

# Keeping Friends Close, But Enemies Closer: Foreign Aid Responses to Natural Disasters

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## **Abstract**

While the existing literature shows that bilateral donors primarily allocate aid to strategic allies, anecdotal evidence suggests that following natural disasters, bilateral aid flows to strategic opponents quite generously. We square this incongruity by arguing donors use natural disasters as opportunities to improve their relationships with strategic opponents through the allocation of humanitarian aid. Donors also forward their self-interest by increasing civil society aid in a natural disaster's aftermath. We substantiate our findings using a new measure of strategic interest that accounts for the indirect ties states share and the multiple dimensions in which they interact.

# Introduction

In the early morning hours of December 26, 2003, a massive earthquake measuring 6.3 on the Richter scale struck the city of Bam, Iran. Its effects were devastating. Out of Bam's 100,000 residents, approximately 26,000 to 40,000 were killed while those who survived were left to grapple with the destruction of 70 to 90 percent of the city's housing infrastructure (Montazeri et al., 2005).<sup>1</sup> As part of the international response that followed, more than 44 countries sent aid, including the United States, which contributed eight plane loads of medical and humanitarian supplies as well as several dozen teams of experts to the relief effort.

However, while the US response to the 2003 Bam earthquake was seemingly analogous to that of any foreign actor offering aid and support, *a priori*, it was not obvious whether the US would send any humanitarian aid at all, to say nothing of whether Iran would accept it. Just the year prior, then-President George W. Bush had famously anointed Iran membership in the "Axis of Evil" (Heradstveit and Bonham, 2007). Meanwhile, at the time of the earthquake US-Iran relations were particularly delicate as the countries navigated the issue of nuclear weapons in Iran.<sup>2</sup> Indeed, given the broader context of contentious bilateral relations, the process of transferring aid from the US to Iran entailed greater intentionality than normal. To initiate the flow of any aid, President Bush was obliged to institute a special 90-day measure to ease US sanctions on Iran<sup>3</sup> – these had been in place since 1979 and continue to be enforced to this day.<sup>4</sup> For Iran's part, accepting US aid meant allowing US military planes to land in Iran, which had not happened in over 20 years.<sup>5</sup> For a country that had undergone a revolution in part because the US military was perceived to have had too strong a domestic influ-

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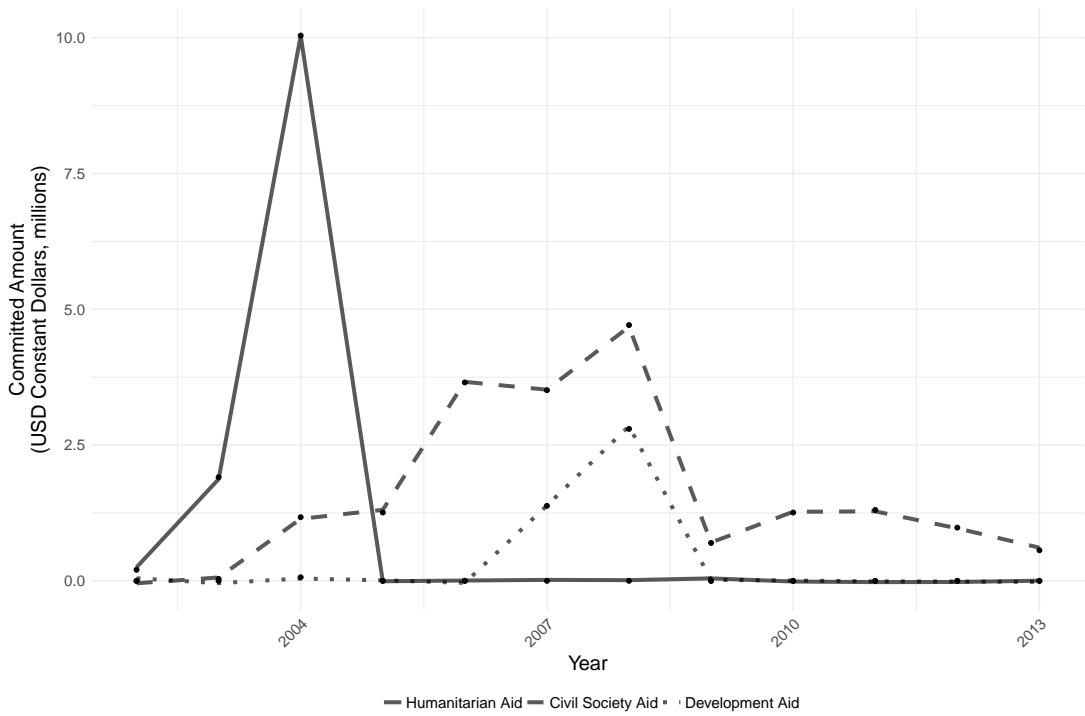
<sup>1</sup>Fathi, Nazila. "Deadly Earthquake Jolts City in Southeast Iran." *The New York Times*. 26 December 2003. Accessed October 2017: <https://web.archive.org/web/20090620230700/http://www.nytimes.com/2003/12/26/international/26CND-QUAKE.html?ex=1225166400&en=c550b50a2ad59dd6&ei=5070>

<sup>2</sup>[http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle\\_east/3362443.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle_east/3362443.stm)

<sup>3</sup>"US eases Iran sanctions to speed earthquake relief." *China Daily*. 1 January 2004. Accessed October 2017: [http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/en/doc/2004-01/01/content\\_295063.htm](http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/en/doc/2004-01/01/content_295063.htm)

<sup>4</sup>The US first imposed sanctions against Iran in 1979 during the US-Iran hostage crisis. While many assets have since been unfrozen, sanctions on a number of items, including military sales, financial assets, and real estate holdings remain in place (Katzman, 2014)

<sup>5</sup>"Iran Quake Toll May Hit 50,000." *China Daily*. 31 December, 2003. Accessed October 2017: [http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/en/doc/2003-12/31/content\\_294833.htm](http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/en/doc/2003-12/31/content_294833.htm)



**Figure 1:** US aid commitments to Iran, 2002 - 2013

ence, it was far from obvious that such an act would be perceived as benign.<sup>6</sup>

Yet, the Bam earthquake led not only to an increase, albeit temporarily, in US humanitarian aid to Iran, but was followed by other types of aid as well. Figure 1 shows that after 2004, aid commitments to "strengthen civil society" increased markedly and consistently, reaching its apex with the creation of the 2006 "Iran Democracy Fund" to promote democracy in Iran.<sup>7</sup> Meanwhile, US aid for a variety of developmental purposes, (i.e. economic and development policy and planning, infectious disease control, social/welfare services) also increased sporadically following 2003. This is particularly noteworthy given that Iran has generally been barred from receiving US foreign aid since the US State Department designated it a "state sponsor of terrorism" in 1984 (Samore, 2015).<sup>8</sup> Why did the US send humanitarian aid to Iran despite objectively hostile extant relations? Was this event *sui generis* or is it possible to observe other dyadic pairs acting in a similar fashion? If so, does the occurrence of a natural disaster also

<sup>6</sup><https://www.stratfor.com/geopolitical-diary/geopolitical-diary-tuesday-dec-30-2003>

<sup>7</sup>Carpenter, J. Scott. "After the Crackdown: The Iran Democracy Fund." *The Washington Institute for Near East Policy, PolicyWatch 1576* 8 September 2009. Accessed May 2018: <http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/view/after-the-crackdown-the-iran-democracy-fund>

<sup>8</sup>Available data from AidData and the OECD suggest that the US did not commit any aid to Iran from 1974 to 2001.

lead donors to distribute other types of aid to strategic opponents?

Answering these questions has important implications for our understanding of how donors seek to use foreign aid. Furthering such an understanding is important as the occurrences of natural disasters are likely to increase with changing climate conditions. Meanwhile, given an existing literature that emphasizes that donors are more likely to give aid to strategic allies, a more nuanced understanding of what motivates donor aid allocations is necessary to answer these questions. To do this, we begin by first disaggregating foreign aid into three types: humanitarian, civil society, and development aid. Humanitarian aid is meant as a stop-gap measure to help recipient countries return to their status quo, while the latter two types of aid are targeted towards catalyzing long term change. Specifically, civil society aid is often used to improve governance outcomes,<sup>9</sup> which provides donors an avenue through which to wade into the domestic politics of recipient states (Ottaway and Carothers, 2000; Henderson, 2002; Resnick, 2012; Spina and Raymond, 2014). Meanwhile, development aid is primarily focused on economic development.

We show that following a natural disaster donor countries actually give more humanitarian aid to strategic *opponents*. We argue that this is because donors use natural disasters as an opportunity to ingratiate themselves with countries that they have historically shared hostile relations with. Additionally, we find that donors tend to increase civil society aid, rather than development aid, following a natural disaster in recipient states with which they do not share positive relations. We evaluate these claims using a new measure of strategic interest that: 1) captures indirect ties states share 2) and incorporates a variety of dimensions of strategic interest.

In what follows, we first give a brief overview of the existing literature on natural disasters and foreign aid allocations before outlining our hypotheses. We then introduce our new measure of strategic interest, and present our empirical analysis of how natural disasters condition foreign aid allocation decisions.

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<sup>9</sup>More specifically, some argue that the lack of good governance and state capacity in developing countries have stymied the ability for foreign aid to promote development. As such, the promotion of civil society is seen as important to the successful implementation of foreign aid projects.

# Extant Motivations for Foreign Aid

Natural disasters can lead to the destruction or impairment of physical and social infrastructure and even more significantly, the devastating loss of human lives. For example, the 1985 Mexico City Earthquake, one of the most catastrophic natural disasters in modern times, killed at least 10,000 people<sup>10</sup> and cost around 9 billion dollars.<sup>11</sup> While the resulting destruction prompted the Mexican government to institute a number of regulatory measures to limit future damage, 32 years later, Mexico City's 2017 earthquake still resulted in a death toll of at least 360<sup>12</sup> and the recovery effort could cost more than 2 billion dollars.<sup>13</sup> The 2011 Fukushima incident meanwhile, stands out for both its death toll and high cost, leaving nearly 1,600 dead and more than 174,000 displaced.<sup>14</sup> Recent 2017 projections estimate that it will cost around 187 billion dollars — double the 2013 estimate.<sup>15</sup> Similarly, estimates put the cost of responding to Hurricane Harvey, which left 82 dead,<sup>16</sup> at around 180 billion dollars, likely to be the most expensive natural disaster in US history.<sup>17</sup>

Few countries are spared the devastation that natural disasters can wreak. Between 1980 and 2004, approximately 7,000 natural disasters led to the deaths of around two

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<sup>10</sup>The Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica. "Mexico City earthquake of 1985." *Encyclopaedia Britannica*. 20 September 2017. Accessed September 2017: <https://www.britannica.com/event/Mexico-City-earthquake-of-1985>

<sup>11</sup>Williams, Dan. 'Mexico Quake Loss put at \$4 Billion: Report by U.N. Panel Includes Damages to Economy.' *Los Angeles Times*. 25 October 1985. Accessed September 2017: [http://articles.latimes.com/1985-10-25/news/mn-14160\\_1\\_mexico-city](http://articles.latimes.com/1985-10-25/news/mn-14160_1_mexico-city).

<sup>12</sup>The Associated Press. 'Death toll rises to 360 in Mexico earthquake.' *The Denver Post*. 21 September 2017. Accessed October 2017: <http://www.denverpost.com/2017/09/30/mexico-earthquake-death-toll-update/>

<sup>13</sup>The Associated Press. 'Economic Costs of Mexico's Earthquake Could Surpass \$2B.' *Insurance Journal* 29 September 2017. <http://www.insurancejournal.com/news/international/2017/09/29/465995.htm>

<sup>14</sup>Hamilton, Bevan. 'Fukushima 5 years later: 2011 disaster by the numbers.' *CBC News*. 10 March 2016. Accessed September 2017: <http://www.cbc.ca/news/world/5-years-after-fukushima-by-the-numbers-1.3480914>

<sup>15</sup>McCurry, Justin. 'Possible nuclear fuel find raises hopes of Fukushima plant breakthrough.' *The Guardian*. 30 January 2017. Accessed September 2017: <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2017/jan/31/possible-nuclear-fuel-find-fukushima-plant>

<sup>16</sup>Moravec, Eva Ruth. "Texas officials: Hurricane Harvey death toll at 82 in 2017, 'mass casualties have absolutely not happened.'" *The Washington Post*. 14 September 2017. Accessed September 2017: [https://www.washingtonpost.com/national/texas-officials-hurricane-harvey-death-toll-at-82-mass-casualties-have-absolutely-not-happened/2017/09/14/bff3ffea-9975-11e7-87fc-c3f7ee4035c9\\_story.html?utm\\_term=.f5eecc9ee21](https://www.washingtonpost.com/national/texas-officials-hurricane-harvey-death-toll-at-82-mass-casualties-have-absolutely-not-happened/2017/09/14/bff3ffea-9975-11e7-87fc-c3f7ee4035c9_story.html?utm_term=.f5eecc9ee21)

<sup>17</sup>'Hurricane Harvey Damages Could Cost up to \$180 Billion.' *Fortune*. 3 September 2017. Accessed September 2017: <http://fortune.com/2017/09/03/hurricane-harvey-damages-cost/>

million people and further negatively affected the lives of five billion more (Guha-Sapir et al., 2009). The economic costs are also considerable and rising, with the direct economic damage from natural disasters between 1980-2012 estimated to be around \$3.8 trillion (Gitay et al., 2013).

While dealing with both the immediate and long-term damage wrought by natural disasters can seriously drain existing resources for any country, developing countries generally find it especially difficult to cope. Often, their existing physical infrastructure is grossly unequal to the task of withstanding natural disasters. Meanwhile, their institutional infrastructure often lacks the resilience or capacity necessary to deal with the often long and complex process of rebuilding. In general, when natural disaster strikes, developing countries are likely to experience more serious physical damage and have less state capacity to recover from it. For example, prior to its 2010 earthquake, Haiti had no building codes and many of its buildings were not designed to withstand even a mild earthquake.<sup>18</sup> Meanwhile, the lack of governmental leadership and low state capacity, along with other factors, has meant that even 7 years after the disaster, Haiti has yet to fully recover (Hartberg et al., 2011).<sup>19</sup>

From a purely tactical perspective then, natural disasters represent an opportune time to inflict harm on a strategic adversary, particularly, if it is a developing country, as both government officials and public resources are fully engaged with responding to the emergency. Yet, anecdotal evidence suggests that strategic adversaries rarely take advantage of this opportunity, at least as far as can be openly observed. Many of the deadliest natural disasters (which should present foreign opponents the best opportunity to inflict harm) do not seem to have been followed up by hostile overtures. For instance, Taiwan did not use the 1976 Tangshan earthquake, believed to be the largest earthquake in the 20th century by death toll, as an opportunity to improve its strategic position vis-a-vis China. Similarly the 2011 Fukushima disaster was not followed by

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<sup>18</sup>Watkins, Tom. ‘Problems with Haiti building standards outlined.’ CNN. 2010 January 14. Accessed September 2017: <http://edition.cnn.com/2010/WORLD/americas/01/13/haiti.construction/index.html>

<sup>19</sup>Cook, Jesselyn. “7 years after Haiti’s Earthquake, millions still need aid.” Huffington Post. 13 January 2017. Accessed May 2018: [https://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/haiti-earthquake-anniversary\\_us\\_5875108de4b02b5f858b3f9c?guccounter=1](https://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/haiti-earthquake-anniversary_us_5875108de4b02b5f858b3f9c?guccounter=1)

hostile gestures from China nor did Russia react to Hurricane Harvey with belligerence toward the US.<sup>20</sup>

Context of course matters. There are different rules of engagement depending on whether one has a contentious versus an actively hostile relationship with another country. In the former context, though taking preemptive action against a strategic opponent may lead to short term gains, it could very well lead to long term losses, especially since such an action would be well out of the realm of socially acceptable behavior in response to a natural disaster. But even by this hard-nosed logic, we might expect countries to simply do nothing when tragedy befalls their strategic opponents. Such behavior would fit well with the larger literature that investigates donor motivations for allocating foreign aid. Indeed, scholars have produced a large body of evidence suggesting that donors overwhelmingly prioritize their own self-interest over recipient need when dispensing aid.<sup>21</sup>

Yet, much anecdotal evidence suggests that rather than jockeying for a more favorable strategic perch or doing nothing, natural disasters encourages the flow of *aid* from strategic opponents. For example, during the famine that ravaged North Korea from 1994 to 1998, the United States, South Korea, Japan and the European Union stepped up as the primary donors of food aid (Noland, 2004). Meanwhile, Taiwan was one of the biggest donors to China in the aftermath of the 2008 Sichuan earthquake.<sup>22</sup> Taiwan also actively contributed to the rescue effort,<sup>23</sup> and further offered to share the technical expertise it developed from its own devastating earthquake experience in 1999.<sup>24</sup>

Are these anecdotes of non-strategic behavior indicative of a systemic pattern or one-off exceptions to the rule of strategic self-interest? If the former, what could ex-

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<sup>20</sup>Note, whether countries take advantage of their strategic opponents using more covert methods during times of natural disaster is a more open question.

<sup>21</sup>For example, see McKinlay and Little (1977, 1978, 1979); Maizels and Nissanke (1984); Schraeder et al. (1998); Alesina and Dollar (2000); Berthélemy (2006); Stone (2006); De Mesquita and Smith (2007); Bermeo (2008); Hoeffler and Outram (2011); Dreher et al. (2015).

<sup>22</sup>'FACTBOX-Earthquake aid for China.' 14 May 2008. <http://uk.reuters.com/article/idUKPEK29448220080514>

<sup>23</sup>French, Howard and Edward Wong. 'In Departure, China Invites Outside Help.' *The New York Times*. 16 May 2008. Accessed September 2017: <http://www.nytimes.com/2008/05/16/world/asia/16china.html>

<sup>24</sup>Hille, Kathrin. 'Taiwan shares quake lessons with Sichuan.' *Financial Times*. 9 June 2008. Accessed September 2017: <https://www.ft.com/content/b0204002-3641-11dd-8bb8-0000779fd2ac>

plain this seemingly humanitarian turn of behavior? Finding an answer to these questions in the current literature is difficult. For one, in evaluating the relative roles that donor interest and recipient need play in foreign aid allocation, what researchers refer to as recipient need may be more precisely understood as “developmental need” and as such, targeted towards addressing chronic poverty. To that end, development need is frequently measured using gross domestic product (GDP) or gross national product (GNP) per capita;<sup>25</sup> or occasionally with more holistic measures of social outcomes such as the Physical Quality of Life Index,<sup>26</sup> the average life expectancy,<sup>27</sup> or the daily caloric intake.<sup>28</sup>

Meanwhile, only a small body of research investigates the degree to which aid is given in response to acute crises, such as natural disasters, which will be referred to here as humanitarian need. Considering that around 11% of official development assistance (ODA) was officially categorized as being given for humanitarian reasons in 2015, the systematic failure to include natural disasters as a potential driver of foreign aid is puzzling.<sup>29</sup> What evidence that does exist suggests a null or small effect of humanitarian aid on foreign aid allocations. For instance, Bermeo (2008) finds no relationship between the number of people affected by disasters and the allocation of bilateral aid for France, Japan, the UK and the US.<sup>30</sup> Similarly, David (2011) finds no statistically significant relationship between development aid flows and climatic or human disasters. David does find evidence for increased development aid following geological disasters, but the effect is only found with a 2 year lag and substantively small.<sup>31</sup> Yang (2008) also finds that ODA increases after a hurricane, but only with a lag of 2 years.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>25</sup>For example, see McKinlay and Little (1977, 1978, 1979); Maizels and Nissanke (1984); Alesina and Dollar (2000); Berthélemy (2006); Stone (2006); De Mesquita and Smith (2007); Bermeo (2008).

<sup>26</sup>See Maizels and Nissanke (1984).

<sup>27</sup>See Schraeder et al. (1998).

<sup>28</sup>See McKinlay and Little (1979); Schraeder et al. (1998).

<sup>29</sup>Total ODA for DAC countries was 131.6 billion in 2015, 15.6 billion of which was designated as humanitarian assistance <http://www.oecd.org/dac/development-aid-rises-again-in-2015-spending-on-refugees-doubles.htm> <http://www.oecd.org/dac/stats/humanitarian-assistance.htm>

<sup>30</sup>Note, Bermeo (2008) also conceptualizes humanitarian aid using measures of the number of refugees and civil war, with mixed effects across countries for both

<sup>31</sup>David (2011) defines climatic events as ‘floods, droughts, extreme temperatures and hurricanes’; human disasters as: famines and epidemics; geological events as: earthquakes, landslides, volcano eruptions and tidal waves.

<sup>32</sup>Strömberg (2007) does find a positive and significant relationship between aid and natural disasters,

# How Natural Disasters Affect Foreign Aid Allocations

Only in the twentieth century has expending public resources to relieve the human suffering of foreigners shifted from being a virtually inconceivable act to relatively commonplace. The devastation wrought by the two world wars was particularly instrumental in bringing about this change. However, such aid was strictly intended to serve as temporary transfers that would facilitate a return to the previous status quo, rather than a long-term commitment to “development” as such. The turn toward promoting development was instead fostered by ongoing Cold War hostilities, which simultaneously promoted the use of aid to further donor’s strategic goals while also building a new norm of rich countries aiding poor countries (Lancaster, 2008).

The role of mitigating disaster and suffering on the one hand and furthering strategic interest on the other are baked into the modern conception of foreign aid. This history also suggests that initial humanitarian aid, though meant to serve as a temporary expedient, may lead to the establishment of aid with longer-term strategic goals. Whether this pattern exists more generally and if so, whether it is driven primarily by strategic or humanitarian concerns is unclear however. The role of the Cold War in foreign aid’s origin story dictated that recipients of humanitarian aid were generally within a particular strategic bloc, making it difficult to untangle strategic from humanitarian drivers. The vignette of US-Iran aid relations following the 2003 Bam earthquake provides some anecdotal evidence, however, that contrasting examples exist.

As such, looking at how natural disasters affect foreign aid allocation is not only interesting in its own right but also provides an exogenous factor with which to identify the role of donor interest and recipient need in explaining patterns of aid commitments. To that end, we present four hypotheses as to how natural disasters affect foreign aid allocations. Further, to better entangle the varying strategic motivations, we disaggregate foreign aid into three types: humanitarian, civil society, and development aid. In doing so, we seek to offer a more nuanced understanding of the principle

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but his paper is concerned with emergency aid in particular, not foreign aid. Similarly, Olsen et al. (2003) find that donors are more likely to give aid for strategic reasons, though their analysis is confined to emergency aid.

drivers of foreign aid allocations.

## Short-term Humanitarian Response to Natural Disasters

Responding to natural disasters quickly and efficiently is often crucial to saving lives and alleviating human suffering. The immediate period after a natural disaster is often critical as services like electricity, gas, water, and telecommunications may all be disrupted. The timely deployment of humanitarian aid is the first response that donors can extend to countries struck by natural disaster. In what follows, we develop three hypotheses as to how the interaction between strategic interests and natural disaster severity can affect humanitarian aid allocation.

Realist scholars expound the view that “foreign aid is today and will remain for some time an instrument of political power” (Liska, 1960). Under this logic, donors commit aid to recipient countries primarily to further their own strategic interests. Extant literature on the drivers of foreign aid have put forward strong substantive evidence to support this viewpoint (McKinlay and Little, 1979; Maizels and Nissanke, 1984; Schraeder et al., 1998; Alesina and Dollar, 2000; Berthélemy, 2006; Stone, 2006; De Mesquita and Smith, 2007; Bermeo, 2008; Dreher et al., 2015). With regards to the interaction between natural disasters and strategic interests, it is in donor’s self-interest to commit greater amounts of humanitarian aid to their strategic allies rather than opponents in the event of a natural disaster. A naive reading of the logic of realism would lead to the following hypothesis as to how the interaction between natural disasters and strategic aid affects humanitarian aid allocations:

*H1A: Donors are driven by self-interest and in the event of a natural disaster, donors are **likely to send less humanitarian aid to their strategic allies vs their strategic allies.***

Conversely, social context, rather than material interest, may be decisive in foreign aid allocation decisions. Recent research in behavioral economics underscores the idea that different social contexts lead to varying behavior in identical situations

(Kahneman, 2003; Do, 2011).<sup>33</sup> Natural disasters may reorient the social context of a dyadic relationship to encourage donors to increase aid to their strategic opponents. That is, the loss of human life and destruction of infrastructure, which natural disasters provoke, can temporarily serve to emphasize the human aspect of the bilateral relationship as opposed to the political, economic, and military aspects that generally define foreign relations between two countries.

Moreover, if natural disasters do have a humanizing effect, than we might expect strategic opponents to be particularly sensitive to it. This is, given that strategic opponents are more likely to “otherize” each other, then dyadic opponents must traverse a greater gap to humanize each another compared to dyadic allies (de Buitrago, 2012). On balance then, we would expect that donors not to discriminate between strategic opponents or strategic allies when dispensing aid.

For example, historically hostile relations between the US and Cuba may mean that the baseline extent to which they “otherize” each other is much greater than in the US-Japan relationship, increasing the potential for Cubans to be humanized in American eyes. As such, we might expect American aid to Cuba rise to the level they would provide to the Japan in the event of similar natural disasters.

That is not to say that natural disasters can always bridge the divide among strategic opponents. For example, India and Pakistan have had an uneasy history in accepting aid from each other following natural disasters.<sup>34</sup> In general, we contend only that natural disasters may make it more *likely* that a strategic adversary will contribute aid because the humanitarian disaster temporarily reframes the context of bilateral relations. An understanding of the interaction between natural disasters and strategic interests affects humanitarian aid allocations based on social context thus leads us to the following hypothesis:

*H1B: Donors who are strategic opponents of the recipient are more likely than strategic*

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<sup>33</sup>While there is evidence that non-governmental organizations are driven by the norms of humanitarian discourse when allocating aid (Büthe et al., 2012), evidence for similar behavior in governments has been mixed at best.

<sup>34</sup>Ravishankar, Siddharth. ‘Cooperation between India and Pakistan after Natural Disasters.’ *Stimson Center*. 9 January 2015. Accessed September 2017: <https://www.stimson.org/content/cooperation-between-india-and-pakistan-after-natural-disasters>

*allies to be sensitive to the humanizing effect of natural disasters. As such, following natural disasters, donors are likely to send **similar amounts of humanitarian aid to strategic allies and strategic opponents.***

Finally, while foreign aid has typically been conceptualized as a way for donors to prop up strategic allies, natural disasters may present donors with a strategic opportunity to improve relations with strategic opponents. As suggested in H1B, social context does matter, but only to the extent of limiting the acceptable set of responses to natural disasters to the allocation of humanitarian aid (as opposed to, for example, the use of hostile overtures). However, donors may still seek to work within this framework of humanitarian altruism to forward their own interests.

Indeed, disaster-afflicted countries appear to be sensitive to the possibility that accepting humanitarian aid from strategic opponents may come with ulterior motives. In 1999 for example, Venezuela experienced catastrophic flash floods and debris flows in Vargas State, which left as much as 10% of the Vargas population dead (Wieczorek et al., 2001). US troops helped in the relief efforts by running helicopter rescue missions and working to provide clean water. However, consistent with his antagonism toward US hegemony in the region, President Hugo Chavez declined US assistance in rebuilding a critical highway, saying that while, "he would accept American equipment if Venezuelan soldiers operated it...he did not want US troops in his country."<sup>35</sup> Meanwhile, Iran categorically refused any aid from Israel following the 2003 Bam earthquake, though the Israeli government still encouraged its citizens to donate privately.<sup>36</sup> Indeed, even the US first turned down Russian aid for Hurricane Katrina before ultimately accepting it.<sup>37</sup>

Note, regardless of the actual motivation of donors when they give aid to their strategic opponents, there is anecdotal evidence to suggest that aid given under such

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<sup>35</sup>Brand, Richard. 'Chavez assailed on handling of Venezuelan flood disaster.' *The Miami Herald*. 5 August 2001. Accessed September 2017: <http://www.latinamericanstudies.org/venezuela/venezuela-disaster.htm>.

<sup>36</sup>Popper, Nathaniel. "Israelis Help Iran Victims Despite Rebuff." *The Forward*. 2 January 2004. Accessed September 2017: <http://forward.com/news/6059/israelis-help-iran-victims-despite-rebuff/>

<sup>37</sup>'U.S. accepts Russian Katrina aid.' *UPI*. 2 September 2005. Accessed September 2017. <https://www.upi.com/US-accepts-Russian-Katrina-aid/39221125680989/>.

circumstances can also serve to humanize and improve public perceptions of donors as well. For example, in the wake of US and South Korean aid for the North Korean famine, one refugee summarized his reaction to the US Institute for Peace this way: "We were taught all these years that the South Koreans and Americans were our enemies. Now we see they are trying to feed us. We are wondering who our real enemies are" (Natsios, 1999). This suggests that, at least anecdotally, that humanitarian aid can serve to improve relations with strategic opponents. Here, however, here are primarily interested in investigating whether donors are driven by this possibility when allocating aid, leading to our third hypotheses:

*H1C: Donors see natural disasters as a strategic opportunity to improve their relations with strategic opponents and are thus likely to send **more humanitarian aid to strategic opponents versus allies**.*

## Long-term Responses to Natural Disasters

Donor countries may dispense aid that not only serves to immediately address the natural disaster at hand, but also through other channels that have longer-term objectives. Here, we make a distinction between civil society aid and development aid. Civil society aid is aimed at supporting non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and their programs. Often, the goal of such aid is to empower grass-roots advocacy and improve governance and government accountability. Meanwhile, development aid is targeted toward promoting long-term economic development in a recipient country often through the building of infrastructure like roads and hospitals as well as the building of human resources via technical training and education. In what follows, we develop hypotheses as to how the interaction between strategic interest and natural disasters can affect the allocation of these two different types of aid.

## Natural Disasters as Strategic Opportunities

If, as following the realist logic, foreign aid is used to promote donor interests, then donor governments should be especially inclined to increase the allocation of civil society aid. This is because aiding the development of civil society is an inherently political act.<sup>38</sup> From supporting the growth of government watch dogs to increasing the domestic capacity for grass roots advocacy, whether it is their intention or not, donors are able to exert influence over a recipients domestic politics by directing funds to civil society.

With respect to natural disasters, countries may be motivated to give more civil society aid to their strategic opponents because the temporary suspension in the normal dynamics of the relationship represents a unique opportunity to increase civil society aid and initiate a shift in the nature of the bilateral relationship. That is, donor countries may either already recognize all to well or come to recognize that the natural disasters offers an opportunity to improve the terms of their relationship with the affected country (as in H1C). Either way, donors can seize on a country's inherent vulnerability following a natural disaster to decide to *strategically* increase their civil aid so as to increase their chances of exerting domestic influence over the recipient countries. As such, we derive the following hypothesis:

*H2: Natural disasters present an opportune window for donors to exert influence over recipients who are their strategic opponents and as such, donors are more likely to send additional **civil society aid** to their strategic opponents.*

## Natural Disasters as (Permanent) Humanizers of Strategic Opponents

Whereas humanitarian aid provides stop-gap measures to address the immediate aftermath of a natural disaster, the focus of development aid is to build the conditions for long-term, sustainable economic growth. As such, if social context matters, natural disasters can have a humanizing effect on strategic opponents that is not only short-

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<sup>38</sup><http://foreignpolicy.com/2013/05/21/the-prickly-politics-of-aid/>

term, but long-term, then this should be manifested in an increase in development aid. That is, the initial devastation wrought by a natural disaster may not only encourage greater humanitarian aid, but may also encourage greater contact and mutual understanding between donors and recipients and a greater donor commitment to recipient development. As in H1B, strategic opponents may be particularly sensitive to this humanizing effect because relative to strategic allies, they are more likely to have had a dehumanizing view of the recipient country. This results in the final hypothesis:

*H3: Natural disasters have a long-term humanizing effect on their strategic opponents and as such, donors are more likely to send greater **development aid** to their strategic opponents.*

## Measuring Strategic Relationships

One reason for evaluating the *motivations* for aid and not aid *outcomes* is that aid given for strategic reasons may still further development objectives, albeit incidentally, while aid given for humanitarian reasons may also bring unexpected strategic benefits (Maizels and Nissanke, 1984). However, evaluating the motivations for aid is not a straightforward process – any given aid project may work toward providing assistance to a recipient country as well as strategic benefits to a donor country.

Of critical importance to investigating whether strategic considerations (and by extension, the interaction between strategic considerations and humanitarian need) affects foreign aid considerations then is constructing a reliable measure of strategic interest. Unfortunately, we find that Alesina and Dollar (2000)'s remark that "the measurement of what a 'strategic interest' is varies from study to study and is occasionally tautological," still holds true. Indeed, strategic interest has alternately been operationalized as: trade intensity (Berthélemy and Tichit, 2004; Bermeo, 2008; Hoeffler and Outram, 2011), UN voting scores (Alesina and Dollar, 2000; Weder and Alesina, 2002; Hoeffler and Outram, 2011; Dreher and Fuchs, Forthcoming), arms transfers (Maizels and Nissanke, 1984), colonial legacy (Alesina and Dollar, 2000; Bermeo, 2008; Berthélemy

and Tichit, 2004; Berthélemy, 2006), alliances (Bermeo, 2008; Schraeder et al., 1998), regional dummies (Bermeo, 2008; Berthélemy, 2006; Maizels and Nissanke, 1984), bilateral dummies (Alesina and Dollar, 2000; Berthélemy and Tichit, 2004; Berthélemy, 2006)<sup>39</sup> or some combination of the above.<sup>40</sup>

Such inconsistency in the operationalization of strategic interest is not simply a matter of using different variables to measure the same concept but a matter of using different variables to measure different *aspects* of the underlying concept. However, while a dyad's strategic bilateral relationship is quite multifaceted, to date, there has not been a readily available measure of strategic relationships which captures its various aspects the same way that scholars have done for other complex concepts.<sup>41</sup> To address this problem, we create a new measure of strategic interest that is able to account for varying aspects of strategic interest.

## A new measure of strategic relationships

To generate a measure of strategic relationships we adopt a latent variable approach that enables us to estimate a relational measure of interest between countries by taking into account the direct and indirect ways in which states are connected across a variety of dimensions. Specifically, we utilize three dimensions of state relations to construct our strategic interest measure: dyadic alliances, UN voting, and joint membership in intergovernmental organizations (IGOs). We focus on these dimensions because each provides a representation of the political and military relations between countries in the international system. Additionally, these measures are commonly employed in the foreign aid literature to measure strategic interest. Dyadic alliances largely capture the strategic and military aspect of country relationships. Meanwhile,

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<sup>39</sup>A US-Egypt or US-Israel dummy seems to be the most common instance of a bilateral dummy

<sup>40</sup>Meanwhile other papers take a negative approach and argue that any shortfall between what would theoretically be expected from poverty-efficient aid allocation and actual aid allocation (Collier and Dollar, 2002; Nunnenkamp and Thiele, 2006; Thiele et al., 2007), or similarly between a theoretical allocation based on good governance and actual aid allocation (Dollar and Levin, 2006; Neumayer, 2005), is evidence of strategic interest at play.

<sup>41</sup>For example, Polity and Freedom House have provided measures of political institutions while the World Bank's World Governance Indicators (WGI) project provides measures for six dimensions of governance

joint membership in IGOs reflects the dyadic relationship across many political issue areas, and UN voting is better able to capture this relationship in a centralized forum.

To estimate a measure of strategic interest across these dimensions, we take a network based approach that allows us to leverage both the direct and indirect ways in which states are connected to one another. To do this we employ a latent factor model as described in Hoff (2005). The model is structured as follows:

$$Y = \mathbf{u}_i^T \mathbf{u}_j + \epsilon_{ij}, \text{ where} \quad (1)$$

$$\mathbf{u}_i \in \mathbb{R}^{R=2}, i \in \{1, \dots, n\}$$

$Y$  here is a  $n \times n$  undirected sociomatrix in which  $y_{ij}$  designates whether there exists a link (e.g., an alliance) between  $i$  and  $j$ . The goal of the model is to provide a projection of the systematic variation in  $Y$  into a two-dimensional social space.<sup>42</sup> More precisely, the types of systematic variation that we are interested in include the concepts of (a) transitivity, (b) balance and (c) clusterability. Formally, a set of three countries  $ijk$  is said to be transitive, if for whenever  $y_{ij} = 1$  and  $y_{jk} = 1$ , we also observe that  $y_{ik} = 1$ . This follows the logic of “a friend of a friend is a friend”. Meanwhile, the relationships between  $ijk$  are said to be balanced if  $y_{ij} \times y_{jk} \times y_{ki} > 0$ . Conceptually, if the relationship between  $i$  and  $j$  is “positive”, then both will relate to another unit  $k$  identically, either both positive or both negative. Finally, relationships between  $ijk$  are said to be clusterable if it is balanced or all the relations are all negative. It is a relaxation of the concept of balance and seeks to capture groups where the measurements are positive within groups and negative between groups.

Thus third order dependencies suggest that “knowing something about the relationship between  $i$  and  $j$  as well as between  $i$  and  $k$  may reveal something about the relationship between  $i$  and  $k$ , even when we do not directly observe it” (Hoff and Ward,

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<sup>42</sup>The latent factor model we utilize here is based on an eigenvalue decomposition that seeks to represent relations between countries as the weighted inner-product of country-specific vectors of latent characteristics. In this application, we project our  $n \times n$  sociomatrix into a  $n \times 2$  matrix of country positions in a latent social space.

2004). Such dependences would seem especially relevant for our purposes, as one cannot understand the strategic relationship between two countries without taking into account their respective relationships with other countries. The importance for accounting for these dynamics have long been acknowledged in the foreign aid literature. Trumbull and Wall (1994) for example, note that, “donors do make their decisions with knowledge of what each other are doing, and may actually act cooperatively. Any study that ignores the interrelationship of donor behavior risks problems with simultaneity bias.” However, we find that until now, this critique has largely gone unaddressed by the existing literature.

The main advantage of calculating the latent space of different dyadic variables as opposed to using alternative specifications such as the S Score algorithm<sup>43</sup> is that it allows us to better account for indirect ties that states share. Indirect ties are accounted for within this framework because the latent factor model takes patterns such as transitivity into account, as a result, the relation between two actors can be inferred even if no direct interaction between them is observed.

We employ this latent factor model on every year for each of our three measures.<sup>44</sup> In Figure 2, we present a visualization of the resultant latent space we calculated for each variable for the year 2005.

Countries that cluster together in this two-dimensional latent space are more likely to interact with each other. The plots for alliances, UN voting and IGO membership suggest that there is distinct clustering among countries. Moreover, these clusters are different across the three measures, suggesting that each variable is indeed capturing different aspects of strategic interest.

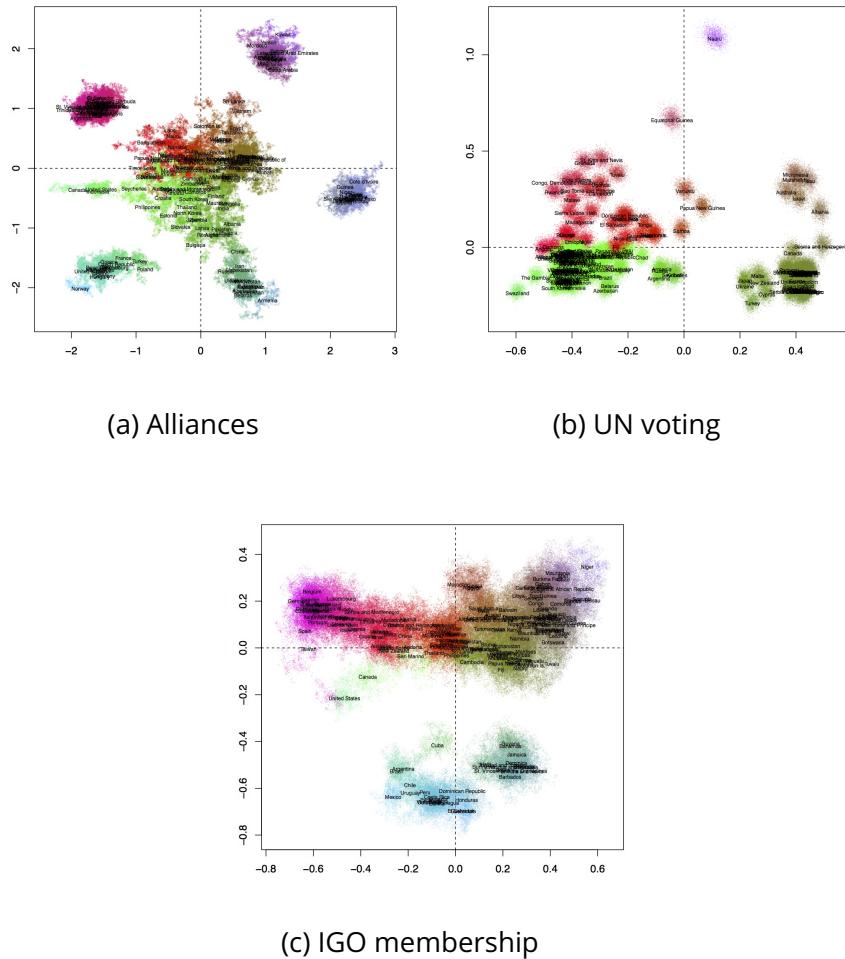
After estimating the latent spaces for these components, we estimate the standardized distance between each pair of each countries for the three component. We then combine them in a principal components analysis (PCA) to reduce the dimension-

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<sup>43</sup>Leeds and Savun (2007), for example, measure a states “threat environment” as the set of all states for which ones is contiguous with or which is a major power and with an S score below the population median.

<sup>44</sup>The models are estimated via Gibbs sampling from the full conditional distributions of  $\mathbf{u}_i^T \mathbf{u}_j$ . For a more detailed discussion of this model, see Hoff (2005).

**Figure 2:** Latent Spaces for components of Political Strategic Interest Measure during 2005



ability of our measure while retaining as much variance as possible. That is, alliances, UN voting and joint membership in IGOs all capture certain aspects of political strategic interest. Instead of choosing only one of them as our measure of strategic interest as other papers have done, we combine them in order to increase our explanatory power. We estimate the PCA of these variables for each year separately<sup>45</sup> and use the first principal component for each year as our measure of strategic interest. On average over all the years, we find that the first component of our PCA of alliances, UN voting and joint membership in IGOs, which we use as our measure of strategic interest, explains about 51% of its variance.

The end result of this process is a measure of strategic interest that takes into account indirect ties while also accounting for multiple dimensions in which states inter-

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<sup>45</sup>For each year, we conduct a bootstrap PCA of 1000 subsamples.

act with one another.

## Data

### Aid flows

Our data from foreign aid flows is taken from the AidData project (Tierney et al., 2011). This database includes information on over a million aid activities from the 1940s to the present. We use the country level aggregated version of this database to create a directed-dyadic dataset of total aid dollars committed. In this analysis, we focus specifically on OECD donor countries as they both are the best able and have the best incentive to give foreign aid to advance their strategic interests. In the final tally, our dataset includes the 18 most active senders<sup>46</sup> and 167 receivers of aid flows from 1975 to 2006. Accounting for all possible senders of aid during this time frame is difficult because of the amount of missing data. That being said, issues with missingness in our dataset still exist and we deal with them by employing a multiple imputation method developed by Hoff (2007) and shown to have good performance by Hollenbach et al. (2014).

We use the AidData's Sector coding scheme in order to disaggregate bilateral ODA into humanitarian aid, development aid, and civil society aid.<sup>47</sup> To that end, our measure of humanitarian aid encompasses the sectors of:

"Emergency Response", "Reconstruction Relief", and "Disaster Prevention and Preparedness".

Meanwhile, civil society aid is measured as aid to the sectors of:

"Government and Civil Society", "Women", "Support to Non-Governmental Organizations and Governmental Organizations".

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<sup>46</sup>More specifically, the included donor countries are: Australia, Belgium, Canada, Denmark, France, Germany, Greece, Iceland, Ireland, Italy, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Norway, Portugal, Spain, Sweden, the United Kingdom and the United States.

<sup>47</sup>"AidData's Sector Coding Scheme." [http://docs.aiddata.org/ad4/files/aiddata\\_coding\\_scheme\\_0.pdf](http://docs.aiddata.org/ad4/files/aiddata_coding_scheme_0.pdf)

Finally, development aid is defined as aid given to the following sectors:

"Education", "Health", "Water Sanitation", "Other Infrastructure and Services", "Economic Infrastructure and Services", 'Environmental Protection', "Other Social Infrastructure and Services", "Agriculture Forestry and Fishing", "Industry, Mining and Construction", "Other Development Aid", "Food Aid" and "Debt Relief".

We note that bilateral ODA often represents only one channel through which a donor country may allocate foreign aid and that an increasing number of papers have argued for accounting for the heterogeneity of aid channels donors may use when estimating drivers of foreign aid (Nunnenkamp and Öhler, 2011; Buthe and Cheng, 2013; Dietrich, 2013). For our paper, we choose to focus solely on bilateral aid in order to maintain greater comparability with previous studies.

## **Strategic Interest**

As previously stated, for our measure of political strategic relationships, we conducted a PCA on the latent distances for alliances, UN voting and joint IGO membership. Data for alliances was retrieved from the Correlates of War (COW) Formal Alliance dataset (Gibler, 2009). Following (Bueno de Mesquita, 1975) and (Signorino and Ritter, 1999), we distinguish between different types of alliances with the following weighting scheme: 0 = no alliance, 1 = entente, 2 = neutrality or nonaggression pact, 3 = mutual defense pact.

UN voting data was obtained from the United Nations General Assembly Data set (Strezhnev and Voeten, 2012). Here we calculate the proportion of times two states agree out of the total number of votes they both voted on. Agreement means either both vote yes, both vote no, or both abstain. This measure is similar to the 'voting similarity index' readily available from the dataset except the voting similarity index does not account for mutual abstentions.

Meanwhile IGO voting data was obtained from the Correlates of War International Governmental Organizations Data Set. (Pevehouse et al., 2010). Dyads were coded as 1 if they belonged to the same IGO as a full member or an associate member and coded as 0 if one or both of them was an observer, had no membership, was not yet a state or was missing data.<sup>48</sup>

## Natural Disasters

Almost all the empirical work on natural disasters relies on the publicly available Emergency Events Database (EM-DAT) maintained by the Center for Research on the Epidemiology of Disasters (CRED) at the Catholic University of Louvain, Belgium<sup>49</sup>. EM-DAT defines a disaster as a natural situation or event which overwhelms local capacity and/or necessitates a request for external assistance. For a disaster to be entered into the EM-DAT database, at least one of the following criteria must be met: i) 10 or more people are reported killed; ii) 100 people are reported affected; iii) a state of emergency is declared; or iv) a call for international assistance is issued. We use a count of the number of natural disasters a country has experienced a year as our measure of natural disaster severity. Disasters can be hydro-meteorological, including floods, wave surges, storms, droughts, landslides and avalanches; geophysical, including earthquakes, tsunamis and volcanic eruptions; and biological, covering epidemics and insect infestations (the latter are less frequent).

## Developmental Need

In addition to our dyadic strategic relationship measures, we include a number of covariates to capture characteristics of the countries receiving aid.

For our measures of developmental need, we use (1) Log GDP per capita and (2) life

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<sup>48</sup>Note we had attempted to make distinctions between different types of membership much like for alliances but found that very few states were noted to be Associate Members or Observers of an IGO for the time period that we are conducting our analysis. Thus we chose to use the simpler coding scheme.

<sup>49</sup><http://www.emdat.be/>

expectancy at birth. This measure “indicates the number of years a newborn infant would live if prevailing patterns of mortality at the time of its birth were to stay the same throughout its life.” Both of these measures are extracted from the World Bank (2013).

## **Additional Covariates**

We also include a number of covariates in our model, including macroeconomic variables and measures for political institutions. For our macroeconomic indicators, we use GDP per capita, available from the World Bank (Bank, 2013). For our measure of political institutions, we use Polity IV data available from the Center for Systemic Peace (Gurr et al., 2010). Polity IV captures differences in regime characteristics on a 21 point scale ranging from -10 (hereditary monarchy) to +10 (consolidated democracy). Note we rescale Polity IV to range from 1 to 21 for greater ease of interpretation.

We control for the incidence of civil war as incidence of civil war in a recipient country certainly informs the ability for a donor country to dispense aid. We do so with data retrieved from the Uppsala Conflict Data Program (UCDP)/International Peace Research Institute (PRIO) Armed Conflict Database. (Gleditsch et al., 2002). We code as civil war any armed conflict which either (a) “Internal armed conflict occurs between the government of a state and one or more internal opposition group(s) without intervention from other states” or (b) “Internationalized internal armed conflict occurs between the government of a state and one or more internal opposition group(s) with intervention from other states (secondary parties) on one or both sides.”

Finally for our data on former colonies, we used the Colonial History Data Set from the Issue Correlates of War (ICOW) Project (Hensel, 2009). This variable is coded as a one when the receiver in a sender-receiver dyad is a former colony of the sender and zero otherwise.

# Analysis

## Estimation Method

To model aid flows using our directed-dyadic panel dataset, we utilize a hierarchical model. To implement this, we nest aid receivers within aid senders and aid senders within years. We include random intercepts in our model for every sender and year. More concretely, we fit the following model:

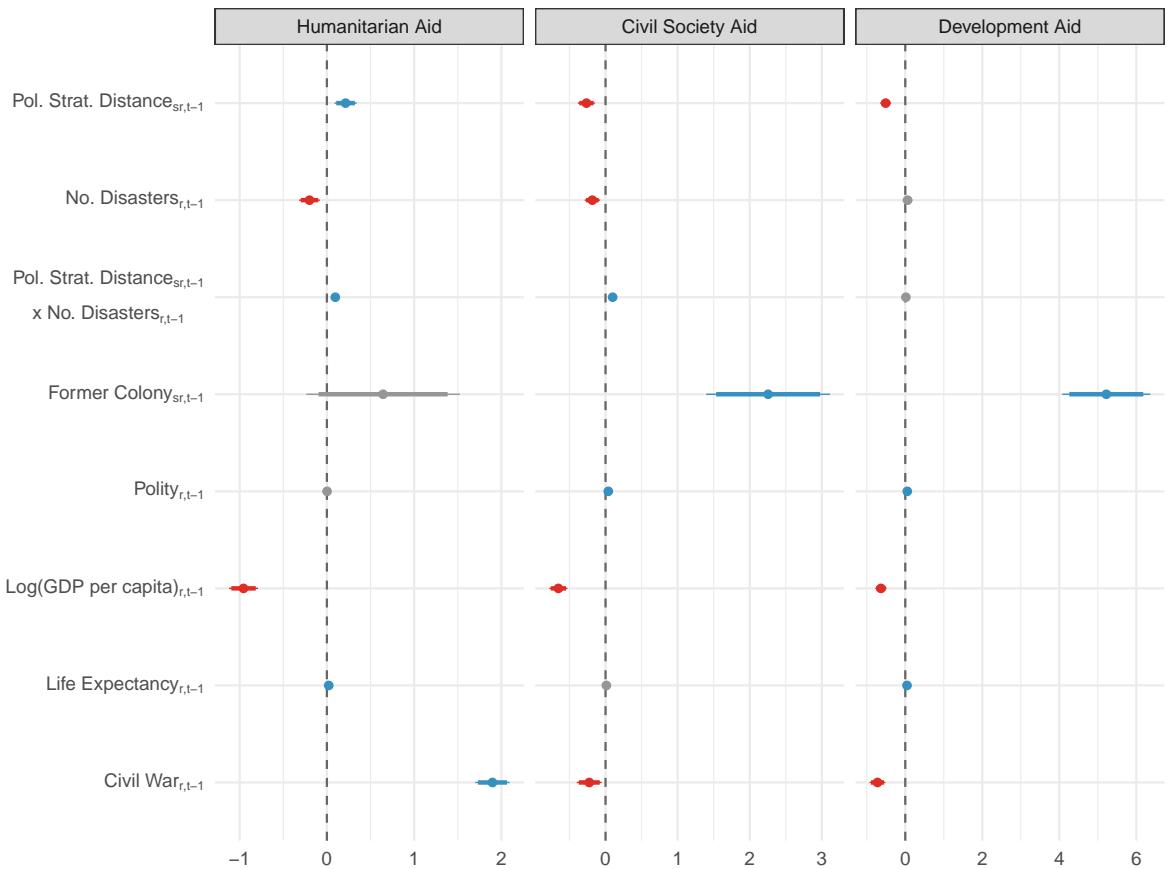
The results of this analysis are shown below in a coefficient plot in Figure 3.<sup>50</sup> We test Hypothesis 1A, 1B and 1C using the model with ‘Humanitarian Aid’ as the dependent variable. The results show a positive and statistically significant relationship between the interaction of *Strategic Distance* and the *No. Disasters*. To interpret these results, we turn to Figure 4 (‘Humanitarian Aid’ panel) where we plot the substantive effect of this interaction term on humanitarian aid over the range of *Strategic Distance* for different levels of natural disaster severity.

$$\begin{aligned} \text{Log}(Aid)_{sr,t} = & \beta_1(\text{Pol. Strat. Distance}_{sr,t-1}) \\ & + \beta_2(\text{Colony}_{sr,t-1}) + \beta_3(\text{Polity}_{r,t-1}) \\ & + \beta_4 \text{Log}(GDP \text{ per capita}_{r,t-1}) + \beta_5(\text{Life Expect}_{r,t-1}) \\ & + \beta_6(\text{No. Disasters}_{r,t-1}) + \beta_7(\text{Civil War}_{r,t-1}) \\ & + \beta_8(\text{Pol. Strat. Interest}_{sr,t-1} \times \text{No. Disasters}_{r,t-1}) \\ & + \delta_s + \rho_r \end{aligned}$$

Where  $\delta_s$  and  $\rho_r$  are the sender and receiver random effects respectively.

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<sup>50</sup>Note, to examine the model results without the interaction effects, please see Figure 8 in Appendix A.1



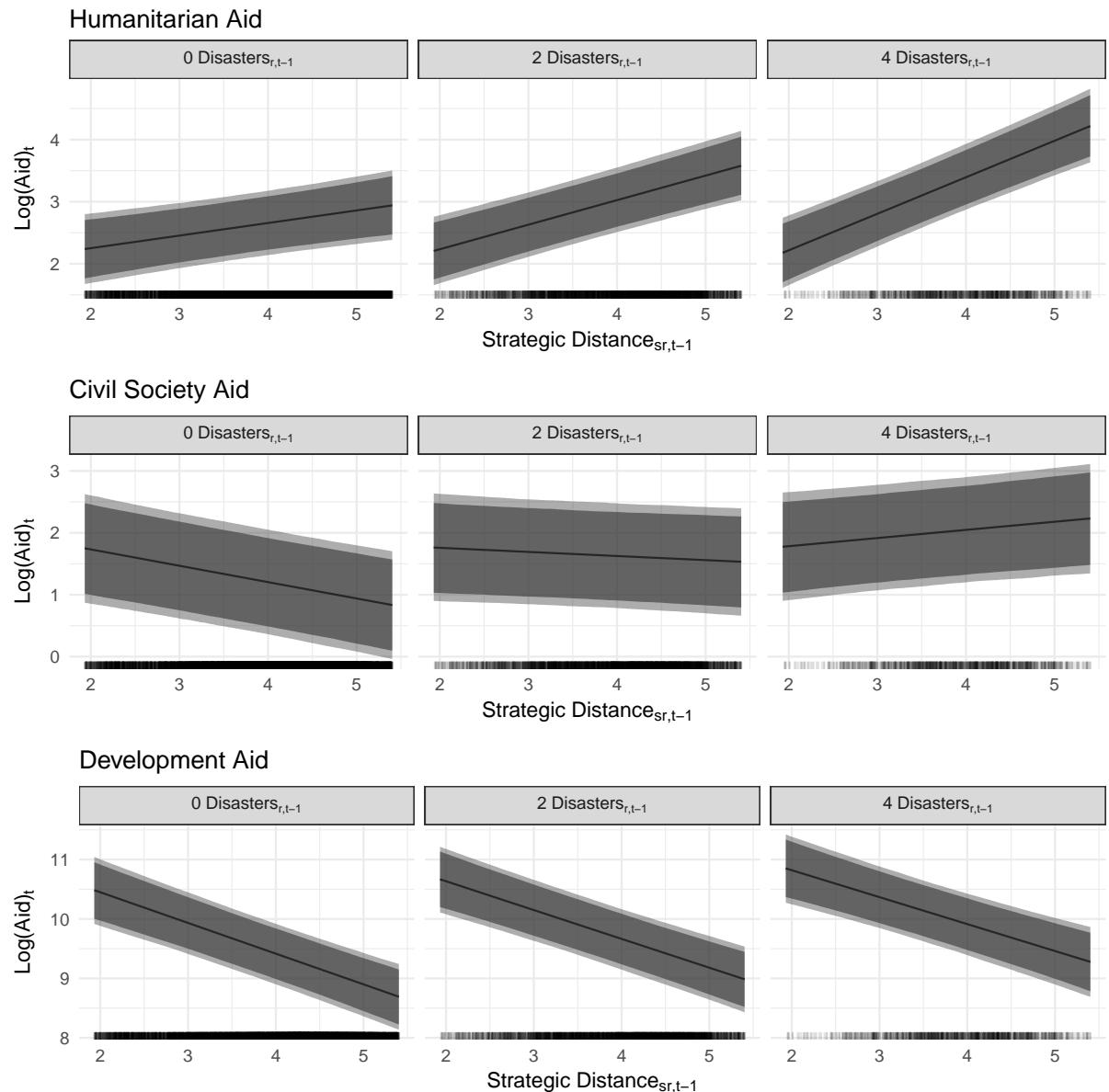
**Figure 3:** Coefficient plots for the main analyses with interaction terms across each dependent variable, humanitarian aid, civil society aid and development aid. Coefficients that are significant at the 5% level are shaded in blue if the coefficient is positive and red if the coefficient is negative. Coefficients that are not significant at the 5% level are shaded in gray.

These results suggest that the greater the number of natural disasters a country experiences, the more likely it is to receive humanitarian aid from a strategic adversary. This is apparent in the rising slope of the relationship between strategic interest and humanitarian aid as the number of natural disasters increases. As such, these results are consistent with H1C, which suggests that donors may be more likely to dispense humanitarian aid to their strategic adversaries because such disasters present unique opportunities to improve bilateral relations. Notably when natural disasters are particularly severe, donors may dispense a great deal more aid to strategic opponents compared to strategic allies to further their strategic interests.

Conversely, to find support for H1A, which hypothesizes that donors are more likely to give to their strategic allies in the wake of a natural disaster to further their own self-interest, we would have expected the parameter estimate for the interaction term between strategic interest and natural disasters to be negative, which it is not. Moreover, we would have expected there to be a downward sloping relationship between strategic interest and humanitarian interest as the number of natural disasters increases. This is clearly not evidenced in the "Humanitarian Aid" panel in Figure 4.

Meanwhile, support for H1B is also missing. In particular, we would have expected there to be a downward sloping relationship between strategic interest and humanitarian aid when there are no natural disasters. However, if natural disasters had a humanizing effect on strategic opponents, then we would have expected the slope between strategic interest and humanitarian aid to flatten as the number of natural disasters increased, which we do not find.

Meanwhile, we test H2 by examining the effect of the interaction between strategic interest and natural disasters on civil society aid. In Figure 3 we similarly find a positive and significant relationship between this interaction and civil society aid. The substantive effects plot (in the 'Civil Society Aid' panel in Figure 4) meanwhile also suggests that donors are more likely to target aid to civil society in their strategic adversaries the more natural disasters that country experiences, supporting H2. These results are somewhat suggestive of the idea that donors may be acting to take advantage of vul-



**Figure 4:** Simulated substantive effect plots for each dependent variable (humanitarian aid, civil society aid, and development aid) for different levels of natural disaster severity across the range of the strategic distance measure. A rug plot is provided below each panel.

nervous recipients to mold the relationship to their interests.

Finally, we test H<sub>3</sub> by analyzing how the interaction between strategic interest and natural disasters affects development aid allocation. From, Figure 3, we can see that this coefficient is not statistically significant. Examining the substantive significance in Figure 4 ('Development Aid' panel) we can see that while the level of development aid does increase as the number of natural disasters increases, the slope between strategic interest and development aid is only minimally affected, suggesting little support for H<sub>3</sub>. These results suggest that whatever humanitarian impulse donors may have felt toward their strategic adversaries (which H<sub>1B</sub> suggests exists), this effect only applies to short-term humanitarian aid and not long-term development aid.

## Persistence of foreign aid allocation over time

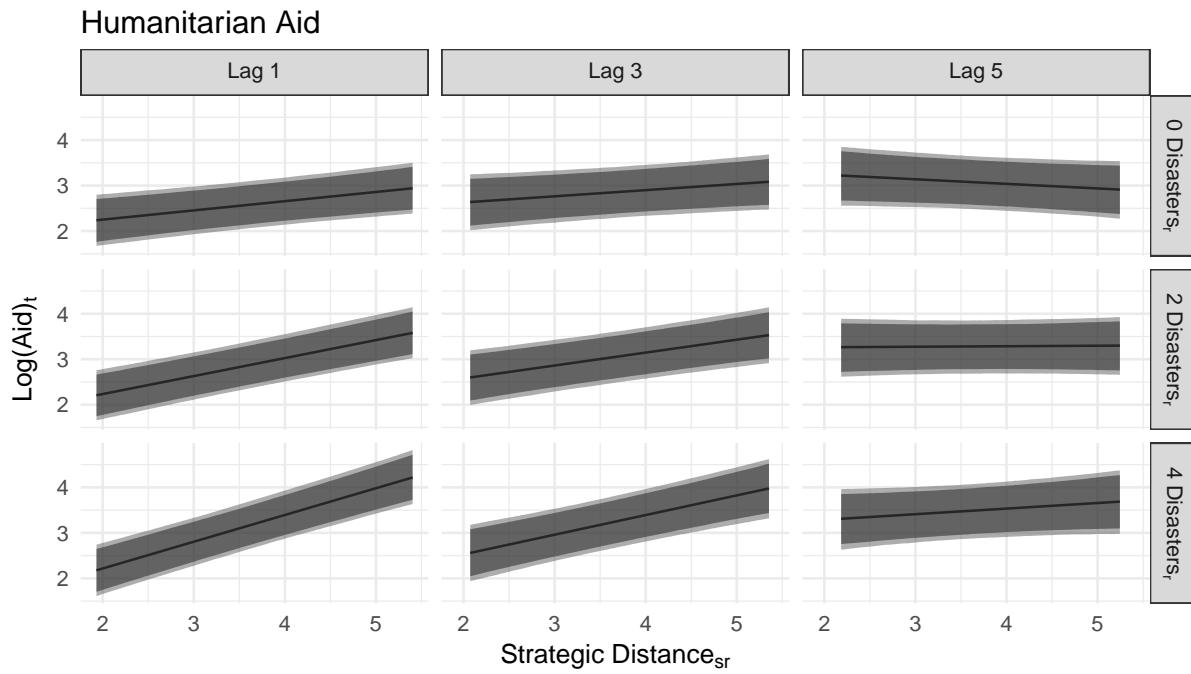
How persistent are these changes that we observe? To answer this question, we re-estimate the original models for different lag lengths for the main interaction terms<sup>51</sup>. These models are estimated separately for each lag length (lags of 1, 3, and 5 years). The simulation results when using different lags for the interactions and constituent terms are shown in Figures 5, 6, and 7 for the outcome variables humanitarian aid, civil society aid and development aid, respectively.

From Figure 5, we can see that the interaction between strategic interest and natural disasters is rather persistent until approximately five years after a natural disaster. This suggests that donors are more likely to allocate humanitarian aid to their strategic adversaries for some time following a natural disaster, suggesting that donors seek to use natural disasters as a tactic to improve relations with strategic opponents for quite some time after the initial disaster (supporting H<sub>1C</sub>).

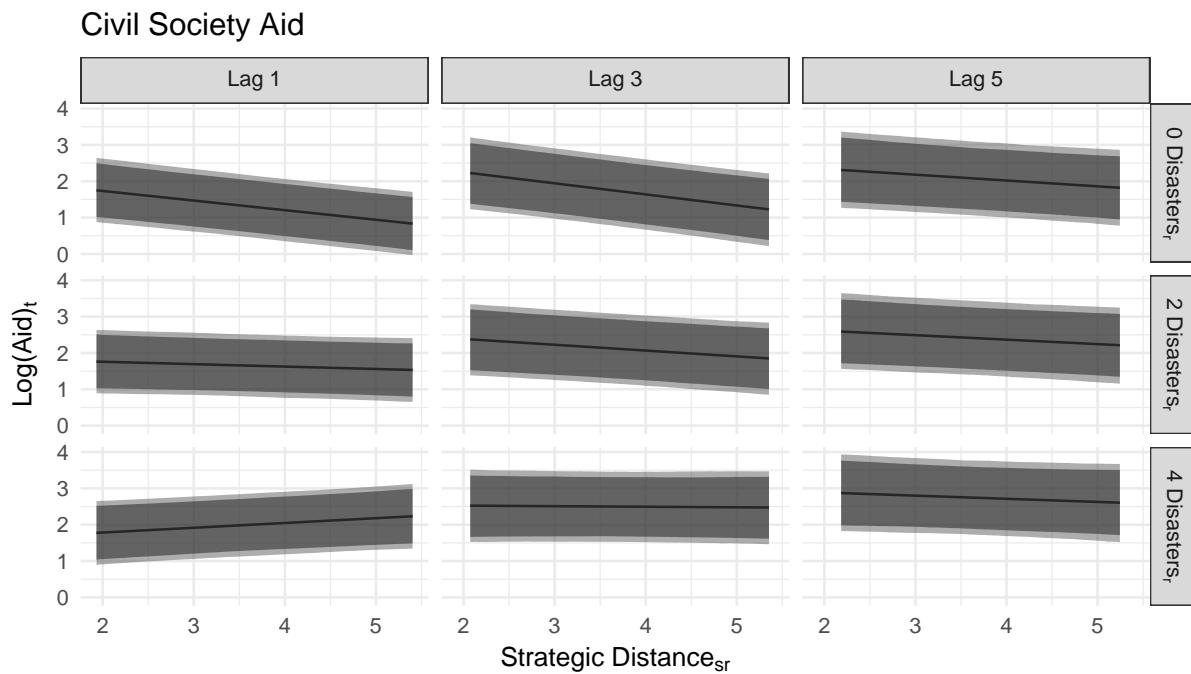
Figure 6 shows that while the interaction between strategic interest and natural disasters positively affects the allocation of civil society aid, this effect is only consistent for a short time following a natural disaster (supporting H<sub>2</sub>). One way to interpret these

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<sup>51</sup>The covariates are measured using a one-year lag throughout



**Figure 5:** Simulated substantive effect plots for humanitarian aid for varying lags of variables of interest and different levels of natural disaster severity across the range of the strategic distance measure.

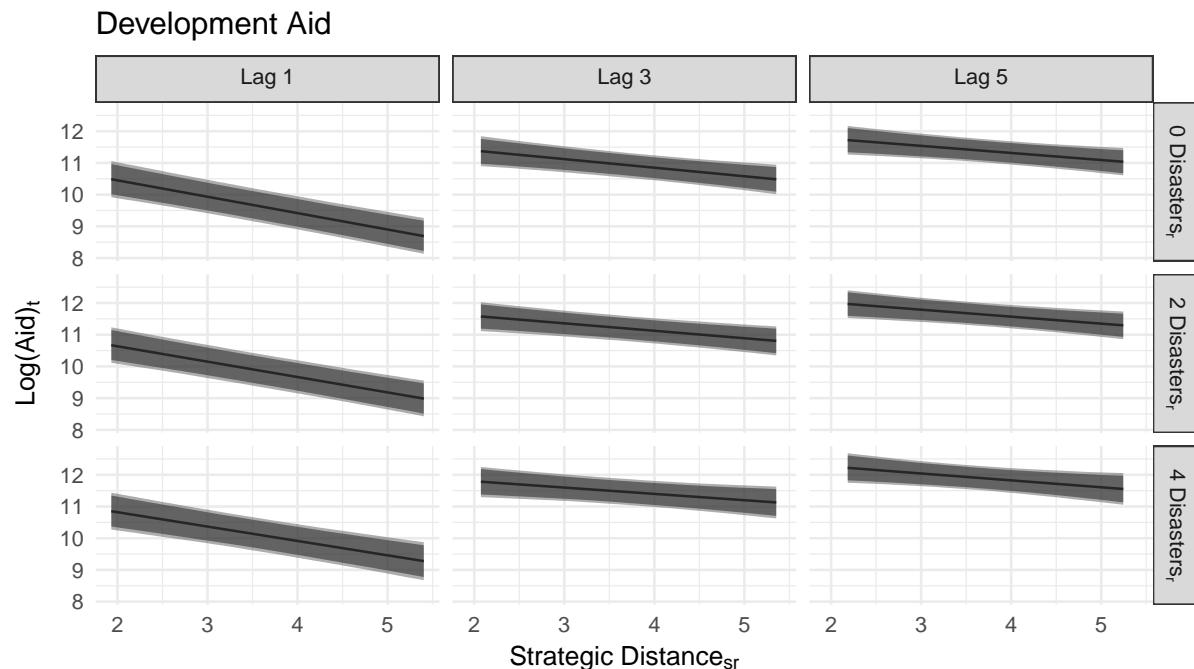


**Figure 6:** Simulated substantive effect plots for civil society aid for varying lags of variables of interest and different levels of natural disaster severity across the range of the strategic distance measure.

results is that donors recognize the difficulty of trying to influence domestic politics through civil society aid relatively quickly, and, as a consequence, waste relatively little time in pursuing such attempts. Another interpretation is that civil society aid is actu-

ally rather effective and as such, recipients governments are likely to push back against allowing it in fairly short order. Teasing out the exact mechanism would be a fruitful area for future research.

Last, Figure 7 extends the earlier finding that the interaction between strategic interest and natural disasters has little effect on development aid across a variety of different lags. This result further suggests that there is little support for H<sub>3</sub>, that is natural disasters do not seem to prompt donors to care concern themselves with recipient's long-term interests.



**Figure 7:** Simulated substantive effect plots for development aid for varying lags of variables of interest and different levels of natural disaster severity across the range of the strategic distance measure.

## Conclusion

Our analysis suggests that a more nuanced understanding of the drivers of foreign aid is in order. While recent work has shown that accounting for the channel of aid delivery can go a long way toward understanding aid allocation decisions (Dietrich, 2013, 2016), we argue that the social context may also be an important consideration. In particular, we show that while donors are generally driven by strategic interests, this does not

always manifest itself by the allocation of greater aid to strategic allies. Indeed, we find that donors are driven to allocate humanitarian aid to strategic adversaries struck by natural disasters. We argue that one explanation for this finding is that donors see natural disasters as an opportunity to improve relations with their strategic opponents. As shown in our lag models, these findings are surprisingly persistent.

Moreover, natural disasters may not only increase short-term humanitarian aid. We find that strategic considerations also reign large when one considers the effect on the distribution of aid with longer-term targets. We find that strategic adversaries are more likely to distribute civil society aid in the more natural disasters a country experiences, they are not more likely to distribute development aid. Because civil society aid inherently involves engagement and intervention in the domestic politics of a recipient country, an increase in civil society aid is indicative of a greater desire to increase donor influence over a recipient country, at least relative to development aid. Our analysis suggests however, that these results are rather short-term.

These results should be of particular interest as climate change continues to increase the incidence and the intensity of natural disasters. They suggest that while countries that experience natural disasters can expect humanitarian aid even from their strategic adversaries, such help can also open the doors to efforts to influence domestic politics in line with the interests of donors who have historically been antagonistic.

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# A Appendix

## Validating our measure of strategic interest

We further conduct a series of post-estimation validation tests for our resulting strategic variable. In particular, we (1) evaluate the relationship between our political strategic interest variable against S scores and Kendall's  $\tau_b$  for alliances and (2) investigate how our measure of strategic interest describe well-known dyadic relationships.

First, we perform a simple bivariate OLS with and with year fixed effects to evaluate how our measures compare to S scores and Kendall's  $\tau_b$ .<sup>52</sup> Note in order to make our strategic measures somewhat interpretable, for the validation we scale our strategic measures to be between 0 and 1 just as S scores and Kendall  $\tau_b$  is scaled. The results are shown in Table 1.

**Table 1:** Validation of Political Strategic Interest Variable against S scores and Kendall's  $\tau_b$

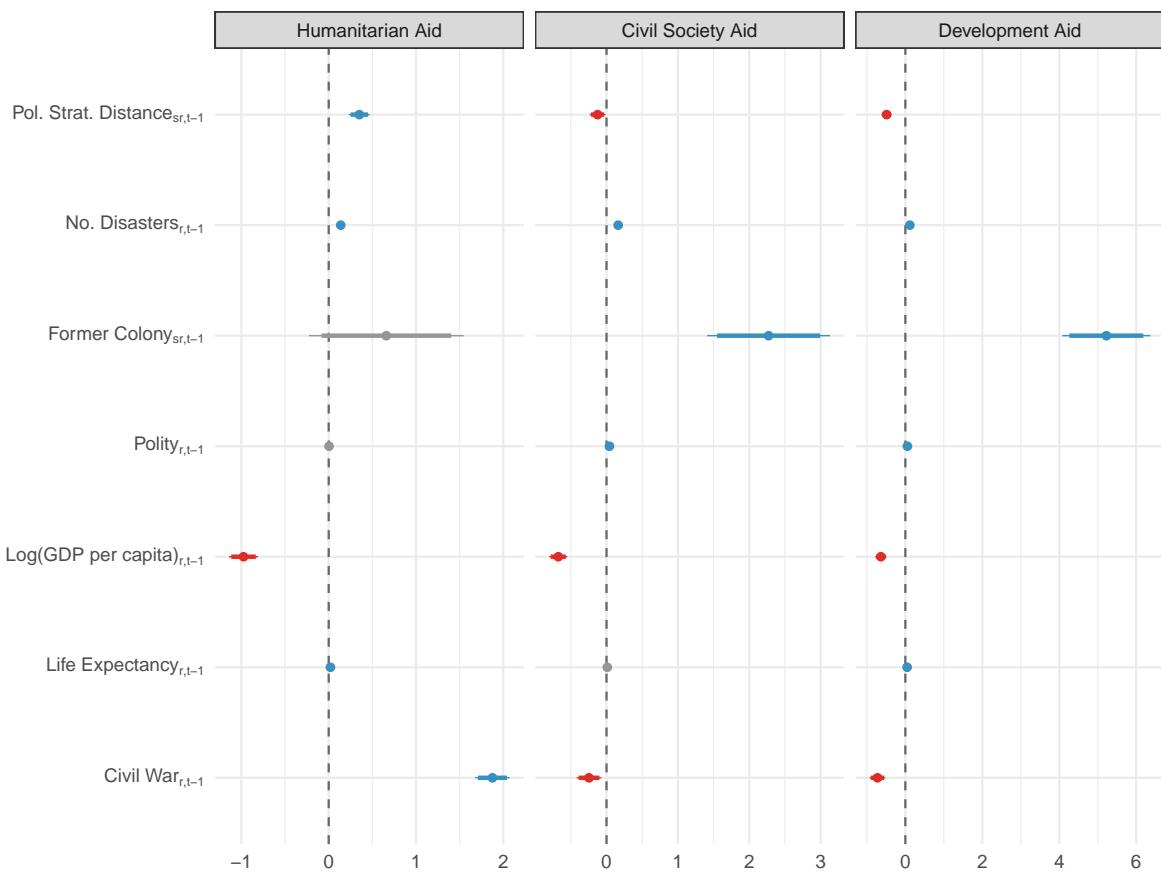
	Unweighted S Scores	Unweighted S Scores	Weighted S Scores	Weighted S Scores	Tau-B	Tau-B
(Intercept)	0.97*** (0.00)	1.03*** (0.00)	1.01*** (0.00)	1.02*** (0.00)	0.29*** (0.00)	0.25*** (0.00)
Strategic Interest	-0.80*** (0.00)	-0.84*** (0.00)	-1.22*** (0.00)	-1.26*** (0.00)	-0.89*** (0.00)	-0.87*** (0.00)
Year FE?	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes

\*\*\* $p < 0.001$ , \*\* $p < 0.01$ , \* $p < 0.05$

In brief, we find that our political strategic measure performs well against S scores and Kendall's  $\tau_b$  for alliances with and without fixed effects. Note that because the PCA is of latent distances between any two dyads, dyads that are closer in space will have smaller values and therefore represent a stronger strategic relationship. Therefore the negative relationship we find between the political strategic measure and S scores and  $\tau_b$  are interpreted to mean the greater the foreign policy similarity as measured by the S score or Kendall's  $\tau_b$ , the smaller the latent distance or the greater the political strategic relationship between a dyad.

<sup>52</sup>Note for comparison that the bivariate relationship of S scores on Kendall's  $\tau_b$  is statistically significant with a coefficient of 0.62 while the bivariate relationship of Kendall's  $\tau_b$  on S Scores is statistically significant with a coefficient of 0.31.

## A.1 Analyses for models without interaction terms



**Figure 8:** Coefficient plots for the analyses without interaction terms for each dependent variable, humanitarian aid, civil society aid and development aid. Coefficients that are significant at the 5% level are shaded in blue if the coefficient is positive and red if the coefficient is negative. Coefficients that are not significant at the 5% level are shaded in gray.