

# Aid by Democratic Versus Autocratic Donors:

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Democratization Processes and Citizens' Perceptions in Recipient Countries

Adea Gafuri

Göteborg Studies in Politics 178

2023

Avhandlingen baseras på följande delstudier:

Gafuri, A. (2022). Can democracy aid improve democracy? The European Union's democracy assistance 2002–2018. *Democratization*, 29(5), 777-797.

Gafuri, A. (2023). Are Autocratic Donors Impeding Democracy Abroad? The Presence of Autocratic Donors and Citizens' Perceptions of Democracy. Unpublished manuscript.

Gafuri, A. (2023). Do Donor Practices at Home and Abroad Matter for Citizens in Recipient Countries? Experimental Evidence from Serbia. Unpublished manuscript.

Akademisk avhandling för filosofie doktorsexamen i statsvetenskap som med tillstånd av samhällsvetenskapliga fakulteten vid Göteborgs universitet framlägges till offentlig granskning fredagen den 22 september 2023, kl. 13.15 i Torgny Segerstedtsalen, Universitetets huvudbyggnad, Vasaparken 1, Göteborg.



DEPARTMENT OF POLITICAL SCIENCE

Gafuri, Adea. 2023. *Aid by Democratic Versus Autocratic Donors: Democratization Processes and Citizens' Perceptions in Recipient Countries*. Göteborg Studies in Politics 178, edited by Johannes Lindvall, Department of Political Science, University of Gothenburg, Box 711, 405 30 Göteborg, Sweden. ISBN 978-91-8069-347-9 (print); ISBN 978-91-8069-348-6 (pdf), ISSN 0346-5942.

### **Abstract**

OECD countries are no longer the sole major providers of financial flows abroad. Authoritarian countries such as China, Russia, Iran, and Saudi Arabia, with their distinct practices and implementation processes, are increasingly present in low- and middle-income countries. In this Ph.D. dissertation, I develop and test hypotheses on the influence of foreign aid on democratization processes and citizens' attitudes in recipient countries. Employing a multi-method approach, using observational and experimental methods, I analyze the role of democratic donors such as the European Union (EU) and autocratic donors like China, both together and separately. I find that democratic donors like the EU, who target democratic institutions via democracy assistance can foster democratization. I argue that democracy assistance is effective when aid is coupled with political conditionality and monitoring mechanisms. On the other hand, aid from autocratic donors like China can decrease support for democracy, especially among those who view autocratic donors very positively. Autocratic aid impacts these perceptions through (1) attribution processes, i.e., individuals learn about aid projects that are implemented close to where they live (2) the instrumentalization of aid by political elites, i.e., political elites influence citizens by spreading information about the benevolence and generosity of authoritarian donors. Finally, this Ph.D. dissertation demonstrates that foreign donors' attributes convey to citizens how likely corruption is in the project and how responsive their local government and donors will be in implementing such projects. The political regime of the donor, whether democratic or autocratic, signals the level of responsiveness to citizens' demands. On the other hand, whether a donor is transparent or not, indicates the risk of corruption in the project.

**Key Words:** democratization, citizens' attitudes, democracy assistance, autocratic aid, China, EU