

# United States “Buying” U.N. Votes?

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**DATA 512: Human-Centered Data Science**  
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# Research Question

— — —

Does increased US foreign aid to a country(s) result in their greater voting “alignment” for pro-US policies/resolutions in the United Nations?

# Background

— — —

[March 2018]

“U.S. Ambassador to the United Nations Nikki Haley is **proposing a sweeping reassessment of U.S. foreign assistance with a view to punishing dozens of poor countries that vote against U.S. policies at the U.N.**, according to a confidential internal memo drafted by her staff.”<sup>1</sup>

Cynically: Does the US buying votes stifle the democratic nature of the institution?



<https://foreignpolicy.com/2018/03/15/haley-vote-with-u-s-at-u-n-or-well-cut-your-aid/>

# The Data I: United Nation General Assembly Voting

**1946 - 2017**

|   | rcid | ccode | session | member | vote | Country | Countryname              | year |
|---|------|-------|---------|--------|------|---------|--------------------------|------|
| 0 | 3.0  | 2     | 1.0     | 1.0    | 1    | USA     | United States of America | 1946 |
| 1 | 3.0  | 20    | 1.0     | 1.0    | 3    | CAN     | Canada                   | 1946 |
| 2 | 3.0  | 31    | 1.0     | NaN    | 9    | BHS     | Bahamas                  | 1946 |
| 3 | 3.0  | 40    | 1.0     | 1.0    | 1    | CUB     | Cuba                     | 1946 |
| 4 | 3.0  | 41    | 1.0     | 1.0    | 1    | HTI     | Haiti                    | 1946 |

Erik Voeten "[Data and Analyses of Voting in the UN General Assembly](#)" Routledge Handbook of International Organization, edited by Bob Reinalda (published May 27, 2013). Available at SSRN:<http://ssrn.com/abstract=2111149>

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# The Data II: US Foreign Aid

| _date | activity_end_date | transaction_type_id | transaction_type_name | fiscal_year | current_amount | constant_amount | USG_sector_id | USG_sector_name   | submission_id |
|-------|-------------------|---------------------|-----------------------|-------------|----------------|-----------------|---------------|---|---------------|
| NaN   | NaN               | 2                   | Obligations           | 2011        | 9941000000     | 10731991839     | 3             | Stabilization<br>Operations and<br>Security Sector R... | 28            |
| NaN   | NaN               | 2                   | Obligations           | 2012        | 9243000000     | 9799467226      | 3             | Stabilization<br>Operations and<br>Security Sector R... | 28            |
| NaN   | NaN               | 3                   | Disbursements         | 2011        | 7840175215     | 8464007285      | 3             | Stabilization<br>Operations and<br>Security Sector R... | 28            |
| NaN   | NaN               | 3                   | Disbursements         | 2013        | 7764310985     | 8095048196      | 3             | Stabilization<br>Operations and<br>Security Sector R... | 28            |
| NaN   | NaN               | 2                   | Obligations           | 2013        | 6928000000     | 7223112779      | 3             | Stabilization<br>Operations and<br>Security Sector R... | 28            |

<https://explorer.usaid.gov/about.html>

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# Interpreting “Alignment”

— — —

- **Different interpretations of alignment:**
  - **Include non-important votes? Are they noisy?**



*The United States doesn't have high stakes in many of the issues put to a vote in UNGA, and pressuring countries is costly, in terms of both resources and political capital.*

- **Is abstain “non-oppositional” to US?**

*“Abstaining or declining to vote may be a politically palatable way for countries to assuage citizen demands at home while also not actively opposing the United States. The United States may welcome abstention or absence from a country that would otherwise actively oppose its position”<sup>1</sup>*

# Interpreting “Alignment”

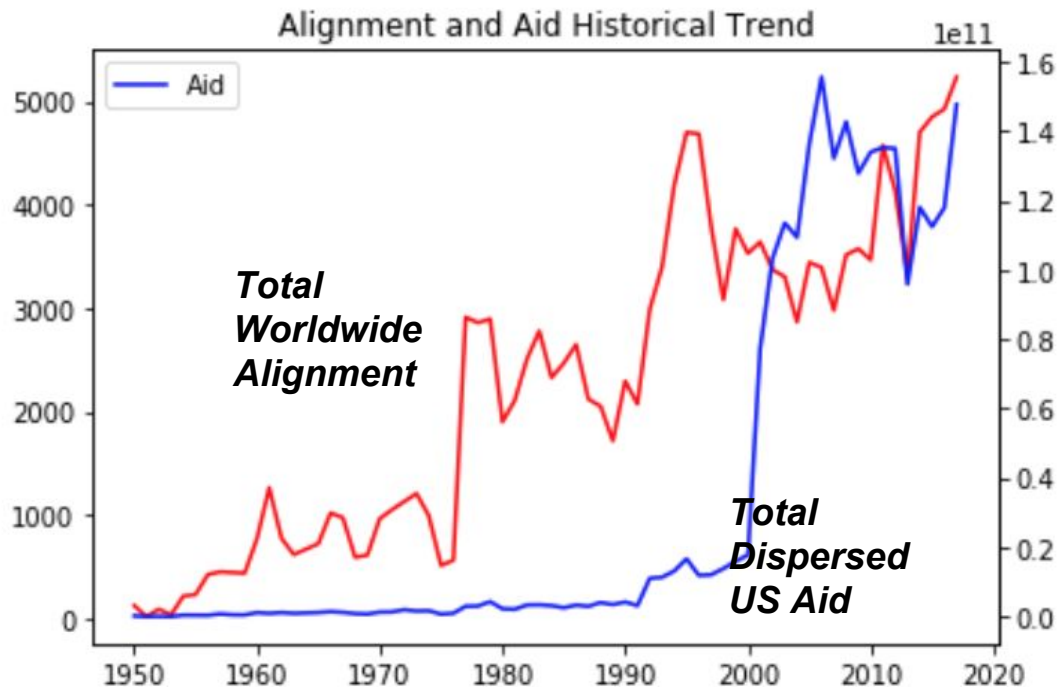
— — —

- Different interpretations of alignment:
  - Include non-important votes?  **noisy**
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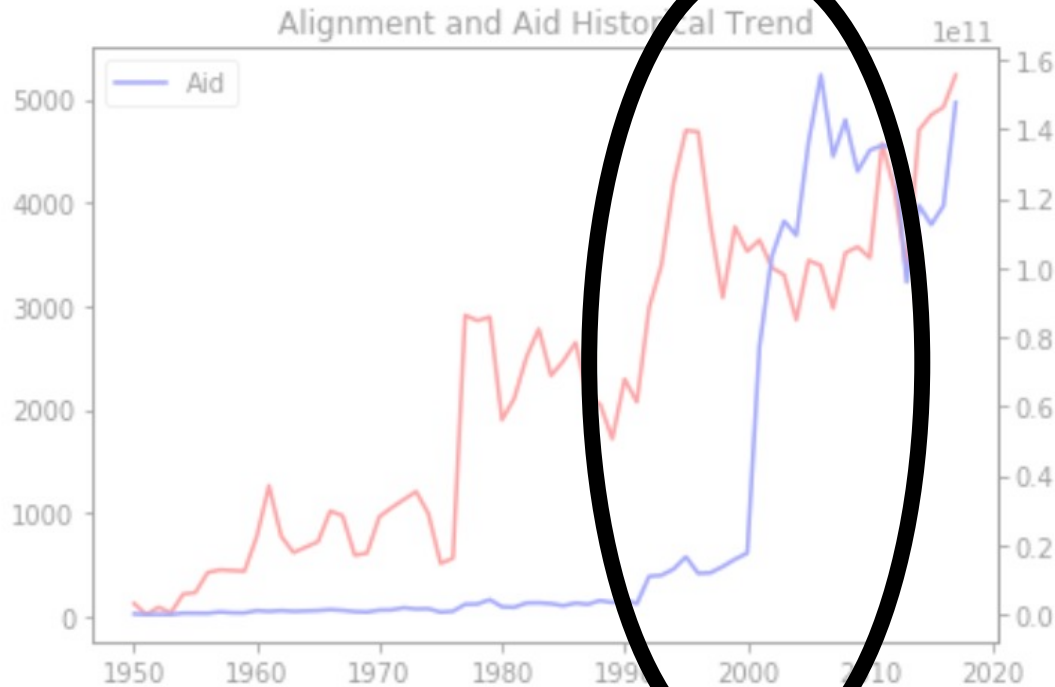
# Exhibit I: Smush All Countries -- By Year

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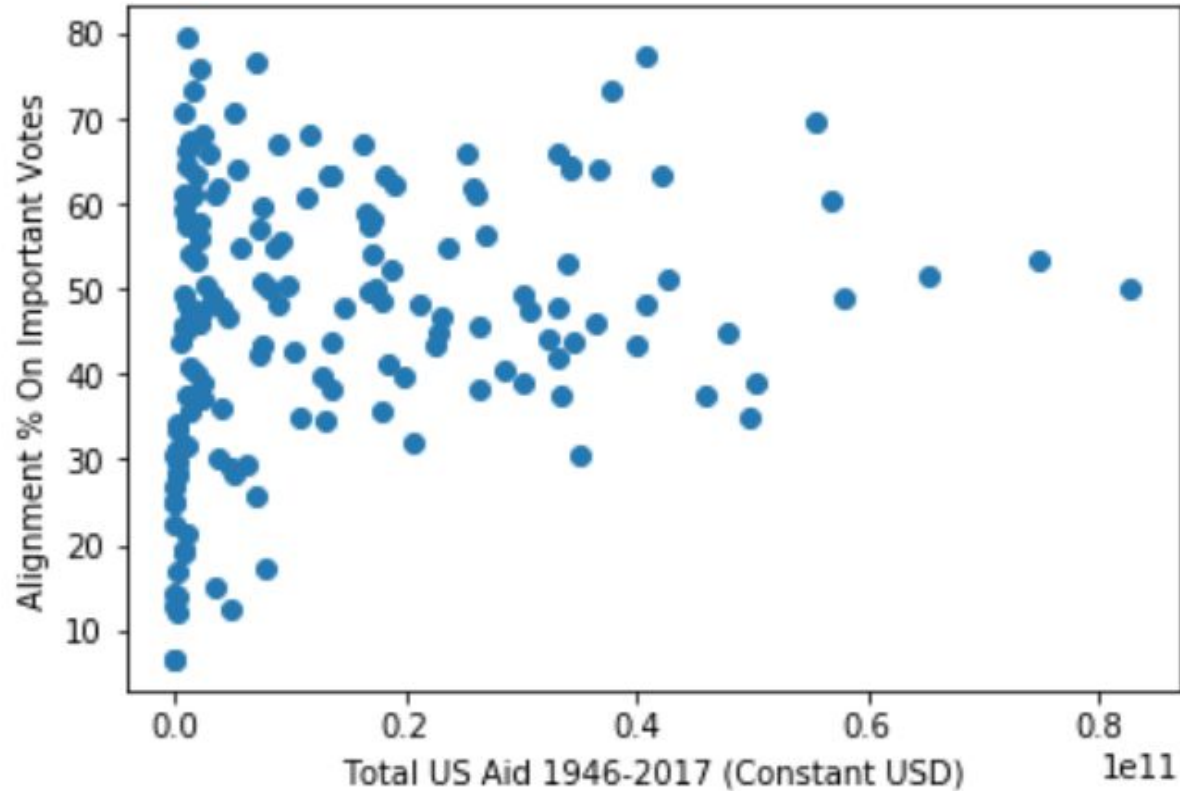
- Ca. 2000
  - Iraq
  - Afghanistan
- **BIAS**
- **SKEW**

# Ethnographic/Historical/Human-Centered Considerations

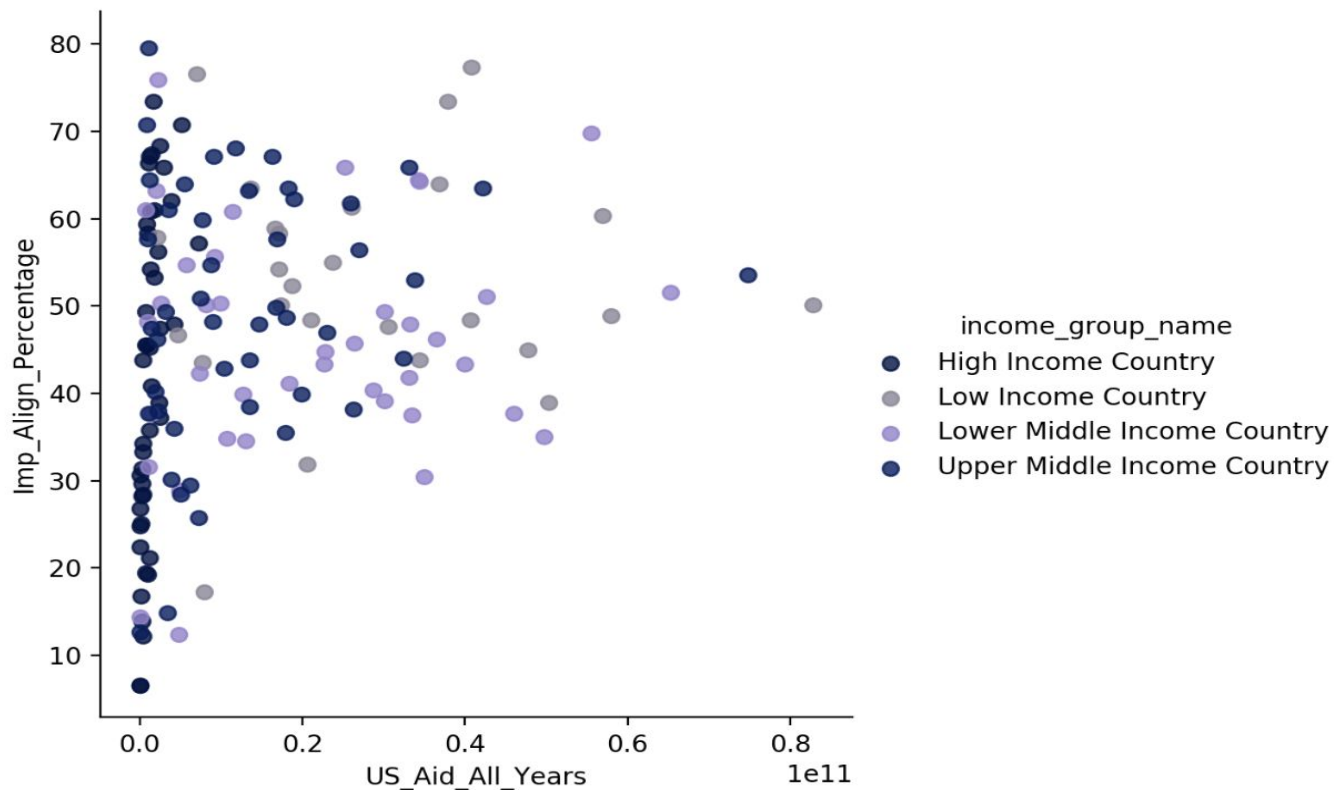
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- Relationships are country-dependent!
- War-torn? Drought? Political unrest? Cultural grounds?
- Pre-existing global alliances
  - NATO
  - Former Soviet bloc?
  - OPEC and oil incentivizing

## Exhibit II: Country-by-Country: Alignment % vs. Aid Received



## Exhibit II: Cluster by Income...



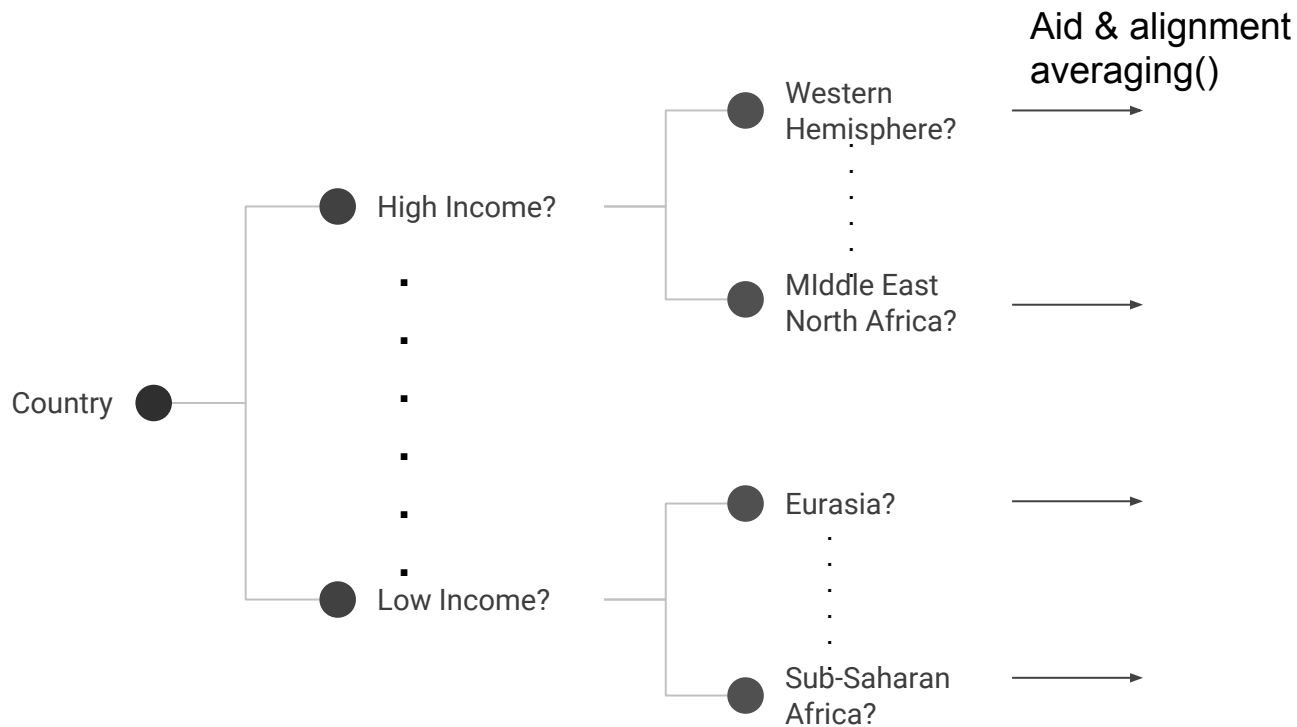
# Fixing Bias & Externalities

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- “Condition away” (condition on) these socio-geo-political-ethnographic factors
  - Infinitude of possibilities
- 
- Assumption: ‘income group’ and ‘geographic region’ as a suitable, best-effort proxy

# Data Model

— — —

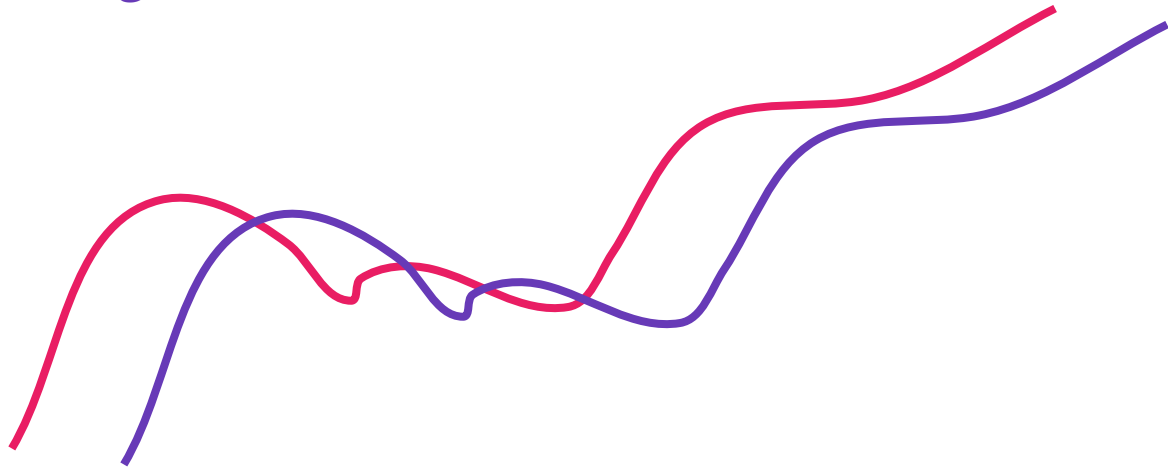


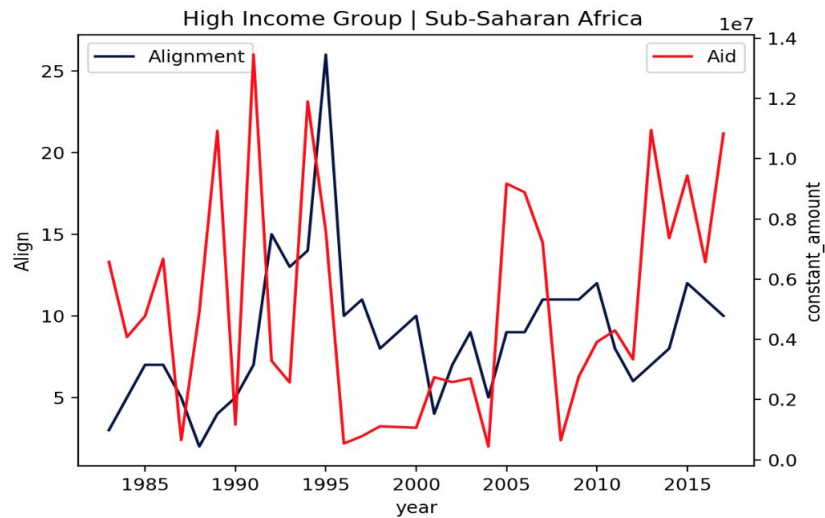
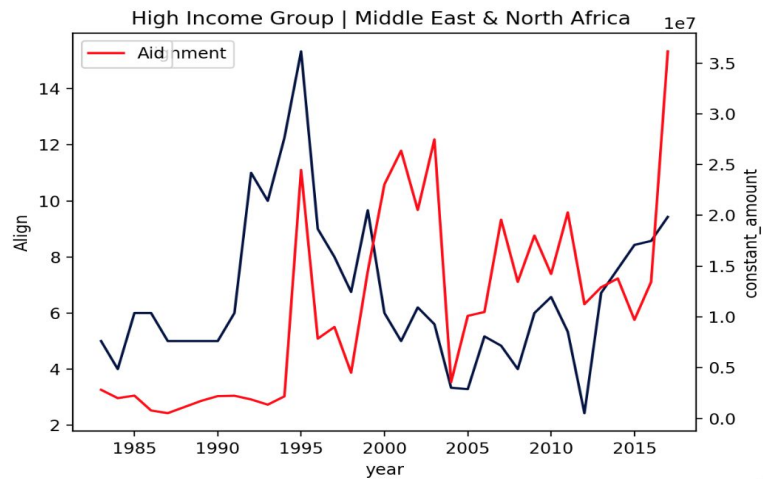
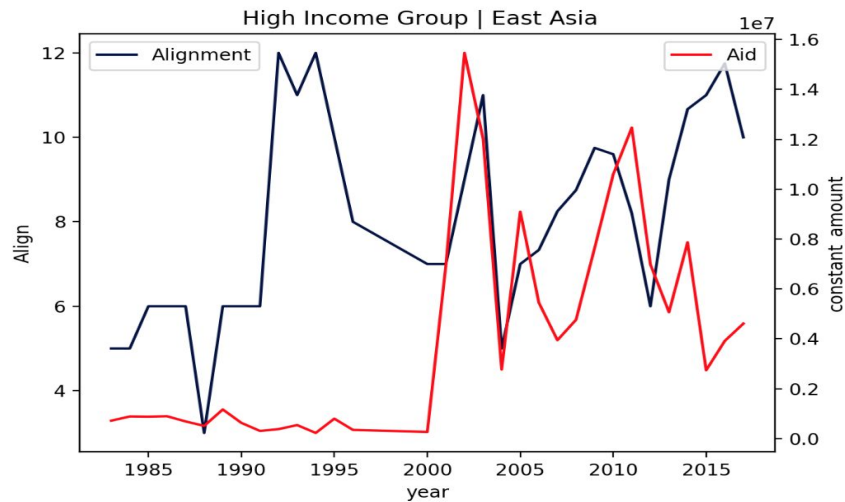
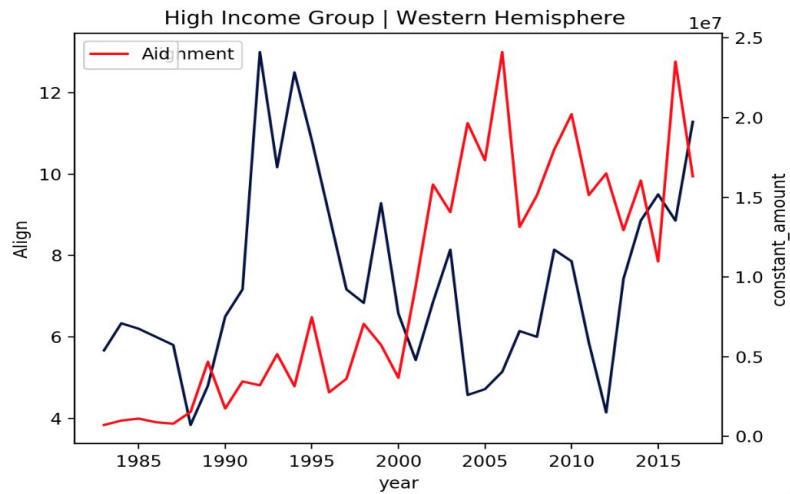
# Research Question is Determining Causality

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With this final quasi- “unbiased” end product:

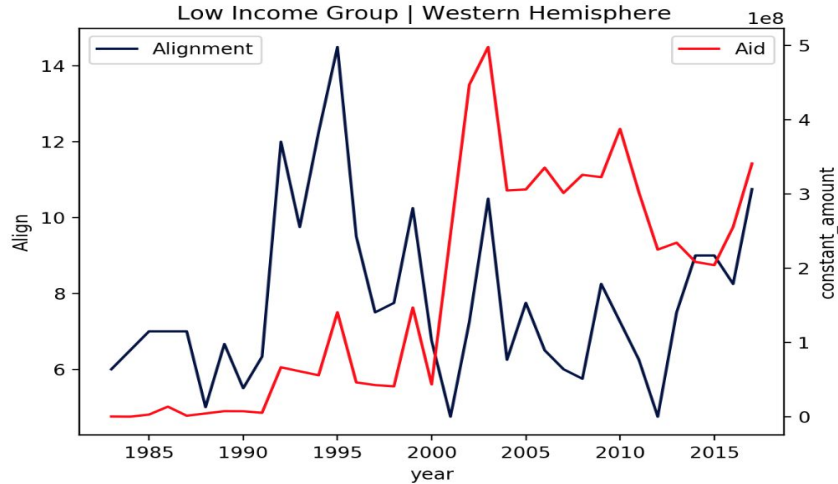
- Does **alignment** follow **aid**: *blue after red*



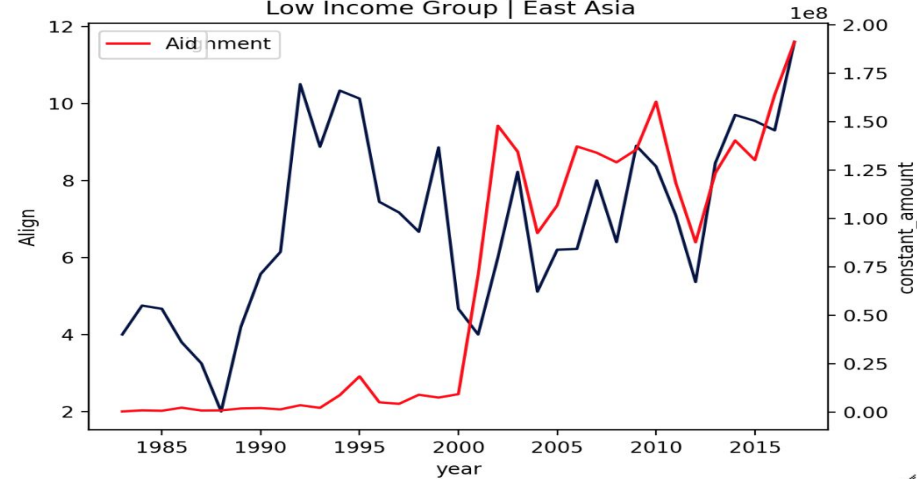




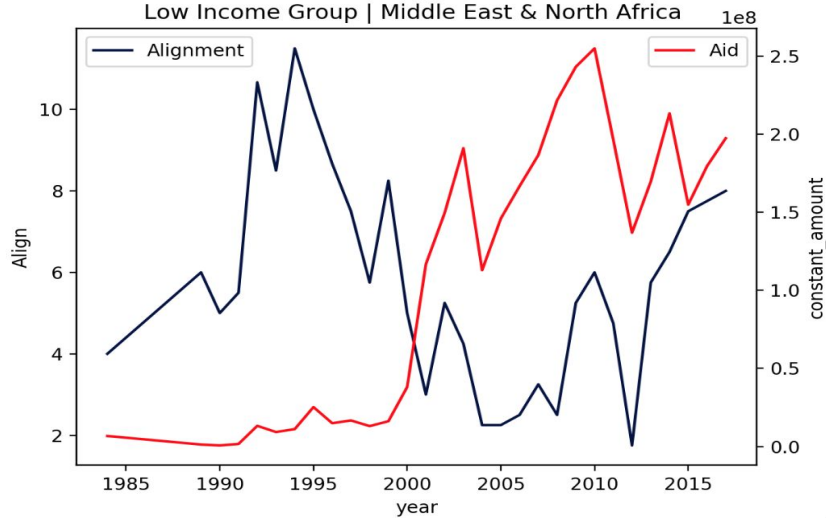
Low Income Group | Western Hemisphere



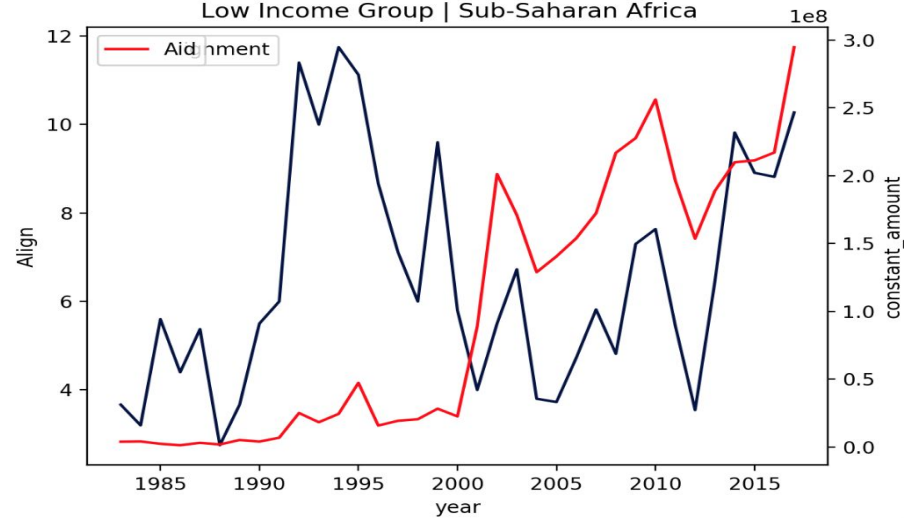
Low Income Group | East Asia



Low Income Group | Middle East & North Africa



Low Income Group | Sub-Saharan Africa



# Conclusion

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- Low income, lower-middle income (not shown), upper-middle income (not shown):
  - exhibit behavior suggesting aid does lead to increased alignment!
- U.N. can/has been coerced into following preferences of United States
- Future work: use RNN, time-series models, join more datasets to quantify causation