it can serve as a tool for donor countries to secure export markets, facilitate business ventures in recipient countries, and guarantee access to essential imports (Lundsgaarde et al. 2010, 738).

The development landscape is shifting as emerging non-DAC donors like China, Brazil, and Saudi Arabia operate outside the traditional framework established by the OECD's DAC. These non-DAC actors are not obligated to report aid allocations, raising transparency and accountability concerns. However, their increasing influence necessitates understanding their practices and impact on both recipient countries and established donors navigating this evolving development landscape. Although there have been investigations into suspicious "rogue aid" operations by non-DAC donors, primarily focusing on China, research shows that the discrepancies may not be solely related to transparency issues. Rather, there might be differences in terms of self-motivated or politically driven distribution of aid, differentiating them from DAC donors. This suggests a potential shift from concerns solely around transparency to broader questions around motives for aid allocation by various groups of donors (Alrababa'h et al. 2020). Asmus et al. (2017, 27) notes distinctions in BRICS aid, emphasizing non-interference, mutual gain, smaller scale, and export promotion. However, studies by Dreher et al. (2011) and Fuchs and Vadlamannati (2013, 125) indicate that both DAC and non-DAC donors prioritize political interests and continue supporting corrupt regimes, highlighting the diverse and complex nature of non-DAC donor practices.

Foreign aid allocation is driven by a complex interplay of factors beyond simple altruism or self-interest (Allen et al. 2024, 245). While donor self-interest remains relevant, the growing involvement of non-state actors, the emphasis on "donor development orientation," and the presence of commercial incentives all play significant roles. Additionally, the rise of non-DAC donors marks a turning point in development, bringing new perspectives and diverse forms of assistance. A comprehensive understanding of foreign aid allocation must encompass this complexity and the diverse actors involved, empowering policymakers, practitioners, and scholars to design effective aid strategies that unlock its potential for meaningful change and sustainable development. Nonetheless, further research is needed to fully understand the diverse forms and impacts of non-DAC aid, enabling a deeper understanding of their contribution to shape the future of development cooperation.

¹Aid allocated by the EU institutions through NGOs in 2009 was USD 1.5 billion. The United States does not report an aggregate for aid for NGOs in the DAC statistical questionnaire. However, according to activity-based reporting to the DAC creditor reporting system, the United States allocated USD 6.2 billion through NGOs in 2009.

This article delves into the understudied case of Qatar's foreign aid motivations, leveraging a novel dataset of Qatari aid from 2014 to 2021. This exploration offers a valuable contribution to the literature by shedding light on the driving forces behind Qatar's foreign assistance efforts. The analysis allows for a nuanced understanding of Qatar's role in international development and its strategic objectives within the global landscape. Thus, the analysis fills an important gap in the literature by introducing a non-Western perspective and studying the role of a smaller state in aid allocation.

Qatar's Foreign Aid

One curious case in the post-pandemic foreign aid space, among others, is the situation of emerging donors in the Global South. Non-traditional donors have changed the outlook of humanitarian and development aid, leading to the emergence of a pluralistic structure of the humanitarian space. There have been several newcomers to the global aid infrastructure, with some previous aid recipients becoming emerging global donors (Dreher et al. 2013). Qatar is a good example of an emerging donor that has proven to be a resilient humanitarian and development actor in recent years, including during the COVID-19 pandemic. Despite its emerging role on the international aid stage, Qatar's foreign aid remains under-studied in comparison to large non-DAC actors, as mentioned above. Qatar is not a member of the OECD-DAC; however, it became an OECD-DAC participant in 2016, and the OECD-CRS has reported Qatar's annual official development assistance data since 2019.²

Qatar's foreign aid has undergone a transformation of its own in parallel to its emergence as a resource-rich country and the adaptation of an autonomous foreign policy line. Qatar's foreign aid was substantiated first within the framework of Arab and Gulf aid. The wealth accumulated in the oil-rich Arab countries, in particular after the subsequent OPEC crises, resulted in the generation of aid funds that were channeled to support Arab causes (Dandashly and Kourtelis 2023). Qatar departed from this de facto aid framework to use aid money for facilitating its foreign policy initiatives. The availability of large funds attracted parties to the mediation table in Qatar's early mediation initiatives. Foreign aid became a component of Qatar's constitutional commitment to strengthen international peace and security through its active foreign policy (Milton et al. 2023). The countries Qatar prioritized in foreign policy received most of foreign aid in this period, i.e., Palestine, Yemen, among others. A large number of humanitarian NGOs also channeled private donations in the form of humanitarian aid in this period, too.

The assessment of the Arab Spring policies and two subsequent Gulf Cooperation Council crises in 2014 and 2017 led Qatari leadership to recalibrate and institutionalize its foreign aid mechanisms.³ The blockading countries in the 2017 crisis asked Qatar to stop funding alleged terrorist groups that mobilized revolutionary movements during the Arab uprisings. In response, the Regulatory Authority for Charitable Activities (RACA) was created to supervise and monitor humanitarian NGOs and only two of them—Qatar Charity and Qatar Red Crescent—were authorized to facilitate international humanitarian aid. Additionally, the Qatar Fund for Development (QFFD) was utilized to handle development cooperation and foreign aid as

²Qatar's Development Co-Operation—OECD, <https://www.oecd.org/dac/dac-global-relations/qatars-development-co-operation.htm>.

³This era encompassed two crises within the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), first in 2014 and then in 2017. The first crisis began with the withdrawal of the ambassadors of Saudi Arabia, the UAE, and Bahrain from Qatar following allegations that Doha intervened into the domestic affairs of these states. This crisis ended after diplomatic talks in the same year. The second crisis went beyond the boundaries of the GCC when Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Bahrain, and Egypt—collectively known as the Quartet—cut relations with Qatar and imposed a land, sea, and air embargo. This crisis ended with the signature of Al Ula agreement by the conflicting parties.

the main bureaucratic organizer, and the Department of International Cooperation was created to take care of foreign aid-related issues within the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Qatar.

Transparency, institutional structure, dependency on oil prices, and external shocks are the main challenges to Qatar's foreign aid regime (Kharas 2015, 3). While Qatar has since solved the first three problems, its resilience to external shocks has yet to be explored. One can expect that humanitarian aid will be the leading aid sector in the post-pandemic global environment. Therefore, the regulation of private aid surfaces as a serious matter for emerging donors. The politicization of aid during the Gulf crisis also undermined initiatives between regional countries and international organizations. Qatar diverted its focus to develop cooperation and coordination with mainstream aid structures like the UN-OCHA and OECD-DAC to create new development and humanitarian aid initiatives outside the region. In parallel, it contributed to WHO and Global Alliance for Vaccines and Immunization (GAVI) during the pandemic and pledged annual support to the UN Development Program (UNDP), the UN Children's Fund (UNICEF), the UN Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), and the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (QFFD 2021).

We have also seen the decoupling of foreign aid and mediation initiatives due to the weakening role of financial incentives in these processes. Namely, Qatar ceased to "offer major financial inducements to conflict parties as a carrot to incentives reaching an agreement" (Milton et al. 2023, 18). This has paved the way for moving toward a universal approach and widening the geopolitical horizons of aid provision. Since this policy change, there have been more references to need-based rather than interest-based aid. Qatar's recalibration of foreign aid in response to the Gulf crises and the pandemic has demonstrated the resilience of Doha's humanitarian and development aid framework as well as the willingness of political leadership to commit to its development.

Indeed, despite all these biases of mainstream scholarship, we still do not know if Qatar's foreign aid allocation, among others, results from an interest-driven attitude, considerations of recipients' needs, or something else. The studies on specific cases outside the Eurocentric/transatlantic understanding would help to decenter it for widening the horizons of foreign aid studies in international relations scholarship (Fisher-Onar and Kavalski 2022). Qatari resilience in foreign aid also disproves projections in the literature that argue that non-DAC donors are more prone to decrease aid and operations under major shocks in comparison to mainstream donors (Gulrajani and Silcock 2020). The new foreign aid approach makes sense within the boundaries of Qatar's foreign policy preferences as well as its commitment to be an internationally reliable partner. It utilizes a pragmatic approach to cooperate with major aid actors, i.e., the UN and OECD-DAC, while continuing to pursue aid operations in its immediate neighborhood and in geographies in need.

Introduction of the Dataset: The QATAR AID

Our novel dataset, QATAR AID, offers comprehensive information on Qatari foreign aid between 2014 and 2021. We systematically collected data on Qatar's foreign aid operations from a variety of open sources, with a primary focus on five private and public aid agencies: the QFFD, Qatar Charity (QC), Qatar Red Crescent Society (QRCS), the RACA, and Silatech. We also conducted searches on LexisNexis news database, OCHA Database,⁴ Google, and Twitter, using specific keywords such as Qatar, relief, aid, humanitarian, emergency, water, food, support, medical, development, assistance, and shelter. These searches were conducted in 5-day intervals to

⁴UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) Financial Tracker Service, <https://fts.unocha.org/data-search>.

retrieve news related to Qatari foreign aid. We cautiously coded all aid operations that surfaced in our search results, even those associated with older organizations that predate the establishment of RACA. Notably, we labeled the implementing agency as “Government of Qatar-Vague” in cases where the news reports did not specify any particular implementing agency. To ensure the accuracy and completeness of the data, we cross-referenced our findings with the annual reports of QFFD and QC.⁵ In instances where inconsistencies arose or where there was a lack of aid data, we conducted additional searches using different keywords to gather the missing information. We interviewed decision-makers from official institutions and charity organizations in Qatar. The identification and appointment process took a time of two months because officials were actively handling aid operations and were under tight meeting conditions during the COVID-19 pandemic. The interviewees included high-level staff at QC and QRCS, the director of QFFD, the head of Department of International Development, and a senior official at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Doha. Only one of the authors conducted these five face-to-face, open-ended, semi-structured interviews between January and March 2021. The interviews were conducted in English and Arabic and lasted around 40–50 minutes.

QATARAID (2014–2021) can be considered a complementary dataset to *AidData* (2014) and the OECD-DAC CRS Database, specifically for Qatar’s aid operations. *AidData* (2014) offers detailed information on aid flows from 136 Qatari projects to 13 recipients in the Middle East and Africa between 2010 and 2013. The OECD-DAC CRS provides annual official development assistance data for Qatar but is limited to the years 2019–2021. QATARAID extends the temporal and regional scope of this database, encompassing the years 2014–2021 and covering an extensive dataset that includes 1,411 aid interactions with 128 countries worldwide. It enables researchers to examine a wider spectrum of aid operations and track possible alterations or adjustments in Qatar’s foreign aid strategies and priorities over a more extended period and across various regions.

Although QATARAID expands the temporal and regional scope of the data, the key advantage of the OECD-DAC CRS lies in its presentation of the volume of aid operations. While QATARAID aims to capture every foreign aid operation facilitated by Qatar, it does not include the volume of aid in these operations due to the lack of data in open and aid agency sources. However, it provides detailed information on each aid operation, its source, and its destination over an extended time. To the best of our knowledge, QATARAID offers the most comprehensive dataset on Qatari aid for the period from 2014 to 2021. The data collection process has resulted in two complementary datasets: the raw dataset titled “QATARAID Raw Dataset (QATARAID-RAW)” and the “Country Panel Dataset (QATARAID-PANEL)”.⁶

While the QATARAID dataset provides a valuable and comprehensive overview of Qatari foreign aid between 2014 and 2021, several limitations and potential biases in the data collection methods can be acknowledged. First, the reliance on open sources, including news databases and social media platforms, introduces a potential bias toward publicly available information. This may lead to the underrepresentation of certain aid activities that were not widely reported or documented. Additionally, the use of specific keywords in search queries might inadvertently exclude relevant aid projects that were described using different terminology. Despite efforts to cross-reference findings with annual reports of key aid agencies and conducting interviews with decision-makers, there is still a possibility that the dataset is incomplete or inaccurate, especially given the dynamic and sometimes sensitive nature of foreign aid operations. Furthermore, there is a potential for selection bias in

⁵During our search, we uncovered additional aid interactions that are not documented in the official reports of QFFD and QC. For instance, in the year 2021, we identified aid interactions with countries such as Guinea, Greece, Guyana, Moldova, Ethiopia, Malawi, Rwanda, and Senegal that were not previously accounted for.

⁶Detailed information about these datasets and their codebooks is available in the Supplementary Material, Online Appendix Part B.

Table 1. Geographical distribution of Qatar's foreign aid (2014–2021)

	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
MENA	55.6	48.2	45.8	31.4	37.7	40.6	39.1	51.3
Sub-Saharan Africa	25.0	22.6	29.8	27.1	29.7	22.4	19.7	14.7
East Asia and Pacific	8.3	9.5	9.2	11.2	8.6	6.5	5.6	3.1
Europe and Central Asia	6.5	8.0	6.1	14.9	10.3	14.7	18.0	13.8
South Asia	4.6	11.7	8.4	8.5	9.7	14.1	8.2	14.7
North and Latin America and Caribbean	0.0	0.0	0.8	6.9	4.0	1.8	9.4	2.2

Source: QATAR Aid-RAW.

the inductively driven data collection exercise, which could introduce confounding factors into the analysis of Qatar's foreign aid destinations. Unlike Western donors, the centralized authority in Qatar may selectively emphasize specific foreign aid programs while keeping others undisclosed. Lastly, the interview process, though comprehensive, may also be subject to a selection bias as only high-level officials from specific organizations were interviewed, potentially neglecting perspectives from other stakeholders involved in Qatari foreign aid.

Our dataset reveals that Qatar carried out 1,411 foreign aid operations between 2014 and 2021.⁷ Among them, we observe that there were 1,305 bilateral foreign aid operations across 121 countries.⁸ In addition to the bilateral flows, Qatar directly contributed to 95 multilateral aid operations abroad.⁹ However, it is significant to underline that some of Qatar's bilateral foreign aid flows are carried out in partnership with various multilateral organizations. A total of 238 aid operations were carried out in conjunction with multilateral organizations, including mostly the United Nations and its development and humanitarian initiatives. Therefore, bilateral aid flows do not mean that all of these aid operations were solely implemented by Qatar.

According to OECD-DAC statistics, Qatar's ODA consistently increased in recent years, from 2019 to 2021. In 2021, Qatar provided USD 677 million in ODA, marking an increase from the 2019 figure of USD 621 million, reflecting a positive trend in the volume of ODA. Our dataset also indicates that Qatar actively expanded its engagement in aid-related activities from 2019 to 2021. In 2019, Qatar engaged in 170 aid interactions, and this number rose to 225 in 2021, demonstrating a notable increase in the country's overall involvement in providing development assistance.

Beyond this period, using the QATAR Aid dataset, we can discern similar trends in Qatar's aid behavior from 2014 to 2021. Notably, Qatar expanded its overall aid interactions over this period, even in the face of two distinct external shocks: the Qatar blockade in 2017 and the global pandemic in 2020. In both instances, Qatar augmented the number of foreign aid recipients, illustrating the resilience of Qatar's humanitarian diplomacy in the face of these external disruptions. The new dataset allowed us to examine the impact of the blockade in terms of both the number of aid interactions and the number of countries with which Qatar engaged. As seen in [table 1](#), the Middle East North Africa (MENA) region was consistently the top recipient of Qatar's aid operations between 2014 and 2021, accounting for 43 percent of Qatar's total interactions on average. Sub-Saharan Africa—the second largest recipient region—has special importance in Qatar's aid operations, accounting for

⁷In QATAR Aid-RAW, there are 39 aid operations that do not target a specific location (country/region) such as "Pizza Hut and QC cooperate to support World Food Program WFP." In the QATAR Aid-PANEL database, for the sake of brevity, we deleted such observations and created a balanced panel of countries.

⁸The dataset lacks information on whether eleven aid flows are bilateral or not. Thus, out of 1400 flows, we observe 1305 bilateral operations, out of which 1,085 designate a specific location.

⁹We observe ninety-five multilateral operations, out of which sixty-eight target a specific location.

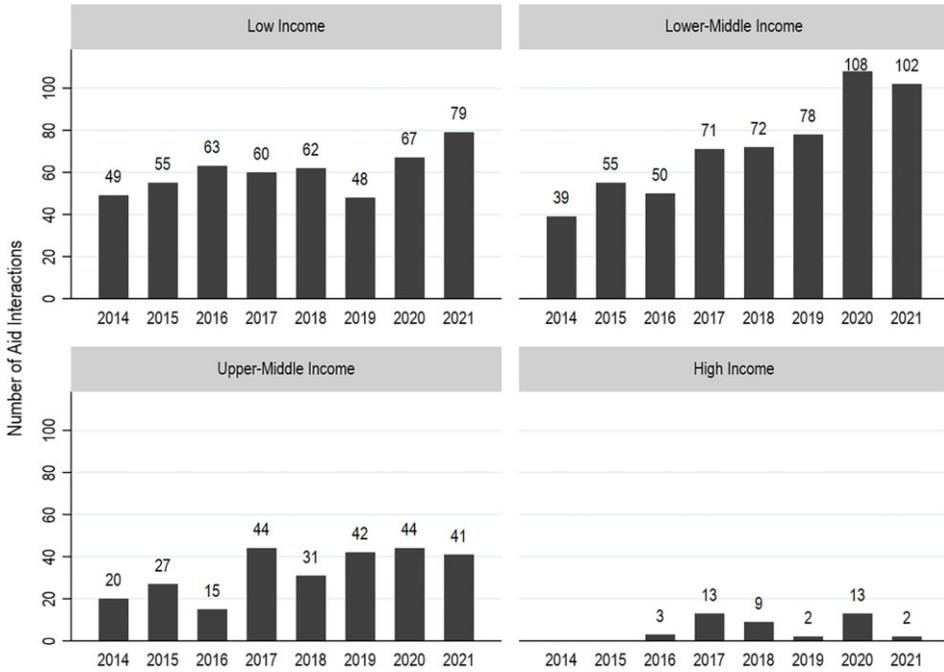


Figure 1. Income group orientation of Qatar's aid operations (2014–2021)

an average of 23 percent of total interactions.¹⁰ It is important to highlight that the geographical distribution is concentrated among a few recipients, where the top ten recipient countries account for around 54 percent of Qatari aid. As can be seen in figure 1, Lower-Middle- and Low-Income Countries receive the bulk of Qatar's foreign aid operations.

Qatar Charity and QRCS are the leading NGOs providing large amounts of foreign aid to the developing world. As seen in figure 2, more than half of Qatar's foreign aid interactions were implemented through private institutions (around 58 percent). Qatar Charity administered approximately 53 percent of the total aid operations, while QRCS conducted 15.9 percent of them. Public institutions such as the QFFD and the Qatari Government (directly) facilitated around 32.5 percent of the total aid operations.

As sectoral distribution is an important indicator for detecting recipient countries' needs orientation, we also analyzed this in our dataset. We identified all ODA sectors, in line with OECD-CRS standards.¹¹ As seen in table 2, humanitarian and emergency response occupies a predominant place in Qatar's public and private operations.

Hypotheses and Empirical Analysis

Hypotheses on Qatar's Foreign Aid Allocation

Based on the literature and extant political atmosphere, we developed and tested four different hypotheses related to Qatari aid. We explored hypotheses concern-

¹⁰These statistics are also consistent with OECD-DAC Statistics. In 2021, Qatar's bilateral ODA was primarily focused on the Middle East, with a substantial allocation of USD 397.8 million. The second largest portion, totaling USD 93.2 million, was earmarked for Africa.

¹¹The most recent version of the purpose codes can be found at <http://www.oecd.org/dac/financing-sustainable-development/development-finance-standards/dacandcrscodelists.htm>.

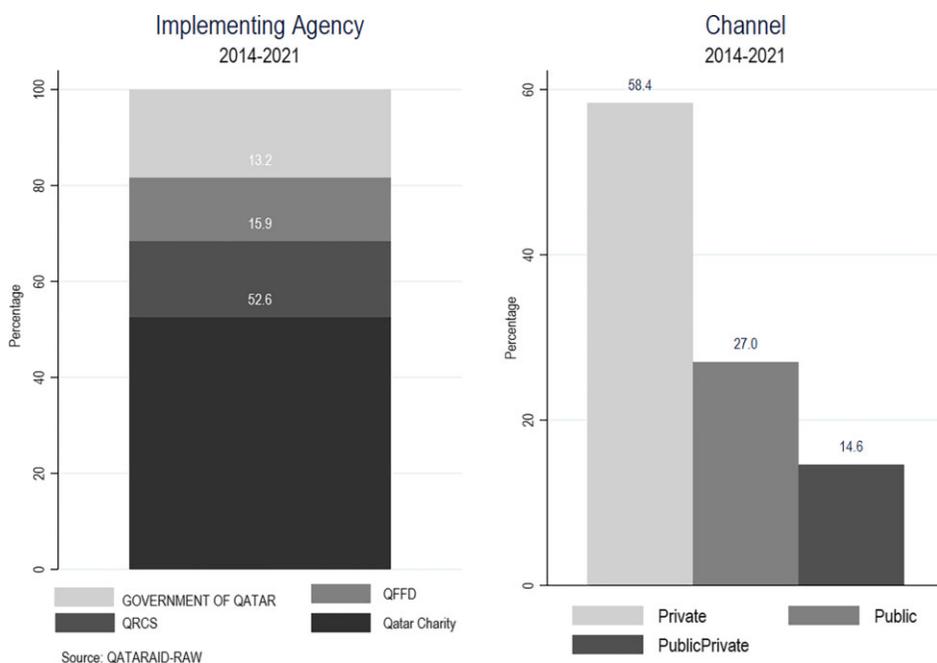


Figure 2. Qatar's aid operations by implementing agency and channel (2014–2021)

Table 2. Distribution of Qatar's foreign aid by sector (2014–2021)

	Number of interactions	Percentage (%)
Humanitarian and Emergency Response	498	38.8%
Health	203	15.8%
Multisector Aid*	134	10.4%
Other Social Infrastructure and Services	91	7.1%
Education	80	6.2%
Refugees in Donor Countries	74	5.8%
Water Supply and Sanitation	66	5.1%
Development Food Assistance	61	4.8%
Government, Civil Society, Conflict, Peace and Security	25	1.9%
Industry, Mining and Construction	18	1.4%
Other Sectors	18	1.4%
Agriculture, Forestry and Fishing	15	1.2%
Total	1283	

*Multisector aid includes urban, rural development, disaster risk reduction, food safety and security, multisector education training, and research/scientific institutions.

ing political interests, trade interests, ethnic and religious affinities, and recipient needs. The four hypotheses are outlined below.

Donors' political interests and foreign policy preferences are significant elements of foreign aid allocation (McKinlay and Little 1977; Alesina and Dollar 2000; De Mesquita and Smith 2007). Examples of how donors adjust their foreign aid behavior to the changing geopolitical atmosphere include U.S. aid during the Cold War and its post-Cold War policy (Meernik et al. 1998; Boschini and Olofsgård 2007). Recent research and data also reveal that political interests are significant factors in non-traditional donors' allocation of foreign aid. For instance, China's

foreign aid is strongly associated with the (non)-recognition of Taiwan and United Nations Security Council membership (Bräutigam 2011; Dreher et al. 2018). In a similar vein, Simmons (1981) and Mertz and Mertz (1983) argue that political considerations can indeed dictate the allocation of Arab aid, and this may result in aid being directed toward countries that share similar foreign policy positions. Al-Ani (1984) disagrees with this assertion and points out that many recipient countries lacked diplomatic relations with OPEC (and therefore Arab) countries in 1980s. This suggests that political interests may not always be the primary factor in aid distribution. Considering these alternative explanations, we offer a broad perspective on the relevance of Qatar's political interests in its foreign aid allocation.

H1a: Qatar's political engagement guides its foreign aid interactions with a potential aid recipient country. As Qatar's political engagements with a country increase, its foreign aid involvement will also increase.

The institutionalization of Qatar's foreign aid intersects with the geopolitical changes in the MENA. In this geopolitical setting, Qatar has been responsive to surrounding conflicts for almost three decades (Kamrava 2011, 539) and has mediated many civil and inter-state conflicts. Qatar's aid diplomacy is a part of its response to regional crises. One interviewee expressed the opinion that Qatar's foreign aid policy prioritizes conflict-affected settings, and argued that providing aid can play a role in de-escalating conflicts, and help reach long-term solutions to current challenges in conflict zones.¹² Another interviewee underlined the fact that once Qatar is involved in mediation attempts in a country—for example, as it was in Sudan to solve the Darfur problem—it continues to provide support in order to address additional problems, ranging from economic aid to supplying essential aid.¹³ The Gulf crisis was an acute geopolitical crisis between Qatar and its regional counterparts. It is a crucial case for examining the economic and political configuration in the region. The blockade resulted in the politicization of Qatar's foreign aid and had a significant impact on Qatar's diplomatic relationships, both within the Gulf region and with external partners. During this period, there was a notable shift in Qatar's foreign policy, which was characterized by a move toward mediation efforts, the implementation of development and humanitarian aid initiatives, and the hosting of major sports and cultural events (Al-Dosari 2021).

H1b: If Qatar mediates a civil war or inter-state dispute, then the countries involved in the mediation process will receive a higher number of foreign aid interactions compared to other countries.

Foreign aid and export markets are closely related, due to export competition and the familiarity of bilateral channels. Top aid donors may provide more foreign aid to certain countries in order to promote their own export interests (Barthel et al. 2014, 362). Additionally, aid can create familiarity with the products and brands of the donor, which can lead to an increase in imports from the donor country to the recipient country (Martínez-Zarzoso et al. 2017). According to one respondent, providing aid to countries in need is Qatar's priority; therefore, there is no expectation to receive anything in return.¹⁴ However, as a sizeable oil and gas exporter, whether Qatar provides more foreign aid to its export partners should be explored.

¹²Interview with Lolwah Rashid Al-Khater, then Assistant Foreign Minister and Spokesperson for the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

¹³Interview with Khalifa bin Jassem Al-Kuwari, Director General of QFFD.

¹⁴Interview with Lolwah Rashid Al-Khater.

H2a: *As Qatar's exports to a country increase, its foreign aid involvement will also increase.*

Although the export-foreign aid nexus is more visible in the literature, in Qatar's case, the impact of imports is more relevant. For any other country, the import-aid relationship would be based on the income effects of aid. However, being the world's most water-stressed country,¹⁵ Qatar's domestic food supply is generated almost entirely through imports. Thus, Qatar's imports from other countries are essential to the survival of the Qatari state, which became acutely evident after the Qatar blockade.¹⁶ Prior to the Qatar boycott, around sixty percent of Qatar's imports (mostly its food supplies) were imported from the boycotting countries. The Qatar blockade disrupted Qatar's imports significantly, and the Qatari government responded by securing new supply/trade routes and increasing domestic production. However, boosting domestic food production created an increase in imports of resource inputs. Therefore, it makes sense to investigate the relationship between foreign aid and import partners to better grasp Qatar's foreign aid attitudes.

H2b: *As Qatar's imports to a country increase, its foreign aid involvement will also increase.*

Traditional Western donors do not prioritize religious motives in international aid (Alesina and Dollar 2000, 40). However, "Muslim countries" often diverge from Western aid providers with respect to the dimension of cultural solidarity. Research indicates that Turkey, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates, among others, place a greater emphasis on ethnic and religious solidarities in their foreign aid decisions (Kavakli 2018, 615; Li 2019). However, it would be an oversimplification to conclude that aid allocation from Muslim countries is primarily motivated by religious or cultural affinities. For example, while Qatar's constitution does enshrine such solidarity, the Turkish constitution does not reflect this sentiment. In the existing literature, there is mixed evidence on the role of Muslim solidarity in international politics, with arguments both for and against the idea that cultural or identical affinities lead to foreign policy convergence among states (Balci and Duman 2022, 348).

While Qatar expands its international aid, it is unclear whether ethnic and religious factors play a role in Qatar's aid interactions. During the interviews, one respondent argued that Islamic and local Qatari values dictate that the state ought to channel aid to whoever is in need; however, she added that "given the drastic developmental challenges facing our immediate surroundings and our region, a significant percentage of our aid goes to these [Muslim] countries."¹⁷

H3: *As Qatar's cultural similarities with recipient countries increase, its foreign aid involvement will also increase.*

Recipient needs, or the aid-development nexus, is another salient issue in the literature. Recipient-oriented explanations indicate that donors often provide foreign aid to lessen poverty in recipient countries, driven by "the simple desire to help the less fortunate" (Dudley and Montmarquette 1976, 132). Donors also provide aid to contribute to recipients' economic development. Our interviews suggest that Qatar prioritizes assistance to countries with greater needs, which are mainly developing countries.¹⁸ Therefore, we specifically look at whether "recipient need" was a priority for Qatar's foreign aid.

¹⁵See <https://www.wri.org/applications/aqueduct/country-rankings>.

¹⁶While its imports from Saudi Arabia, the UAE, and Bahrain accounted for 10.8 percent of Qatar's total imports in 2016, this rate was only 0.3 percent in 2018 (WITS-World Bank, 2019).

¹⁷Interview with Qatar Charity.

¹⁸Interview with Lolwah Rashid Al-Khater.

H4a: *As a country's level of development increases, Qatar's foreign aid involvement will decrease.*

H4b: *Qatar's foreign aid interactions increase as a function of Infant Mortality Rate.*

Methodology: The Determinants of Qatari Foreign Aid

The challenge with these hypotheses regarding the determinants of Qatari aid allocation is that their accuracy can only be assessed within a multivariate statistical framework that controls for the independent effects of potential factors. Our dependent variable is the number of Qatar's foreign aid interactions with recipient countries from 2014 to 2021. We have a balanced dataset for 194 countries for eight years.¹⁹

Beginning with donor interests, our initial examination focuses on political factors. To address our first hypothesis and test the role of political interests and foreign policy preferences, we utilize two different measures. First, we generate a "political interests" variable, which is representative of Qatar's political interests, by counting the number of Qatar's diplomatic interactions.²⁰ Our political interest variable is a direct measure of to what extent Qatar is politically engaged with other countries. Next, to investigate whether Qatar's mediation track record affects the level of foreign aid engagement with recipient countries, we control mediation activities in recipient countries. We generated a "mediation" variable and coded countries as "1" if Qatar mediated an interstate or domestic conflict in this country and "0" if it did not.²¹ To investigate the effect of the blockade on Qatar's prospective aid, we define a "Qatar-Blockade" dummy, which is "1" for the countries that supported the blockade against Qatar and "0" otherwise.²² Using the blockade variable, we aim to measure if and to what extent acute geopolitical changes affect Qatar's aid policy.

We use the logarithm of Qatar's exports to recipient countries and imports from recipient countries to investigate the importance of Qatar's commercial interests in its aid behavior. To assess this, we collected trade data from Qatar's Planning and Statistics Authority. To examine how cultural similarities shape Qatar's aid operations, we included variables related to religious and ethnic identities. We created a dichotomous variable for Muslim-majority countries (valued at "1" if the majority of the population is Muslim and "0" otherwise), utilizing [Maoz and Henderson's \(2013\) World Religion Dataset](#).²³ To measure ethnic similarity, we used a binary Arab League membership variable, valued at "1" if the recipient country is a member of the Arab League and "0" otherwise. Both the Muslim-majority and Arab League variables are reflections of a country's majority population.

We used size of the recipient population, infant mortality rate (per 1,000 live births), and gross domestic product (GDP) per capita as variables to measure the recipient needs hypothesis. Although population size can be seen as a potential source of state power, and thus signal an important geopolitical issue for donors, it also implies recipient need in certain circumstances. In this sense, we follow a certain strand in the literature that uses population as a variable to indicate recipient need ([Kilby and Dreher 2010](#), 339). Similarly, the infant mortality rate shows the immediate need for health-related aid ([Williamson 2008](#), 190). The GDP per capita

¹⁹Note that out of 194 countries, there are 68 countries receiving no aid at all for the period in question.

²⁰We collected and coded Qatar's diplomatic interactions from the Qatar Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Bilateral meetings and visits at the leader and ministerial level are all coded.

²¹Data on Qatar's mediation activities are provided by the Qatar Ministry of Foreign Affairs (see Table A.1 in the Supplementary Online Appendix).

²²Bahrain, Chad, the Comoros, Djibouti, Egypt, Jordan, Libya, the Maldives, Mauritania, Niger, Saudi Arabia, Senegal, and the United Arab Emirates all supported the blockade against Qatar, either by cutting or downgrading ties with Qatar.

²³This provided us with country-specific data on what percentage of each country's population identifies as Muslim.

variable is often considered the most appropriate proxy of poverty. The information on the corresponding macroeconomic indicators is taken from the World Development Indicators database of the World Bank.

When analyzing the factors influencing Qatar's aid allocation, it should be considered that not only do countries receive different amounts of aid, but also many countries do not receive any aid at all. To select the appropriate econometric specification to overcome this potential sample selection problem, we have relied on previous studies that estimate a Heckman (1979) selection or a two-part model (see among others, Neumayer 2003; Berthélemy and Tichit 2004; Drury et al. 2005; Berthélemy 2006; Fleck and Kilby 2010). In both models, the estimation process is divided into the selection and allocation steps. The first stage is often referred to as the "aid decision stage, selection or gate-keeping stage" in which the selection of countries to receive aid is determined. This stage is typically analyzed via logit/probit regression models. The second stage is known as the "allocation stage/level stage," which is estimated using ordinary least squares (OLS) regression techniques. At this stage, it is determined how much aid is allocated to a country that has been selected as an aid recipient in the first stage. We prefer to utilize Heckman's selection model instead of the two-step model because it permits the error terms in both stages to be correlated. It does not necessitate that decisions at the aid decision stage are made independently of the decisions at the allocation stage.

As we aim to inquire into the motivation behind Qatar's foreign aid operations, our main dependent variable is the number of Qatar's foreign aid operations. However, the Heckman estimator handles sample selection where the outcome can be modeled by linear regression. As the number of aid interactions is a count variable, we cannot apply the classic Heckman procedure. Still, implementing the maximum likelihood estimator derived from Terza (1998), we estimate a Poisson model with sample selection, using Heckman's two-step methodology. At the selection/aid decision stage, Qatar chooses the recipient countries to which aid is provided, and at the allocation stage, it decides the number of aid interactions for selected recipients.

In the first stage of our analysis, a probit specification is estimated, where the probability of Qatar's foreign aid decision is regressed on the independent variables that could affect the aid decision. It is carried out in all countries. The selection equation (selection stage) can be written as follows:

$$Aid\ Status_{it} = Aid\ Status_{it-1}\alpha + X_{it-1}\beta + u_{it}. \quad (1)$$

The second equation (Equation 2) is carried out only for the selected sample, i.e., aid receiving countries. The Poisson regression equation (allocation/level stage) can be written as:

$$E[Aid\ Interactions_{it}|X_{it-1}, Aid\ Status = 1] = e^{X_{it-1}\gamma + u_{it}}, \quad (2)$$

where $Aid\ Status_{it}$ is a binary variable having a value of "1" if country i had received foreign aid from Qatar in year t and "0" otherwise. $Aid\ Status_{it-1}$ is the lagged foreign aid status of countries. It is valued "1" if the country has received aid from Qatar at time $t-1$ and "0" otherwise. The lagged value of the status of aid is added to Equation (1) to control for the possible persistence/inertia in aid behavior of Qatar. X_{it-1} includes independent variables at time $t-1$, as well as a time period dummy for the COVID-19 pandemic.²⁴ To avoid possible endogeneity between country controls and aid behavior, the country-specific variables are included in the regressions in their one-year lagged values. Another motivation for lagging explanatory variables is to capture the possibility that the impact of our variables on foreign aid might occur

²⁴As an alternative to this variable, we use year dummies in our specifications.

Table 3. Descriptive statistics (2014–2021)

	No. of obs.	Mean	Std. dev.	Min	Max
Number of Aid Interactions	1,552	0.88	2.74	0	38
Political Interests (number of interactions)	1,552	3.16	5.23	0	63
Qatar Blockade	1,552	0.04	0.19	0	1
Polity	802	4.34	5.95	−10	10
Electoral Democracy	1,368	0.53	0.25	0	1
Mediation Efforts	1,552	0.01	0.1	0	1
Muslim Majority	1,552	0.25	0.43	0	1
Arab League	1,552	0.11	0.31	0	1
Imports (in logarithms)	1,552	6.15	5.04	0	15.6
Exports (in logarithms)	1,552	6.92	4.76	0	17.3
Trade (in logarithms)	1,490	8.22	4.55	0	17.4
GDP per Capita (in logarithms)	1,504	8.71	1.42	5.4	12.1
GDP per Capita Growth	1,505	1.18	5.28	−34.8	43.8
Infant Mortality Rate (per 1,000 live births, in logarithms)	1,496	2.61	1.06	0	4.6
Population (in logarithms)	1,552	15.63	2.16	9.3	21.1
Distance from Qatar	1,512	8.52	0.76	4.9	9.6

Source: QATAR AID.

with a time lag.²⁵ Table 3 reveals the summary of statistics for our variables utilized in the study, while Table A.2 in the [Supplementary Online Appendix](#) presents the correlation matrix.

Empirical Results

First, the factors spurring Qatar's likelihood of providing foreign aid to countries are analyzed using probit specifications. Next, the impact of country-specific factors such as politics, trade interests, ethnic and religious dimensions, and recipient needs are estimated according to the number of aid interactions. Estimation results from several different selection models of Qatari foreign aid allocation are presented in table 4.²⁶ Models 1 and 2 in table 4 differ only with regard to how the recipient needs hypothesis is proxied. In Model 1, we measure the recipient needs hypothesis by controlling for GDP per capita and population size. In Model 2, to control for recipient needs, we utilize the infant mortality rate and population size.²⁷

In Model 1, we observe a positive and significant coefficient for lagged aid status, implying persistence in Qatar's aid behavior. We find that the decision of aid provision in the previous year positively affected the next year's decision. The estimated coefficient suggests that, for a typical country, there is a 21 percent higher probability of receiving aid if it has also received aid in the previous year.²⁸ This finding suggests bureaucratic inertia in aid provision (Lai 2003).

Consistent with the donor interest variable, the political interest variable has a positive estimated coefficient in the selection stage of Model 1. The results suggest that as Qatar's political engagement with other countries increases, the probability

²⁵Selecting a one-year lag over a different time period is consistent with previous studies on the determinants of foreign aid (see among others, Neumayer 2003 and Fuchs and Vadlamannati 2013).

²⁶The results confirm the choice of our methodology, where we reject the hypothesis that the correlation coefficient between the selection and outcome errors is 0.

²⁷As the GDP per capita is highly correlated with infant mortality rates, we use these variables interchangeably in the estimations.

²⁸The above probability derivative for Aid Status and the rest of the variables of the selection equation are evaluated with all other variables set to the sample mean.

Table 4. Heckman-Poisson estimation results (2014–2021)

	Model 1		Model 2		Model 3		Model 4	
	Aid decision	Aid interactions	Aid decision	Aid interactions	Aid decision	Aid interactions	Aid decision	Aid interactions
Aid status (ϵ_1)	0.9275*** (0.000)		1.0099*** (0.000)		0.9229*** (0.000)		1.0007*** (0.000)	
Political interests (ϵ_1)	0.0394*** (0.000)	0.0092 (0.352)	0.0309*** (0.001)	-0.0007 (0.934)	0.0359*** (0.000)	0.0055 (0.549)	0.0270*** (0.004)	-0.0033 (0.703)
Mediation efforts (ϵ_1)	0.2006 (0.650)	0.5610** (0.019)	0.4206 (0.304)	0.4741** (0.029)	0.0775 (0.858)	0.5306** (0.017)	0.3038 (0.454)	0.4535** (0.041)
Qatar blockade					-0.6092*** (0.005)	-0.6205*** (0.002)	-0.6594*** (0.002)	-0.6224*** (0.002)
Muslim majority	0.6887*** (0.000)	0.3598*** (0.007)	0.6811*** (0.000)	0.3066** (0.018)	0.7519*** (0.000)	0.3571*** (0.008)	0.7497*** (0.000)	0.3149** (0.013)
Arab league	0.0169 (0.921)	0.6932*** (0.000)	0.0282 (0.867)	0.7988*** (0.000)	0.1759 (0.329)	0.7271*** (0.000)	0.2017 (0.258)	0.8156*** (0.000)
Imports (in logs, ϵ_1)	0.0251* (0.090)	0.0326** (0.040)	0.0053 (0.715)	0.0180 (0.252)	0.0213 (0.152)	0.0275* (0.081)	0.0004 (0.980)	0.0164 (0.311)
GDP per capita (ϵ_1 , logs)	-0.2978*** (0.000)	-0.0866 (0.166)			-0.2912*** (0.000)	-0.0694 (0.272)		
Infant mortality (ϵ_1)			0.2494*** (0.000)	-0.0490 (0.500)			0.2345*** (0.000)	-0.0459 (0.531)
Population (in logs)	0.0473 (0.168)	0.0184 (0.650)	0.0976*** (0.003)	0.0406 (0.346)	0.0541 (0.117)	0.0105 (0.791)	0.1071*** (0.001)	0.0282 (0.507)
Time period dummy (Covid)	0.0707 (0.455)	0.0952 (0.325)	0.0744 (0.422)	0.1402 (0.145)	0.0950 (0.318)	0.0973 (0.307)	0.0952 (0.308)	0.1434 (0.132)
Observations	1,329	1,329	1,309	1,309	1,329	1,329	1,309	1,309

Notes: Robust standard errors in parentheses. * $p < 0.1$, ** $p < 0.05$, and *** $p < 0.01$. All the specifications verify the existence of sample selection bias.

of providing aid to this country increases. The coefficient estimate implies that one additional political interaction increases the probability of aid provision by 1 percent. This result supports the diplomacy-aid nexus, showing how Qatar's political engagement shapes its foreign aid policy. However, when examining the allocation equation in Model 1, we notice an insignificant coefficient. In sum, political interests appear to affect the decision to send aid to a country but have no significant effect on aid interactions. This may suggest that political interests encourage Qatar to engage in foreign aid for symbolic purposes such as shows of support or future commitment.

Qatar's mediation attempts—as one of our primary geopolitical variables—are found to be insignificant at the aid decision (selection) stage (Model 1, [table 4](#)). However, it is found to be strongly and positively associated with Qatar's foreign aid interactions. In other words, mediation programs do not have a significant correlation with aid initiation but have a strong positive effect on the volume of aid, suggesting that once Qatar has decided to mediate through foreign aid, it invests substantial amounts in those countries. If Qatar mediates a civil war or inter-state dispute, then these countries had 0.56 more foreign aid interactions with Qatar in comparison to other countries. One respondent in our interviews claimed that Qatar uses its foreign aid as a de-escalation strategy.²⁹ This finding also empirically corroborates some remarks in the literature, claiming that conflict mediation and Qatar's humanitarian diplomacy are linked ([Barakat 2019](#)).

It is worth underlining that Qatar's mediation efforts are realized more frequently in Muslim-majority countries. Unsurprisingly, countries with Muslim-majority populations are positively associated with Qatar's aid response in Model 1. The effect of being a Muslim-majority country is significant in both the allocation decision and aid interaction stages. The probability of receiving aid is 16 percent higher for Muslim-majority countries compared to non-Muslim-majority countries. Furthermore, the number of aid interactions is 0.35 higher with Muslim-majority countries than with non-Muslim-majority countries. However, based on regional tensions, we suggest that the Muslim variable does not guarantee a strong values-based attitude in Qatar's aid provision. Therefore, the religion variable might affect Qatar's foreign aid policy not only because of religion itself but also because of geopolitics. During our interviews, respondents also posited that Islamic values are in line with universal values.³⁰ Another cultural variable is ethnic similarity. In this regard, we used Arab League membership to try to understand if Qatar's provision of foreign aid was affected by ethnic similarity. We found that the coefficient of being an Arab League member is significantly positive only in the aid interaction stage, while aid interactions are 0.69 higher for Arab League members than non-members. This suggests that although ethnic affiliation may not be as influential as religious affinity in Qatar's aid provision decisions, Qatar tends to invest significantly in Arab countries more than non-Arab ones. Our results indicate a strong effect for ethnic and religious similarities, supporting the donor-interest hypothesis.

To account for commercial donor interests, we include Qatar's imports in our models. As Qatar's imports are highly correlated with its exports, we have included only the imports in our specifications (see [Table A.2](#) for the correlation matrix in the [Online Appendix](#)). While the coefficient of Qatar's imports is positive in both of the stages in Model 1, we do not find a robust effect among different models. The coefficient for exports (as well as trade) is significant at the selection stage and insignificant at the margins for all of the models. However, when we replicate our estimates including only exports (without including imports and population as they are highly correlated with exports, see [Online Appendix Table A.3](#)), we find

²⁹Interview with Shaheen Ali Al Kaabi, Assistant Director of the Department of International Cooperation at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

³⁰Interview with Shaheen Ali Al Kaabi.

a relatively small positive coefficient³¹ for the aid decision stage,³² which supports our commercial interests hypothesis.

Almost all of our respondents underlined the fact that Qatar provides foreign aid independent of its economic and political interests. Rather, they explained Qatar's foreign aid behavior from a needs-based perspective. Consistent with the recipient needs hypothesis, there is a negative coefficient of the logarithm of GDP per capita, highlighting the humanitarian motive for the aid selection (aid decision) stage of Model 1. The coefficient estimate indicates that a 1 percent increase in GDP per capita is associated with a 6.8 percent decrease in the probability of receiving aid. The results reveal that wealthier countries are less likely to receive foreign aid from Qatar. In contrast to our assessment of GDP per capita, we find that the population rate does not have a robust association with Qatari foreign aid. At this stage, the results discussed in Model 1 are confirmed in Model 2. Turning to Model 2, where we measure the recipient needs hypothesis by controlling for infant mortality rates and population size, we observe a negative coefficient of the logarithm of infant mortality for the aid decision stage. Countries with higher infant mortality rates are significantly more likely to receive economic aid. The coefficient estimate suggests that a 1 percent increase in the infant mortality rate is associated with a 6 percent higher probability of receiving aid. In this case, it appears that countries with higher infant mortality rates are more likely to receive aid, which may reflect a response to humanitarian needs or a focus on addressing healthcare and social issues in those countries.

The findings related to infant mortality rate, along with GDP per capita, point to the fact that as recipient countries develop, their probability of receiving aid lessens, which is in line with the needs-based hypothesis, as well as the previous findings in the literature. However, similar to the political interest variable, the recipient needs variable appears to influence the decision to provide aid to a country but does not significantly affect the quantity of aid interactions. The decision to provide aid to these countries might be driven by Qatar's desire to highlight its commitment to humanitarian and solidarity goals, establish geopolitical influence, or strengthen diplomatic ties. It may be related to the severity of the humanitarian situation, such as a catastrophe or disaster in the recipient country. Nevertheless, the lack of a significant impact on the number of aid interactions implies that once Qatar decides to allocate aid, the extent of support given to recipient nations may be more influenced by strategic, political, or symbolic considerations than by recipient needs.

We introduce the Qatar blockade as another political variable capturing donor interest in Models 3 and 4. As expected, the results signify a negative association of the Qatar blockade with Qatar's foreign aid interactions in the aid decision equation. That is, if a country imposed sanctions on Qatar and maintained them, the probability of receiving aid significantly decreases by 0.14 percent compared to other countries that did not impose any restrictions. Qatar had 0.62 fewer interactions with blockading countries than with non-blockading countries. This does not mean that Qatar did not provide any foreign aid to countries that supported the Qatar blockade. For example, one of our respondents underlined the fact that Qatari NGOs still offered foreign aid to Mauritania and Djibouti over the three years of the blockade despite their position.³³ However, as a general principle, the provision of bilateral and public foreign aid becomes more difficult without diplomatic ties.

³¹A one percent increase in exports from Qatar to target countries raises the probability of those countries receiving foreign aid by 0.6 percent.

³²While we did identify significant coefficients for the exports variable, it is worth noting that the estimation results for exports exhibit significant variations when the population rate is integrated into the models. Consequently, we have chosen to present the results from the model with imports, as it includes a more extensive set of control variables.

³³Interview with Qatar Red Crescent Society.

Robustness Checks

All of the models exhibit robustness in terms of the magnitude and direction of their effects, but more importantly, they are robust in identifying which factors have the most significant impact on aid. Detailed results and additional information are available in the [Online Supplementary Appendix](#). Beginning with the decision to provide aid, we observe that previous aid provision has the highest impact on the probability of aid. In the context of donor interests, being a Muslim-majority country has the most influence on aid decisions, followed by the impact of the Qatar blockade and political interests. Regarding the recipient needs hypothesis, while the coefficients for GDP per capita and infant mortality rates are statistically significant, their magnitudes are lower compared to those of the donor interest variables. Consequently, we can conclude that in the context of Qatar's aid allocation decisions, donor interests hold greater importance than recipient needs. We did not discover a significant coefficient for the time period dummy representing COVID-19. To ensure the robustness of our findings, we conducted a robustness check by including year dummies in our model specifications. The results remain consistent even with the inclusion of year dummies (Online Appendix Table A.4 for details).

Finally, we examine the robustness of our results by considering additional covariates and alternative indicators, which not only strengthen our findings but also shed light on certain issues in Table A.5 in the Online Appendix. Our findings are also robust for these additional variables. To comprehensively address the multifaceted and complex nature of political relationships between countries, we introduce a set of political variables commonly utilized in the literature. Specifically, we incorporate the "polity" variable, which gauges a country's democratic credentials ([Dreher et al. 2018](#)), and the "electoral democracy index" from the Varieties of Democracy Project. These additions allow us to control for the impact of the regime type. Given that these two variables are correlated, we include them in our models interchangeably to ensure a thorough examination of their influence, yet neither of them is found to be significant. In order to examine the hypothesis that donors are more inclined to provide aid to countries in their geographical proximity ([Dollar and Levin 2006](#)), we introduce a "distance from Qatar" variable (in logarithms) into our estimations. Our results reveal a significant negative relationship between the amount of aid provided and the distance between the capital of the donor (Qatar) and the capital of the recipient for the allocation equation. This suggests that aid tends to decrease as the geographical distance between the two countries increases, supporting the idea that donors may indeed be more inclined to assist neighboring countries. To delve deeper into the recipient needs hypothesis, we have introduced a variable representing the GDP per capita growth of the recipient countries into our analysis to consider business cycle effects. Similar to the findings regarding a country's income level, we observed a negative and statistically significant coefficient for GDP per capita growth in the context of the selection stages of aid distribution. However, it is important to note that the impact of GDP per capita growth is considerably lower in magnitude when compared to the influence of GDP per capita itself. This implies that while economic growth plays a role in aid allocation decisions, the absolute income level of recipient countries remains a more dominant factor in determining the allocation of aid, particularly during the decision of aid provision.

Conclusion

There was previously a dearth of reliable data regarding Qatar's foreign aid allocations. This paucity of information hampered systematic investigations into the nation's motivations for providing such aid. To fill this gap, we created the QATAR AID

Database, which is the most comprehensive dataset on the foreign aid allocation of Qatar, a small state emerging donor, from 2014 to 2021. In this article, we utilize the QATAR AID Database to deepen our understanding of the motivations behind this emerging donor's aid allocation. Throughout our analysis, we find evidence for persistence in aid behavior and for Qatar prioritizing recipient countries in its aid delivery. In terms of the aid selection process, our results support both the recipient need and donor interest theories presented above. Our findings suggest that when allocating aid, Qatar is concerned with both lessening physical suffering (i.e., reducing infant mortality) and improving economic conditions (increasing income per capita).

More interestingly, our study indicates the important role of diplomacy and the positive return on diplomatic efforts in Qatar's foreign aid allocation decisions. The results suggest that the more Qatar is politically engaged with a country (both in terms of diplomatic interactions and/or mediation activities), the higher the probability that Qatar will provide aid to this country. In contrast to these more cooperative relationships, the Qatar blockade is found to negatively affect Qatar's aid decision. In terms of the intensity of aid, we show that ethnic and cultural similarities, as well as Qatar's import relations, determine the number of aid interactions. We reveal that the countries from which Qatar imported food and necessary materials during the blockade received more aid from Qatar in comparison to others. Qatari foreign aid prioritizes income level over economic growth; however, the former remains a more prevailing feature in both determining the allocation and the decision of aid provision.

Our analysis shows that although Qatar's aid allocation decisions prioritize recipient needs, aid provision also depends on foreign policy interests in the targeted countries. The intent to provide aid demonstrates Qatar's willingness to respond to recipient needs, prior commitments, and promoting Qatar's international reputation. Once Qatar is involved in a mediation initiative, the countries taking part in this process are more likely to receive aid, showing Qatar's utilization of foreign aid as a complementary tool for the success of its mediation efforts. Here, again, reputational concerns prevail as a motive tying it to the success of the foreign policy initiatives. It was found that Arab and Muslim-majority states receive more aid, and similarly, the probability of countries geographically closer to Qatar receiving more aid than distant ones is higher. We found that while there are significant geopolitical and interest-based determinants of Qatar's foreign aid, these do not rule out need-based aid provision.

The political situation in the recipient country is not significant among Qatar's donor preferences; the quality of democratic institutions and government styles are not determining factors for receiving aid. This attitude differs from, for example, the Asian preference of providing less conditional aid for debt trap diplomacy (Dole et al. 2021). Qatar does not offer concessional loans, and there is a balance between state and private channels for aid delivery as opposed to Chinese aid (Dreher et al. 2018). The Qatari case suggests a different kind of politicization of aid—rather, for the purposes of reputation, geopolitics, and security. As discussed, Qatar sent less aid to blockading countries during the Gulf Crisis and provided more aid to import partners. There is no significant economic focus or trade benefit in Qatari foreign aid with these countries. Both of these cases are noteworthy since Qatar pursues a persistent foreign aid policy without seasonal fluctuations. This persistence can be observed in the resilience of aid operations during the pandemic and the overall consistency of aid during the Gulf Crisis. The deviations in aid patterns vis-à-vis blockading countries and import partners exemplify small state aid behavior for geopolitical and security perspectives. Qatar's aid to these countries is in part a nuanced diplomatic effort to project the image of an internationally responsible partner and national reinforcement rather than to leverage dominance and hegemony.

Our findings rule out rouge aid categorization for Qatar aid since it stands between OECD-DAC and non-DAC donors, and is somewhat closer to the OECD-DAC norms. The mainstream foreign aid studies within international relations scholarship “treats foreign aid as unidirectional with Euro-American actors as donors and Global South actors as recipients” (Benabdallah 2022, 2) or as rogue aid actors. Further country-specific studies, like ours on Qatar, would help to go beyond this binary framework and expand the horizons of the mainstream, Eurocentric approach to build a more universal understanding of foreign aid. Our contribution is to underline the distinctive features of Qatar’s foreign aid role in order to push the limits of mainstream scholarship, to point out the necessity of deconstructing the generalized attributions to emerging donors, and to enrich the understanding of plurality in the foreign aid space in the Global South.

For future studies, although we have focused on aid decisions and aid interactions in its entirety, QATARAID can be utilized to investigate particular sectors of aid or target regions/countries in Qatar’s aid and modalities of aid over time. This database also provides information for investigating the impact of external shocks or disasters on foreign aid attitudes. Alternatively, QATARAID may help researchers to explore the effectiveness of Qatar’s foreign aid and provide feedback on the lively debate regarding the ultimate outcomes of aid. Another future study utilizing QATARAID could be a comparison of Qatar and other non-DAC countries to better understand the plurality of foreign aid from the Global South.

Supplementary information

Supplementary information is available in the *ISAFPA* data archive.

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