

# **Humanitarian Aid Rejection during Disasters: Understanding its Political Dynamics**

## **Abstract**

Despite a common belief that humanitarian aid offers are always accepted, aid rejection is a recurrent phenomenon with potential negative implications for the victims of disasters. Given the expected increase in the number and intensity of these events, understanding aid rejection is more important than ever. This dissertation will try to understand why this phenomenon occurs, while closing a knowledge gap in the existing humanitarian aid literature. To serve this purpose, this work undertakes first a correlational study to test six hypothesis that aim to explore the relationship between aid rejection and several determining factors: recipient need, regime type, regime transition, time to elections, economic freedom, and relative power. Then, it undertakes a qualitative analysis to explore the extent to which IR approaches can explain aid rejection, and to show how culture and identity provides us with an alternative explanation to this issue. This study finds that, contrary to expectations, none of the variables studied correlate significantly with the behaviour of aid rejection, while it finds that culture and identity provide us with a valuable explanation.

**Keywords:** Humanitarian Assistance, Humanitarian Aid, Humanitarian Aid Rejection, Refusal of Humanitarian Assistance, Natural Disasters, Human-made Disasters, States, International Organizations, Sovereignty, International Law, International Cooperation.

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## I. Introduction

An average of 60.000 people lost their lives annually in the period from 2000 to 2019 as a result of natural and human-made disasters, and more than 4 billion were affected in various ways, according to a report by the United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction (UNDRR) (2020). In addition, the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) concluded that disasters ‘occur three times more often than 50 years ago’ (UN News, 2021), and there is a wide consensus within the scientific community that climate change will further exacerbate the rate and intensity of disasters in the coming decades (European Commission, 2016). Whether the current humanitarian system will be able to cope with this increased need is also a matter of concern. The United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) reported in 2005 that every year humanitarian assistance is at least 30% underfunded (WorldVision, 2021), and in 2021 this trend worsened as result of Covid-19, when funding for humanitarian aid dropped by \$284 million and the number of people in need of assistance raised by 19 million (OCHA, 2021).

In addition to these pessimistic trends, evidence suggests that although offers of humanitarian assistance are generally accepted when a disaster occurs, their rejection is still a frequent phenomenon (Nelson, 2010, p. 391). Salient cases include Japan’s reluctance to accept international assistance in the aftermath of the Kobe earthquake in 1995, an event that left more than 5000 people dead and around 34.000 more affected (CRED, 2020), or the Indian government refusing foreign aid following the 2004 Indian Ocean Tsunami and the earthquake that hit Kashmir a year after (2020). These last two events, which were in line with India’s long term official policy of aid rejection, left the country with more than 16.000 and 1.300 deaths respectively. The most prominent case is perhaps Myanmar’s refusal to accept foreign assistance after cyclone Nargis hit the country and left around 140.000 victims and hundreds of thousands of people homeless (2020). This event sparked discussions of criminal responsibility and foreign military intervention was suggested in various occasions (Parsons, 2008).

If humanitarian aid is effectively delivered abiding by the principles of humanity, neutrality, impartiality, and independence, and it is in effect apolitical as it is commonly presupposed and announced by most humanitarian donors, then why would a state reject such a self-interested offer? This is a question that increasingly puzzles scholars, and although some efforts have been made to answer it, this puzzle remains largely unanswered.

Unlike in the context of armed conflicts, where the tense political environment can easily hamper efforts to help civilian populations when aid is perceived as foreign interference (UNHCR, 1993), humanitarian assistance to disasters is expected to be politically neutral and clear of strategic considerations. Humanitarian aid is also expected to be free of conditions, what would differentiate itself from Official Development Assistance (ODA). Rejecting aid also seems to be contradicting core humanitarian norms, breaching fundamental human rights law, and possibly violating international criminal law. Furthermore, aid that is channelled through multilateral organizations and meets the condition of being ‘unearmarked’ is meant to provide a higher sense of neutrality and independence as opposed to bilateral aid, although this type would also be expected to follow humanitarian principles (Nelson, 2010, p. 382). Aid rejection to multilateral organizations would then be even more unusual and unexpected. What is more, rejecting aid in times of humanitarian need seems to contradict key expectations of well-known International Relations theoretical approaches. For instance, this action contradicts the realist logic of power maximization, whereas states maximize their absolute gains in a context of international insecurity (Waltz, 1979), and, at least in the case of liberal democracies, it contradicts the constructivist logic of appropriateness (Sending, 2002), as aid rejection would undermine core democratic values such as the protection of human rights. For these reasons, it is puzzling that international offers of humanitarian assistance can be rejected in the context of natural or human-made disasters.

Understanding aid rejection is more important today than ever before. When a disaster hits a population, a response is usually required immediately to save the greater number of people. If the national response capacity of a state is overwhelmed by the magnitude of the disaster, refusing external humanitarian assistance can hamper efforts to save lives. Given the expected increase in the number of disasters around the world, cases of aid rejection may also rise, and consequently, the number of people that do not receive outside help when it is needed. An in-depth understanding of this phenomenon could help us to better assess the risk of rejection, and to ensure greater humanitarian access in situations of disaster. Then, the findings of this study could be of benefit to policymakers, humanitarian donors and practitioners, and to benefit the victims of natural disasters. Also, it may be of help to future researchers that feel that the issue of aid rejection is a contemporary problem that needs a solution.

In light of these questions, it is the purpose of this work to find and provide compelling explanations to why states end up rejecting aid. In doing so, it will aim to contribute

considerably to a topic that seems understudied, and to close a knowledge gap in the existing humanitarian aid literature with hopes that it will assist further research and policymaking. In addition, the study conducted here will be useful to assess the explanatory power of core theoretical approaches with regards to this topic and to the field of humanitarian affairs in general.

To achieve the aspirations of this project, it will first begin with a review of the existing literature on humanitarian aid rejection, which will conclude with an overview of the present academic gap in the context of aid rejection and an explanation of how this research will close such gap. Then, it will introduce the conceptual and theoretical frameworks that will be used to interpret and frame de various hypotheses and research sub-questions of this work. It will continue with an explanation of the methodology used along the two main parts of the study: its correlational research and its qualitative analysis. The correlational research will test seven hypothesis that are expected to suggest factors likely to condition states into refusing humanitarian aid, while the qualitative analysis will aim at providing additional explanations based on consolidated theoretical approaches. On the one side, IR theories will be used to explore the extent to which they can explain the role of institutions and international law in conditioning the rejection of aid, and on the other, perspectives on culture and identity will be applied to a case study on the rejection of humanitarian aid by India.

## **II. Literature review: explaining the rejection of humanitarian aid**

This chapter explores the existing academic literature around the phenomenon of humanitarian aid rejection in the context of disasters. The purpose is to gain a considerable understanding of the existing research and debates surrounding this topic, and to find gaps in the literature that this study will aim to close. The contributions included in this review will be assessed, revealing its strengths, weaknesses, as well as controversies. Overall, it will provide a context in which to situate the scope of this work.

Given the concern in exploring specifically those cases where aid rejection seems more puzzling as result of the presupposed “apolitical” nature of humanitarian aid, this chapter will not explore literature on aid rejection that is specific to times of armed conflict, nor cases where official development assistance is refused, even though understanding these phenomena could be significant and of concern for future research. The structure of this chapter will be as follows: First, it will present those arguments that claim that aid offers are often turned down on the basis that they are not needed or are inadequate. After that, it will approach literature that aims at understanding the politics of humanitarian aid provision, before reviewing publications that specifically focus on the political dynamics behind the act of aid refusal. Then, it will continue with an examination of the contribution of ‘grand theories’ of International Relations (IR) to the understanding of this issue. To finish, it will explore the elements of the current international legal framework that seem directly relevant to humanitarian assistance, and it will inquire into research that may shed light into how existing legislation (or the lack of it) conditions rejection. It will finish with an overview of the existing academic gap and an explanation of how this research aims to bridge it.

### **a. Unneeded or inadequate humanitarian aid**

When a state publicly rejects humanitarian aid, the explanation given is often that the affected state has the sufficient response capacity to deal with the disaster on its own. When this is the case, it is legitimate and not as controversial for a state to reject foreign aid. The United States in 2005, Myanmar in 2008 and India in the same year justified their rejection of aid using arguments on these lines. ‘This country is going to rise up and take care of it’ (Sturgis, 2007), was the initial response of former US president Bush when refusing foreign aid after Hurricane Katrina hit the coasts of Florida. Whether the actual capacity of the state is undermined after a disaster seems to be always object of fierce debate and contestation,

although in these specific cases one could argue that the respective states were not able to respond effectively (Borger and Campbell, 2005). Leaving this debate aside, when the state does have sufficient response capabilities it is not unreasonable to expect that aid will be rejected if managing this aid could become a burden to those responsible to deliver it. As Dany explains in his study, too much aid “can lead to chaos and easily overburden those who are supposed to receive and distribute this aid” (2020, p.199), as may have occurred during the 2010 Haiti earthquake, where officials were overwhelmed with enormous challenges of logistics and coordination (IFRC, 2016). Besides, aid offers can often be inadequate and include resources that the affected state has not identified as needed, or be culturally insensitive, he argues. For example, hundreds of tents were unused in the afflicted areas in India in 2004, as they were not big enough to accommodate entire families or became too hot inside (2020, p.210). Although these explanations may seem enough to answer the current puzzle, the next sections will show how the acceptance of aid can be highly influenced by political considerations.

#### **b. Apolitical aid offers?**

To expand on this issue, some authors have argued that aid rejection is the result of the political nature of the aid offers. Unsurprisingly, when they are perceived as serving particular purposes, rather than being politically neutral, they take the risk of being rejected (Dany, 2020, p.201). Fink and Redaelli’s contribution suggests that this could be the case, as they show that humanitarian need is not always the driver of offers of international assistance (2011). Through a quantitative study of more than 400 disasters, they found that aid offers are often biased with strategic intent, showing that humanitarian aid can be highly political and inconsistent with humanitarian principles. “Forgotten” or “silent” emergencies often receive little or no help from the international community, while others receive disproportionate amounts of attention (Fink and Redaelli, 2011,p. 2). “While the extent of the various biases varies significantly across countries, the correlation between the current allocation of aid and the actual humanitarian losses associated with natural disasters is surprisingly low”, they argue (2011, p.15). On average, aid provision was found to be provided significantly more to oil exporting countries, and disproportionately more to geographically closer and politically less affine states. Aid to former colonies is also thought to be higher than to other states, and “bandwagon” effects are not uncommon, where aid is believed to be 15 to 30% more likely to be offered after any major donor participates in the aid process (2011, p.3). These findings are unexpected



given the common assumption that aid is “apolitical” and indicate that the problem may lie in the offers of aid rather than in the states accepting them.

### **c. The politics of humanitarian aid rejection**

It seems reasonable to assume that the nature of aid offers may lead states to decline aid, and indeed, Dany found that this was an important explanatory variable in cases of aid rejection (2020, p.201). Nevertheless, caution should be given with this explanation. Indeed, Dany also concluded in his qualitative examination that this was not sufficient to account for all the cases of aid rejection (2020, p.215), in other words, the fact that an offer was perceived as political or strategic did not always explain why it was rejected. By studying how leaders’ self-perceptions of their environment may condition the rejection of humanitarian aid in democracies, Dany also offers valuable alternative explanations. For example, leaders may wrongly perceive that their response capacity is sufficient to deal with the impact of a disaster, influencing their decision of whether accepting or rejecting foreign aid (Dany, 2020, p.198). Leaders’ self-perceptions of the national roles may also lead them to refuse aid when accepting it is incongruent with their roles of ‘world leader’, ‘regional power’ or ‘major donor’, or when it is perceived that accepting it can cause a negative political impact domestically, for example by affecting a state’s stability or political support (2020, p.199). In this study, akin to constructivist and Foreign Policy Analysis schools of thought, she concludes that states rejected aid not because they had sufficient capabilities, but bureaucratic hurdles and administrative failure impeded aid acceptance (2020, p.213). This is a considerable contribution to the understanding of aid rejection, and it illustrates well how perceptions and non-material constructions such as identity and national role conceptions can provide great explanatory power to understand state behaviour.

Similarly, in his quantitative study Rosario argues that states reject aid when they perceive that, during the management of a severe disaster, rejecting it would pose less political risks to their legitimacy than accepting it (2020, p.3). Three indicators inform the likelihood that aid is rejected on the basis of political risk and legitimacy: state response capacity, level of external intervention and domestic politics. His findings lead him to conclude that most states are likely to accept foreign offers of assistance as long as these offers carry a manageable level of political risk (Rosario, 2020, p.3). The works of both Dany and Rosario are innovative and highly illustrative of a complex phenomenon. Framing the issue of aid rejection through

the prisms of perception and political risk reveal that important domestic considerations can play a role in shaping state behaviour with regards to humanitarian aid.

Differently, aid rejection is a rather more instrumental activity, according to Carnegie and Dolan, who studied 32 cases of aid rejection, argue that states strategically refuse offers of aid to increase their reputation domestically and to ‘cultivate images of self-sufficiency’ (2020, p.13). Finally, Nelson has meticulously examined EM-DAT’s database to find and study all cases of rejection in natural disasters between 1982 and 2006 (2010). Of the 19 cases found, he tests three hypotheses to explore the relationship between aid rejection and factors such as per capita GDP, disaster severity, regime type and whether a regime is transitioning. In light of his findings, he is confident to conclude that, like aid acceptance, aid refusal is a political endeavour (2010, p.379). Although he confirms his expectation that aid tends to be refused when it is not needed, he also finds that aid rejection is more likely during more serious disasters, that autocracies are no more or less likely to refuse aid, and that states that have recently undergone a regime transition are considerably more likely to fall into this type of behaviour (2010, p.394). Both Carnegie and Dolan and Nelson also show what is not commonly known: that states refuse aid in a great number of cases, and in a significant proportion to the total number of disasters. In those cases where aid has been refused other than because of the absence of need, these cases should be highly concerning due to the high number of lives at stake.

#### **d. ‘Grand theories’ of International Relations and aid rejection**

Despite the track record of IR theories in explaining the most pressing issues of the international system, there seems to be a scant contribution within this field to the understanding of aid rejection. In *Political Theory of Foreign Aid*, Hans Morgenthau only covered humanitarian aid briefly, and although he shared his perspective on the political nature of aid, he did not address the issue of rejection (1962). For instance, he contended that humanitarian aid was per se non-political, while maintaining that it “can indeed perform a political function when operating within a political context” (1962, p.301). This led this *realist* thinker to conclude that the different types of aid “are all weapons in the political armoury of the nation” (1962, p.309). ‘*Neorealist*’ theorists do not seem to have framed the issue of aid rejection either, although their views on the behaviour of states, one shaped by the structure of the international system, can be useful to make sense of this specific behaviour.

The branch of *Liberalism* that studies international relations also aims to explain the nature of states' behaviour in the international system, and although it has already tried to shed some light into this issue, its contributions are limited. Considering Kant's views that democracies are highly unlikely to go to war with one another (Kant, 1795), Nelson expected that the different behaviour thought between liberal democracies and illiberal, undemocratic ones, could also account for the likeliness of states to reject foreign aid. Nevertheless, he concluded that, from 1982 to 2006, neither democracies nor autocracies were more likely to decline humanitarian aid (2010, p.395). Given that this relationship may have changed, it will be useful to continue Nelson's study in a broader timeframe. The various liberal views on the role of institutions and international law will also be valuable to understand aid rejection. Finally, like realists and liberals, *constructivist* scholars do not seem to have produced much literature on this issue directly, but their explanations of how ideas and social constructions shape states' actions are of great relevance for understanding it. Despite that these competing perspectives are often assumed as mutually exclusive, they can complement each other to provide an informed account of the past, present and future issues in humanitarian assistance, in this case a broad picture of the complex phenomenon that is aid rejection.

#### **e. International law and aid rejection**

In line with liberal and constructivist approaches, which regard institutions and norms as important in shaping states behaviour, this chapter will continue exploring those writings that can help us appraise the current state of the international humanitarian legal regime, with particular attention to those provisions that seemingly condition the rejection of aid. Several authors have written extensively about the inadequacies of the existing legislation in humanitarian assistance in the context of disasters, revealing various fundamental issues. For example, Hardcastle and Chua point that one is the inexistence of a multilateral treaty specific to humanitarian assistance in disasters (1998). Whereas the Geneva Convention and its protocols protect civilians in the context of armed conflicts, there is no international humanitarian legislation conferring a right to victims of disasters to receive international aid, nor an obligation of states to accept it, they argue (1998). Although Jansen-Wilhelm is conscious of the importance of a legally binding treaty in this regard, she also contends that where international humanitarian law falls short, other legal instruments could play a role in protecting victims. The most important seems to be human rights law, as disasters often risk the fulfilment of fundamental human rights such as the right to life, food, clothing, and housing

(2017, p.42). Given that states party to the International Bill of Rights are legally bound to protect the human rights of their population, there is a legal precedence that rejecting aid in this context could mean that the affected state is failing its legal obligations.

However, Jansen-Wilhelm identifies at least two problems with following a human-right approach. One is that in the event of a disaster states may activate a state of emergency, which can downgrade their legal responsibility to protect fundamental rights (2017, p.44), and the other is the absence of a legal instrument that links the responsibility of the state to protect their populations to an obligation to accept international humanitarian assistance (2017, p.45). In addition to this, Hardcastle and Chua also point to the existing tension between the universality of human right norms and notions of sovereignty and non-intervention, pillars of the United Nations Charter, and demand that they should not be interpreted in isolation, but in line with states' human rights obligations (1998). This reinterpretation of sovereignty could have partially been found in the development of the Responsibility to Protect doctrine (R2P), which seeks to redefine the fundamental meaning of sovereignty, making it conditional to the protection of populations (Smith, 2020). In her work, Barber discusses whether this principle could have triggered military intervention in cases of humanitarian aid rejection such as that by Myanmar in the aftermath of cyclone Nargis, and although she concludes that this specific case would have not met the criteria to apply R2P, other cases could, making this emerging norm an important deterrent of aid refusal (2009, p.33). Gareth Evans, cocreator of the R2P precedent, argued that if a similar case can be considered a crime against humanity, then R2P would apply (Asia-Pacific Centre for the Responsibility to Protect, 2008). Scheinert, who studied this possibility extensively, concluded that, in effect, the Myanmar junta committed crimes against humanity, specifically the crime of "other inhumane acts" (Scheinert, 2013, p.662).

Furthermore, Jansen-Wilhelm has added that refugee law represents another legal regime that may limit the extent to which states are able to reject aid, as signatories of the Refugee Convention are legally bound to protect certain rights to those forcibly displaced (2017, p.47). For internally displaced persons (IDPs) there is not a multilateral agreement in force yet, although regional agreements such as the Kampala Convention in Africa gives states the obligation to seek assistance for IDPs when they are unable to protect them themselves (2017, p.47). A last component of the legal framework that may condition aid rejection is Customary law. Hardcastle and Chua find that it is not clear that the right to receive foreign

assistance has this condition, as it is unclear the extent to which this right could be fulfilled or who in the international community would bear this responsibility (1998). Whether R2P could be regarded as customary law represents the same fundamental issue. Differently, Sivakumaran provides a considerable analysis of the different levels of consent required internationally before a donor can deliver aid to an affected state and concludes that, although in all cases consent is required, regionally this level of consent may vary considerably (2015, p.531). An example of this is that some coordinating mechanisms require a previous request for assistance before aid can be offered, while others do not. This seems to imply that although all these regional treaties are designed in line with the principles of sovereignty and non-intervention, the interpretation of the exact meaning of these norms have varied along time and place. Also, it suggests that different levels of consent may condition the act of aid rejection in different ways.

Finally, Scheinert warns that although certain instruments do exist, matters of jurisdiction, admissibility and criminal responsibility are also considerable issues that may limit the extent to which international law deters states from refusing aid (2013, p.663). For example, in the case of Myanmar, although he finds that crimes against humanity may have been committed, the fact that Myanmar is not a signatory to the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court (ICC) limits its jurisdiction to referrals by the United Nations Security Council. These constraints leave the Security Council as the only considerable enforcement mechanism that may seriously limit the extent to which a state is able to refuse aid. Still, its mandate may only allow intervention and economic sanctions in cases that, under Chapter VII of the *UN Charter* (1945), threaten ‘international peace and security’, as Barber maintains in her study (2009, p.8). Given its veto system, whereas its five permanent members hold the power to veto any binding resolution, the Security Council is often unable to find consensus, a constrain that limits its enforcement power considerably.

These authors’ contributions suggest that although there are some instruments that might deter states from rejecting international offers of aid, the inadequacy of the current legal framework conditions considerably whether this phenomenon can occur. There is not a clear right for victims to receive international assistance, nor an explicit obligation for affected states to accept it. Existing legislation becomes somewhat ambiguous for its application in the context of disasters, problems of jurisdiction may arise within the existing enforcement mechanisms, while the main enforcement instrument, the Security Council, seems to be permanently subject

to political considerations. The extent to which international law influences aid refusal seems difficult, if not impossible to assess. To this, Shelton warns of a counterfactual problem in trying to prove casual links between the existence of a legal regime and the current situation, as it may be extremely challenging to find any record between the mechanism and the change (1980, p. 7).

## **f. Conclusion**

This review has provided considerable familiarity and understanding of the existing body of knowledge surrounding the topic of humanitarian aid rejection. The research presented here shows that although some scholars have already approached this problem, the issue is still understudied and undertheorized, therefore requiring further research. This review has so far showed that although rejected aid offers can be legitimate, rejections are often charged with political considerations that may limit the ability of the international community to meet the needs of affected populations. The various approaches reviewed explain aid rejection differently, suggesting that this issue cannot be attributed to a single explanation on its own. Still, these illustrate that the existing body of knowledge is still immature and requires further research. An extensive search for relevant literature has led to the conclusion that few studies approach aid rejection directly, as most focus on the politics of aid provision rather than aid rejection. This seems to underestimate the role of the receiving state and to overemphasize the importance of aid giving in the dynamics at play, imbalance that this work will aim to address. While IR theoretical approaches are commonly known for their ability to explain the most pressing issues in international relations, they do not seem to have been applied directly to explain the issue of aid rejection. Given their usefulness to explain state behaviour, this work will use these theoretical approaches to close such gap while testing their explanatory power. Exploring literature on international law in relation to the rejection of humanitarian assistance has also raised important considerations, suggesting that this act is highly conditioned by the inadequacies of the current international legal framework.

The contributions that most closely address this research question have been exposed in this review. Although they provide more than valid explanations, they render inspiration and room for further work that this research will exploit. The small body of literature found gives place not only to test new hypotheses, but to approach existing research from different angles and using different criteria, which could lead to different results and interpretations. Using up-to-date data can also be useful to test whether past conclusions will remain appropriate in light

of more recent events. For instance, whereas Dany frames this issue with an approach to leaders' perceptions, this work will take a broader stance and use identity and culture to explain it. Although Nelson provides a considerable quantitative analysis of the factors conditioning aid rejection, a broader quantitative study can help us to explore whether other factors shape aid rejection, and it will be interesting to see whether his findings have continued over time. Also, this study will analyse disasters occurring in a longer timeframe and it will use different criteria to narrow results down.

New questions have arisen as result of extensive research on the matter, and once answered, they may provide a more comprehensive explanation to why states reject humanitarian aid: Do elections condition the rejection of aid? Can an open market economy influence this behaviour? Is the relative power of the state a determinant of aid rejection? The fact that these questions have not been answered add to the current gap in the literature that this study will aim to close.

### III. Conceptual and theoretical framework of analysis

The purpose of this chapter is to introduce the conceptual and theoretical framework used in the present study. They will frame and interpret the hypotheses within the quantitative analysis (H1-6) and research sub-questions within the qualitative analysis (RSQ1-2), and they will be the main tools employed to answer this study's research question.

First, it is paramount to begin with well-defined concepts, of which *humanitarian aid* is centrepiece. Despite an impression that this is a contested concept given the existence of varied definitions, and because terms such as humanitarian aid, humanitarian action, humanitarian assistance and humanitarian relief are often used interchangeably (also done in this work), it seems clear that they all refer to actions that aim at “saving lives, relieving suffering and protecting human dignity in the aftermath of man-made crises and natural disasters”. The *humanitarian principles* of humanity, neutrality, impartiality and independence guide such actions, shaping the definition of humanitarian aid while distinguishing it from other activities (ECHO , 2020). These principles are well-defined in UN General Assembly resolutions A/RES/46/182 (1991) and A/RES/58/114 (2003), partially rooted in international humanitarian law provisions (GSDRC, 2021) and are the guiding principles of many Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) such as the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement.

This type of aid, distinguished from others for its short-term nature and urgency, can take various forms, such as the provision of food, water, shelter, health and medical assistance, capacity building and training, logistical support, and the coordination of volunteers in the affected area (European Commission, 2021). Cash transfers, technology and expertise also are forms of assistance that can be offered to affected states in the event of disasters. Depending on the source of this help, humanitarian aid offers can be *bilateral*, aid “controlled and spent by donor countries at their own discretion” (ReliefWeb, 2008) or *multilateral*, channelled through UN agencies or international organizations. Funding managed by multilateral institutions cannot always be used entirely under their discretion, as a great portion of the funds received is “earmarked”, that is, donors can decide their specific purpose. Even though this type of aid is delivered by multilateral bodies, it is for this reason still considered bilateral aid (ReliefWeb, 2008).



Various definitions can be found for *disaster*, such as “a serious disruption of the functioning of a community or a society causing widespread human, material, economic or environmental losses which exceed the ability of the affected community or society to cope using its own resources” (UNDRR, 2021). Differently, it can also be defined as a “situation or event, which overwhelms local capacity, necessitating a request to national or international level for external assistance” and “an unforeseen and often sudden event that causes great damage, destruction and human suffering. Though often caused by nature, disasters can have human origins” (CRED, 2021). By *aid rejection* it is meant the act of declining international offers of humanitarian assistance partially or totally, independently of their source, in the aftermath of a disaster. Specific criteria around this definition will be found in the ‘dependent variable’ section. The various theoretical approaches used in this study can be found below.

### **a. Liberalism**

#### *Democratic Peace Theory (H2)*

There is an increasing body of literature that argues that democracies tend to behave differently than autocracies. Kant claimed, for example, that a federation of republics would guarantee perpetual peace on the long run, and although he did not argue explicitly that democracy was the specific regime type needed to achieve this condition (Kant, 1795, p. 5), his sketch preceded many theories that maintained this perspective. Given the seemingly absence of war between democracies since Kant’s writing in 1795, Fukuyama was determined to claim that with the universalisation of liberal democracy as a form of government, humanity had reached *The End of History* (1989). Other authors such as Doyle have extended this argument contending that it is the four institutions common to liberal democracies that can lead to perpetual peace, namely judicial equality, representative legislatures, private property, and market economies (1983, p.206). Although the various assumptions of the authors contributing to the Democratic Peace Theory vary, what is important for this work’s purpose is that it provides a perspective that suggests that democratic and autocratic states behave differently. Although the specific behaviour studied in this theory is the act of going to war with other states, considering its expectations it seems reasonable to suspect that states’ type of political system may also condition the behaviour of accepting or rejecting humanitarian aid.

*Democracy*, the ‘power of the people’ is thought of as a form of political organization where governing depends on the will of the population. Given that the specific form that

democracy takes can vary across states, it may be easier to understand democracy to what it definitely is not (Council of Europe, 2021). “Democracy, then, is not autocracy or dictatorship, where one person rules; and it is not oligarchy, where a small segment of society rules...(it) should not even be "rule of the majority", if that means that minorities' interests are ignored completely” (2021).

### *Democratization and War Theory (H3)*

Studies such as Wolf et al’s have concluded that, although democratic states may be less prone to engage into armed conflict, autocratic states recently transitioning to democracy may be highly unstable and even more likely to take part into armed conflict than actual democracies or stable autocracies (1996). According to their study, highly unstable domestic political competition after the breakup of an autocratic regime, weak institutions, and nationalist appeals to win the support of masses tend to ultimately end in belligerent attitudes (1996). Like the Democratic Peace Theory, this suggests that states perform a distinct behaviour when they are in a transition period. Again, although the application of this theory was devised to understand the act of war, it seems reasonable to suspect that this distinct environment could condition the rejection of humanitarian aid.

Wolf et al. regard *regime transition* as the process by which a state undertakes certain institutional reforms that leads it to change from a democracy towards an autocracy, an anocracy, or vice versa. These distinct categories are based on Gurr’s Polity II project (Wolf et al., 1996, p. 185). The Polity IV database defines regime transition as any shift of three or more points in its 20-point scale (Marshall, 2020, p.36). In this study, by *regime type* it is meant any level within this scale.

### *Institutional Peace Theory (RSQ1)*

Other liberal scholars such as Axelrod and Keohane have emphasized the importance of international law and institutions in explaining state behaviour, arguing that these can effectively make for the absence of a world government (1985). Given the power of institutions to reduce the uncertainties of cooperation, such as that of ‘free riding’, states are prone to follow international norms and to seek absolute rather than relative gains (Keohane and Martin, 1995, p.44). This is the case given that institutions provide important coordinating mechanisms for cooperation, facilitate key information about the actions of states, and reduce the costs of

cooperating (1995, p.42). Although this approach still sees states as the most important actors in the international arena, it regards the role of international organizations as determinant in shaping state behaviour. This perspective will be useful to understand the limits of international law and to assess whether aid rejection is influenced by the workings of international institutions.

#### *Commercial Peace Theory (H5)*

Similarly, liberal authors Deudney and Ikenberry have also emphasized the role of economics in reducing the likelihood of conflict and argued that the interdependence created by international trade incentivises states to behave peacefully with one another (1999). Strong trade relationships would not only increase the absolute gains of the participant states, as David Ricardo already argued in the 18<sup>th</sup> century with his theory of comparative advantage, but the motivation to maintain economic growth would disincentivise states from engaging into conflict, since war would highly reduce the benefits of trade (Deudney and Ikenberry, 1999, p.191). Considering this, it would also be interesting to explore whether trade can have the same influence over the acceptance of aid.

#### **b. Neorealism**

##### *Defensive Realism (H7 & RSQ1)*

Kenneth Waltz wrote in *Theory of International Politics* (1979) that the behaviour of states was preconditioned by the structure of the international system, one based on its anarchic nature (the lack of a world government), and the objective power of states. Given that states (the system's units) cannot not be at all times certain of other states' intentions, nor seek help from a higher authority in the event of a conflict, states ultimately depend on themselves to ensure their survival. The only way to overcome this uncertainty and persist within this 'structure' is for states to increase their capabilities to at least a level similar to those of other states. This logic forces them to seek relative gains and to reject opportunities for absolute gains, which ultimately drive states into power competitions and to the creation of balances of power. 'Size of population and territory, resource endowment, economic capability, military strength, political stability and competence' are the various elements that form states' assessments of capabilities in Waltz' 'self-help' system (Waltz, 1979, p. 131). In effect, most of these elements could be affected negatively by the impact of a disaster. According to these premises, accepting foreign aid would be seen as an opportunity to recover some of the associated losses, and to

some extent, aid would add up to the total share of resources for which states compete. At first sight, aid rejection seems to contradict this theory's expectations, leaving this approach as insufficient to explain it. Still, it can be worthy to study whether states' share of global resources can play a role in influencing this behaviour. Also, this perspective is useful to explain some of the dynamics at play in international law and its enforcement.

### **c. Constructivism**

#### *Social Constructivism (H5 & RSQ1)*

Contrastingly, Constructivism emerged as a critique to approaches such as Waltz's defensive realism. The emphasis that pioneers such as Wendt placed on the social construction of reality has offered important accounts of the differences in states' behaviour where Realism and Liberalism fell short to explain. Rather than focusing on the material structure affecting states' behaviour, Wendt argued that these objective realities are shaped by the intersubjective meanings of individuals, preconditioned by ideas and beliefs (Wendt, 1992, p.405). It is the meaning attached to the material structure (ideational structure) rather than the material structure itself, what shapes the actions of states (Copeland, 2000, p.189). This offers a completely different view of the logics behind state behaviour and provides a different lens to explore aid rejection. Like liberalism and neorealism, it will also be helpful to understand the political dynamics behind the current legal framework.

### **d. Foreign Policy Analysis**

#### *Diversionary Foreign Policy Theory (H4)*

An interesting approach to understand states' foreign policies is offered by Smith, who argues that governments often undertake 'adventurous' policies to increase their chances of getting re-elected (1996, p.133). This occurs because risky or conflictive foreign policies may divert the attention of the public from domestic issues, or because 'succeeding' at these may increase the government's reputation. This success can increase their current chances of re-election, even if their policies are not in the interest of the nation or directly risk the lives of its citizens (1996, p.133). Diversionary theory has been applied in specific contexts such as to explain why states engage into conflict, but it does not seem to be applied to the case of aid rejection. Although this approach may not explain rejection on the grounds of diverting public attention,

it might in terms of reputation. Moreover, it is especially useful as it suggests that states behave differently before incoming elections, and that this can affect states' interactions with other states.

### *Culture and Social Identity (RSQ2)*

Finally, Foreign Policy Analysis (FPA) as a subfield within IR has gone beyond traditional approaches and it has provided alternative explanations to how states relate to each other with their foreign policies. Although Constructivism has been an important innovation by including socially constructed ideas into the understanding of state behaviour, FPA has gone further and studied how constructs such as culture, identity and role conceptions regularly influence decision-making upon the development of foreign policies. These contributions have also shown the increasing importance of domestic factors for a more complete understanding of state behaviour.

Given their abstract nature, it is important to define these concepts well, clearly establishing their limits. On the one hand, *culture* refers to 'recurring patterns of mental activity, or the habits of thought, perception, and feeling, that are common to members of a particular group' (Duffield, 1999, p.769). To name a few, culture can be described in terms of 'assumptions, beliefs, ideas, values, attitudes, feelings, meanings, images, norms, world views or some combination of these', while it is only when they are broadly shared by a group when they become 'cultural' (1999, p.769). Three attributes can be associated with culture: they are characteristic of groups, rather than of individuals; they are different from other cultures; and they are considerably stable. This stability occurs as unconventional views tend to be rejected by the status quo, because it is uncommon to encounter irrefutable evidence to challenge settled perspectives, and to the fact that emotional and normative elements are difficult to disprove empirically (1999, p.770). The term *political culture* is defined by Duffield as 'used to denote the subjective orientations toward and assumptions about the political world that characterize the members of a particular society and that guide and inform their political behaviour' (Duffield, 1999, p.774). Among other categorizations, political culture is particularly useful for the purposes of this work.

On the other hand, *identity* entails self-knowledge and stories about one's 'self' (Sinnott, 2017, p.4). Identities are mental constructions that gives us a sense of who we are as individuals and 'serve as a bulwark against the existential assaults of risk, tragedy, and

meaninglessness that threaten the self with dissolution, chaos and terror' (Sinnott, 2017, p.5). Sinnott differentiates between 'internal' identity, which describes ideas of one's self, and 'external, implying ideas that relate to the identity of others (2017, p.8). Also known as *social identity*, Risse et al define the latter as 'ideas describing and categorizing an individual's membership in a social group, including emotional and evaluative components... and which provide a system of orientation for self-reference, creating and defining the individual's place in society' (1999, p.154). In other words, social identity illustrates actors' own conceptions and how they see themselves within an 'imagined community'. A sense of being different from other communities, creating in-groups and out-groups or 'others' distinguish social identities (1999, p.155). In addition, *nation-state identity* concern 'social identities defining social groups on the basis of mostly territorial criteria...and closely linked to ideas about sovereignty, statehood and of just political and social orders' (1999, p.155).

Duffield's work is revealing on how these terms can be applied to understanding states' foreign policy. His approach identifies four mechanisms with which culture influences foreign policy processes and outcomes, although this model also seems appropriate to explore the connections between identity and foreign policy. First, culture and social identity help defining the basic goals of the group, as interests depend on its ingrained values and collective identities (Duffield, 1999, p.771). Second, they condition perception of the external environment, as they influence what people pay attention to, causing some issues to be ignored while others magnified, and influence how they are interpreted and understood. Third, they help to formulate and identify prospective behaviours for realizing and supporting the group's interests in a particular context, limiting the possible range of available actions, as well as the tools and tactics seen as acceptable, legitimate, or appropriate. Finally, culture and social identity influence how options are evaluated, as they condition the judgements made about possible results, courses of action and their costs and benefits appraisals (1999, p.772). Culture (and arguably social identity) are not deterministic, Duffield argues; rather, they condition behaviour and promote its continuity (1999, p.772).

Given the explanatory power shown by Duffield's work in trying to make sense of Germany's policy choices with regards to its security, this approach proves itself as illuminating in explaining aid rejection. In the qualitative analysis chapter of this work, the way culture and identity can be applied to frame India's long-term policy of aid rejection will be explained.



## **IV. Methodology**

In order to explore the various explanations around humanitarian aid rejection, this study employs a mixed-methods approach. Using a combination of quantitative and qualitative methods will enrich our understanding of a highly complex phenomenon, which could not be fully comprehended by using any method on its own. In the first part it will undertake a quantitative, correlational research analysis, which will try to identify some of the factors that may condition the rejection of aid. To do this, it will test six hypotheses. These have been devised drawing on existing literature on aid rejection and by inspiration of the results derived from the application of various theoretical approaches to understand other issues. To continue, the second part of this study involves a qualitative analysis that will explore two research sub-questions: How can IR theories help us explain the role of institutions and international law in conditioning the acceptance of humanitarian aid after disasters? What is the role of culture and identity in shaping states' decision to reject aid? What follows is a deep explanation of the methodology employed for the quantitative analysis.

Given the constrained nature of research in the social world, one that for obvious practical reasons and ethics standards disallows the realization of experimentations following strict scientific methods, the first part of this dissertation will not attempt to prove causal links between variables, but rather, correlations that can suggest the likelihood of certain factors in conditioning or predisposing the refusal of humanitarian assistance. This positivist approach will use empirical data from various sources to reach its findings, and various criteria to narrow down the amount of the available data to that directly relevant to the scope of this work. The study will first select the most severe natural disasters and identify those where aid refusal has occurred. Then, it will study the relationship between aid rejection (dependent variable) and certain characteristics of states that could influence it (independent variables). Data from the dependent and independent variables will be coded in RStudio upon calculating Pearson's correlation coefficient, which will be displayed in scatter plots.

### **a. Data sources**

This study follows a secondary quantitative research methodology to obtain data, as it builds on existing data from various institutions to find correlations. First, data on disasters is obtained from the Emergency Disasters Database (EM-DAT) of the Centre for Research on the



Epidemiology of Disasters (CRED, 2020), a research institution within the Catholic University of Louvain in Belgium, which includes over 25.000 disasters occurring from 1900 until the present year. The disasters included in EM-DAT conform to at least one of the following criteria: 10 or more people dead; 100 or more people affected; The declaration of a state of emergency; or a call for international assistance (CRED, 2020). Some of the information available in this database includes the name of the disaster, its type, the date the event begun and finished, the states affected, whether a state of emergency was declared, or the human and economic costs in which the disaster resulted.

After careful examination of the available data, the present study did not find evidence of a database where all cases of aid rejection have been gathered, information that is not included in the EM-DAT database. Therefore, to find such information this study also relies on qualitative evidence pointing to the rejection of humanitarian aid. This evidence is gathered on a case-by-case basis from each of the selected disasters. The source of this evidence is primarily sought in official communications from the affected state, from UN agencies such as ReliefWeb, or from Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs). When these are not available, this study relies on communications from other governments such as official documents, speeches by heads of state and diplomats, or newspapers articles documenting the rejection. Such evidence will be found using a range of online sources such as search engines, online newspaper archives such as *Newspapers*, and online libraries such as *Google Scholar* or *Discovered*, using keywords such as ‘humanitarian’, ‘aid’, ‘assistance’, ‘decline’, ‘rejection’, and key information regarding the disaster being searched for, such as date, localization, name of disaster, etc. A shortcoming of using this methodology is that some cases of aid rejection may not be found even if they occurred. Evidence may be overlooked or may not exist, as could be the case when rejection occurs in close-doors negotiations. The sources of data for the independent variables will be explained in its respective section below.

## **b. Timeframe**

As to study disasters dating from 1900 would result in an unmanageable number, and because I want to study the international humanitarian system as similar to its current form as possible, I have chosen to research from 1991 to 2020. 1991 coincides with the end of the Cold War and the fall of the Soviet Union, ending a period of divide that shaped the delivery of aid to a great extent (Davey *et al.*, 2013, p.5). This was a year of considerable changes, as Davey *et al.* explain in *A history of the humanitarian system*, as ‘the UN General Assembly committed to

the reform of the humanitarian apparatus' (2013, p. 13). Through resolution 46/182 on the 'Strengthening of the coordination of humanitarian emergency assistance of the United Nations' (1991), the UN reinforced the Office of the UN Disaster Relief Coordinator (UNDRO) (later the Department of Humanitarian Affairs (DHA); it created the role of Emergency Relief Coordinator; the Humanitarian Coordination System; the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC); the Consolidated Appeals Process (CAP); the Central Emergency Revolving Fund (CERF) and the Financial Tracking system (Davey, Borton and Foley, 2013, p. 13). The UN's commitment to reduce the impact of disasters culminated with the declaration of the 90s as the 'International Decade for Natural Disaster Reduction' (United Nations General Assembly, 1989), which also saw an important shift of funding from development towards relief assistance and a trend towards the management of emergency aid funding by NGOs (Davey, Borton and Foley, 2013). Finally, this was also the year when OCHA was created, key agency for the coordination of humanitarian assistance globally.

### **c. Data filters**

Various forms of criteria will filter down the results for a higher relevance to this study. In EM-DAT all disasters are categorized as either technological, natural, and complex disasters. All complex disasters will be discarded given the limited available data, as CRED is currently not continuing its research on this type of events. Besides, complex emergencies are generally assumed to be highly political (often as result of conflict) (FAO, 2021), which goes beyond the scope of this study. In contrast, natural and technological disasters (at least when these are unintended) are generally expected to be less political and to lead to unconstrained offers of help (Obrecht *et al.*, 2015). Then, all natural and technological disasters from EM-DAT will be included, and none of the subcategories deriving from these two will be discarded.

A similar reasoning followed the choice within most current research in focusing only on rapid onset emergencies (such as earthquakes, floods, slides, volcanos, and windstorms) and not in slow-onset emergencies (such as droughts, epidemics or insect infestations). Slow-onset emergencies are generally expected to be more easily managed, which may not urge the same demand for international assistance, what can lead state leaders to perceive that the disaster can be managed with national capabilities. They are also expected to attract more funds from development assistance than from humanitarian aid, a type of aid that is arguably of a more political nature (Morgenthau, 1962). Despite this, I will include slow-onset emergencies in my

research. As Staupe-Delgado argues, ‘they are generally overlooked both empirically and conceptually (2019), and are often ignored by the media, even though their human impact can be greater than those more sudden disasters. Besides, slow-onset emergencies can lead to rapid onset ones and vice versa, making them highly interrelated issues. Although they may attract more development funds and these may not follow purely humanitarian principles, it should not be assumed that this will always be the case. Then, this study will at least try not to contribute to widening this research gap in the literature surrounding slow-onset disasters.

To ease the search for cases of aid refusal, more filters will be applied. The reasoning is that given that cases of aid refusal must be found on a manual, qualitative basis, the likelihood to find them will be greater if they have been of some international significance. There will be a greater chance to notice a case of aid rejection after a hurricane that has resulted in thousands of casualties than after a wildfire that has caused no deaths. This does not mean that the second did not need international assistance, but that the first is more likely to have caught the attention of international organizations, states, NGOs, and media organizations. Then, evidence of aid refusal should be expected to be more readily available in the first case than in the second. Employing a methodology of gathering data similar to that used by EM-DAT, and which has been employed by researchers like Nelson or Rosario, I will use the number of deaths caused by a disaster as a filter and as a measure of disaster severity, being 500 the minimum threshold. This will ensure that only severe disasters are included. It is important to note, EM-DAT regards number of deaths as the total number of confirmed dead summed to the number of missing people (CRED, 2021). Some cases of aid rejection could be overlooked by applying these criteria, as aid may be refused after disasters with lower impact. Still, this is useful as it will increase the likelihood of finding those cases of aid rejection where a state’s national response capacity has been overpassed by the disasters’ magnitude.

All the disasters in the database are already counted depending on the states that were affected by it. For example, if a hurricane affects two states, it is counted twice. This is helpful as I am studying the response by different states, and not the impact of natural disasters themselves. The actor being analysed will be the state. Although there could be instances of national NGOs refusing to administer offers of foreign aid, this seems highly unlikely, thus the state as the actor receiving aid will be the only one considered. Regarding states with limited recognition, I will work with those states as available in EM-DAT.

#### **d. Data description**

Applying the criteria below results in 296 disasters, of which 89 can be found in Africa, 30 in the Americas, 146 in Asia, 24 in Europe and 1 in Oceania. From these disasters 58 were found to involve aid rejection in some form, representing 19.59% of the total (see table 1 in Appendix). Of these, 5 occurred in Africa, 8 in the Americas, 43 in Asia, 2 in Europe and none in Oceania. Cases of rejection in Asia accounted for 74% of the total, a share considerably higher than its share in the total number of disasters. Epidemics, especially in Africa, were found to be the most common type of disaster, followed by floods, earthquakes, and storms, respectively. The last three were almost the only types of disaster where humanitarian aid was rejected, being earthquakes (28) the one that had the most cases of rejection. The country most impacted by disasters was India, with 39 disasters, followed by China, with 19. India was also the country that rejected humanitarian aid on most occasions (8), followed by Indonesia (7). Finally, the year in which the highest number of disasters occurred was 1998, with 20 disasters, while the years in which the highest number of disasters involved the rejection of humanitarian aid were 1999, 2004 and 2005, all with 6 cases.

#### **e. Hypotheses and variables**

Given that correlations are never fixed and the relationship between variables may change over time, it is useful to test whether ‘old’ hypotheses lead to the same conclusions in different time periods. Because of this, the first three hypothesis have been devised by Nelson and tested again in this study. In light of the findings in the literature review and deriving from the theoretical choices in the subsequent chapter, the rest of the hypotheses have been developed. All the hypotheses have been organized conforming to FPA’s levels of analysis, first ‘societal’ and then ‘external’ factors.

*H1: Recipient need hypothesis: The greater the humanitarian needs, the less likely that a state will reject humanitarian aid.*

The first of the hypotheses aims to explore the relationship between humanitarian need and aid rejection. It assumes that the act of rejecting aid is not a particularly political act, but rather, it follows considerations of humanitarian need and capacity. It is expected that a state with large humanitarian needs and an insufficient response capacity will be more likely to accept aid than those with less needs and more state capacity. Although there are various ways to assess the

humanitarian needs after a disaster, the capacity of the state to react, or the vulnerability of the state to be affected by it, I will rely on *disaster severity* as the independent variable to test this hypothesis. Although ‘modern’ indicators such as INFORM’s index of risk or severity (European Commission, 2021a) may provide more objective and accurate means to do this, they do not provide sufficient data over time to cover all cases included in this study. As it was previously explained, disaster severity will be measured by number of fatalities. This conforms to Nelson’s method, except from GDP, which is not included as an indicator of humanitarian need.

*H2: Regime type hypothesis: The more democratic a state, the less likely to reject foreign aid.*

As the Democratic Peace Theory suggests, regime type is expected to shape the behaviour of states (Kant, 1795). In this specific scenario, we expect that those states closer to the autocratic end of the spectrum will be more likely to reject humanitarian aid. To test this hypothesis, a 20-point scale of *institutional democratization* by Polity IV will be used, particularly its ‘polity’ indicator, which combines its scale of democracy with its scale of autocracy (Marshall, 2020, p.16). This scale ranges from -10 (the least democratic) and 10 (the most democratic) and is the result of coding five elements: competitiveness of executive recruitment, openness of executive recruitment, constraints on chief executive, regulation of participation and competitiveness of participation (2020, p.16).

*H3: Regime transition hypothesis. The closer in time since a state has transitioned, the more likely that this will reject aid.*

Democratization and War theory suggested that, despite the more peaceful nature of democratic states, those in a transitioning phase were found to behave more aggressively than democracies or autocracies (Wolf *et al.*, 1996). In this hypothesis, we expect that transitioning states will be more likely to reject foreign offers of aid. The independent variable to test this hypothesis is the *number of years* that have passed since such transition has occurred. Transitions will be identified as per Polity IV database, which defines them as any 3-point or greater shift in its scale.

*H4: Time to next elections hypothesis. The closer a state is to next elections, the more likely it is to reject humanitarian aid.*

Based on Diversionary Foreign Policy Theory, this hypothesis expects that governments are likely to engage into ‘adventurous’ policies in order to increase their chances of getting re-elected (Smith, 1996). If a disaster occurs some time close to the next elections, this process is expected to influence the decision to accept external offers of humanitarian aid. The independent variable here is the *number of months* that have passed between the day the disaster occurred and the day the next democratic elections were held.

*H5: Economic Freedom hypothesis. The higher the level of economic freedom, the less likely a state is to reject humanitarian aid.*

In line with the expectation that a free market makes states more prone to peaceful relations and cooperation, as according to the Commercial Peace Theory (Deudney and Ikenberry, 1999), this hypothesis expects that states more open to international trade will be more likely to accept foreign aid. To test this claim, data from the Fraser Institute’s *Index of Economic Freedom* is used as the independent variable (2021). This index measures rule of law, government size, regulatory efficiency and openness to markets, which result in a 10-point scale.

*H6: Relative power hypothesis. Less powerful states are less likely to reject humanitarian aid.*

Realists and neorealists would expect the behaviour of states to be determined by their relative power in the international system. Given that states are power maximisers, they would all be expected to accept free aid. Even though this has been shown not to always be the case, a relationship between relative power and aid rejection may still exist. For instance, we could still expect those less powerful states to be less likely to reject aid. Based on assumptions of Defensive Realism (Waltz, 1979), total *GDP* in constant 2010 dollars, and military expenditure in constant 2019 dollars of the countries rejecting aid will be the independent variables to test this hypothesis.

#### *Dependent variable*

The search for the most severe disasters has resulted in 296 results, which precedes the qualitative search for cases of aid rejection. But what should be considered as aid rejection? As previously defined, aid rejection will describe the act of declining international offers of humanitarian assistance partially or totally, independently of their source, in the aftermath of a

disaster. It is certainly not the same to refuse one offer of aid from one state while accepting a dozen from others. The specific criteria to account for cases of aid rejection has been a challenge that has divided scholars, and one that regardless of the choice will have its advantages as well as disadvantages. For example, whereas Nelson decides to use a 4-point scale in his research, accounting for various levels of rejection (Nelson, 2010), Rosario includes only those cases where a state has refused all offers of assistance in a calendar year (Rosario, 2020). My choice of dependent variable is based on Nelson's scale, although it includes one more category to account for cases of rejection to multilateral organizations. The first (1) category includes cases where there is evidence that a state has broadly accepted offers of aid or whenever there is no reported aid rejection. The second (2) category includes disasters where state leaders delayed the acceptance of aid and/or threatened to refuse it entirely before this was finally accepted. The third (3) includes cases where a state fully refused aid from one or two bilateral sources, while the fourth (4) includes cases where a state refused aid from multiple sources, that is, from three or more. The fifth (5) and last is for those cases where aid from a multilateral organization (regional or international) was rejected. Since a formal request for assistance may be a prerequisite before certain regional institutions are able to offer humanitarian aid to affected states, as it is the case with the Directorate General for European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations (DG ECHO), it is not unsurprising that cases in the fifth category are difficult to find (2021), as it would be extremely rare that a state requests assistance to a multilateral body to later reject the offer. This means that many offers are not rejected because they are not made in the first place.

## IV. Results and analysis

### a. Correlational research results and discussion

Using Pearson's correlation coefficient to calculate correlations for the six hypotheses, has led to the following results:

**Table 1.** Pearson's coefficient results

<b>Variable</b>	<b>Results</b>
Disaster severity (number of casualties)	0,200898
Level of institutional democracy	0,068027
Years since transition	0,184432
Months to next elections	-0,09507
Level of economic freedom	0,1933254
GDP (constant 2019 dollars)	0,3003593
Military expenditure (constant 2019 dollars)	0,207603

The results of the first hypothesis show that the relationship between aid rejection and humanitarian need are not as they were anticipated. A significant negative correlation was predicted given that higher disaster severity is expected to reduce the likeliness of aid rejection, but this has shown to be a positive and weak correlation. Although this does not necessarily mean that states are more likely to refuse aid the more humanitarian needs they have as result of a disaster, it suggests that aid rejection do not follow purely humanitarian considerations, but rather, political ones. This is as important finding that reinforces the various views presented in this study about the political nature of aid. Whereas Nelson found a strong positive correlation between these variables, suggesting that the most severe disasters lead to more aid rejection, the present results do not go as far, as they prove insufficient to support his finding on the timeframe used.



The results of the second hypothesis are not remarkable, suggesting no correlation between aid refusal and regime type. Whether a state is authoritarian or a mature democracy does not seem to condition the likeliness of a state to reject humanitarian aid, which is contrary to expectations. Consequently, this hypothesis is rejected. These findings correspond to those of Nelson, who found that regime type did not play a significant role in conditioning aid rejection from 1986 to 2006.

The same occurs with the third hypothesis, which expects that the less time that has passed since a state has undertaken a significant transition, the more likely will be to reject aid. Given the weak correlation found, this hypothesis is also rejected. This result contrasts with Nelson's findings, as he found a positive and significant correlation between these two variables. Whereas this may have been an important factor during the period of his study, it seems to no longer hold when applied to the 1991-2020 timeframe. After visual inspection of the scatter plot corresponding to this hypothesis (see figure 3 in the Appendix), 5 outliers were identified and discarded from the data. After removing the outliers, the correlations were calculated again, but not significant change was identified.

The statistical results of the fourth hypothesis show no traces of the influence of elections in the rejection of aid, which expected that the closer in time a disaster occurs with respect to next elections, the more likely a state is to reject foreign aid. The correlation is negative and very weak; then, its findings do not support this hypothesis. Economic freedom does not seem to influence the rejection of humanitarian aid either, as the fifth hypothesis is rejected with a weak positive correlation. Finally, although the results of the sixth hypothesis are slightly more significant, they are still not sufficient to support relative power as a factor conditioning aid rejection. Nor GDP nor military expenditure seem to condition aid rejection, as the results indicate positive, weak relationships.

Even though the results of the correlational analysis do not show any important relationship that can indicate a single factor strongly conditioning the act of aid rejection, these results are still important to understand this phenomenon. While they indicate that aid rejection is a political act, they also suggest that aid rejection is a multicausal behaviour that cannot be attributed to single explanation. It also questions the appropriateness of using solely a positivist approach to explain aid rejection, gap that can be filled with more interpretivist stances.

## **b. Qualitative analysis**

*RSQ1. How can IR theories help us explain the role of institutions and international law in conditioning the acceptance of humanitarian aid after disasters?*

As it was explained in the theoretical framework, international organizations are expected to shape the behaviour of states, and it is also expected that they condition decision-making upon the acceptance of aid offers. According to the Institutional Peace Theory, organizations such as the United Nations help foster cooperation and reduce the likelihood of conflict (Axelrod and Keohane, 1985). When it comes to the delivery of aid, they provide an increased perception of neutrality and ensure that aid offers abide by the humanitarian principles and do not follow political considerations. Various pieces of evidence found during this study support this approach's claims. In the aftermath of hurricane Katrina in 2005, the United States rejected aid from various countries, such as Canada, United Kingdom or Israel, all close allies of the US (NBC News, 2005). In total, of the around 90 offers received, more than 50 were rejected. When faced later with the possibility of accepting the remaining offers of aid, the US requested assistance from NATO, the European Union and the United Nations instead, organizations that sent aid in different forms, such as blankets, first-aid kits or food (2005). In 2008, cyclone Nargis devastated the city of Burma in Myanmar, leaving more than a hundred thousand victims (CRED, 2020). The then military junta rejected all offers of aid for weeks, even though various sources cited the lack of capacity of the state to react (Hookway, 2008). This included offers from various countries such as the US and international organizations such as the World Food Programme (WFP). Aye Myint, Myanmar's Deputy Defence Minister later declared that 'assistance and aid provided with genuine goodwill from any country or organization would be welcomed providing there 'are no strings attached' or politicization' (DPA, 2008). The acceptance of aid by Myanmar from ASEAN, Asia's multilateral organization, followed (CNN, 2008). Although Myanmar's rejection of assistance from the WFP would initially discredit the Institutional Peace Theory, the fact that the military junta decided later to accept aid only if it was channelled through ASEAN, does support this approach. As various studies point out, Myanmar was in a very unstable period domestically, and viewed any offers of humanitarian aid with high suspicion (Selth, 2008). The fact that the country was pressed by this organization to accept aid, and that it finally accepted it suggests that Myanmar found in ASEAN a relatively neutral body that would not 'interfere' in its domestic affairs. A last

example to support this view is the case of Japan in 2011, where an earthquake and tsunami hit the coasts of the country (CRED, 2020). After rejecting all offers of foreign aid, such as from the United States and China, Japan finally accepted assistance from the United Nations in the form of a team of experts (UN News, 2011), while other offers remained rejected. These three examples show that although aid rejection may still occur, the existence of international organizations facilitate the acceptance of foreign assistance, where in other situations it may have not been accepted. It also supports the significance of the IR liberal school of thought in explaining state behaviour.

Despite the influence of international organizations, the literature review showed that both international law and enforcement institutions can also be insufficient to deter states from refusing international offers of aid when these prove unable or unwilling to protect their populations. These were found to have a limited power to shape the behaviour of states when it comes to the acceptance of aid for various reasons, such as inadequate and ambiguous legal instruments, weak enforcement mechanisms, problems of jurisdiction and criminal responsibility, and UN bodies subject to political considerations. To explain why this is the case, Neorealism proves itself especially useful, as its assumptions are partly representative of the problems that institutions and the current legal framework portray. This paradigm's view suggests that the anarchic nature of the international system constraints states from cooperating, given their constant security concerns (Waltz, 1979). The current shape of multilateral institutions such as the United Nations Security Council were designed during times where geopolitical tensions were the order of the day, and international law played a little role in world politics. This historical past is reflected in the current structure of the Security Council, one determined by the existence of the five veto powers. The hypothesis of the power maximising nature of states would not only provide a relevant explanation to this structure, but it also explains the current political dynamics within the organ. For instance, this often fails to enforce well-established norms of international law when these intersect with the self-interests of their veto members. In 2008, when France proposed bringing the case of Myanmar to the Security Council and invoke R2P, China's Ambassador Liu Zhenmin made it clear that China would veto any such resolution: "The current issue of Myanmar is a natural disaster," he argued. "It's not an issue for the Security Council. It might be a good issue for other forums of the U.N." (Charbonneau, 2008). Other cases of disaster do not seem to have reached the Security Council, but examples such as Myanmar's question whether this body, which is the

most considerable enforcement mechanism of international law, will be able to deter states from rejecting aid in the future.

As it can be observed, liberal and neorealist views differ in their contributions to understanding aid rejection. While one emphasizes the power of institutions to shape state behaviour, the other sees the power dynamics that constraint the ability of these institutions to enforce any meaningful change. Constructivism seems to conciliate these perspectives, as this broad paradigm would understand state behaviour to be conditioned by the ideational structures of individuals themselves (Wendt, 1992). In this light, liberal and neorealist approaches would both be social constructions themselves, which are conditioned by identities, ideas, perceptions, and intersubjective meanings. Based on these assumptions, we can expect that this ideational structure is what gives shape to the current legal framework and how states decide to interact within this structure. The fact that some states are distrustful of joining institutions such as the ICC (the cause of some of the court's jurisdiction problems) or of signing new international legislation to guarantee the rights of victims can be associated with leaders' own ideas of what their security concerns are, and what sovereignty means and entails. We can then expect that the own metatheoretical choices of individuals is what determines that states reject aid, rather than the objective realities of the international system. This does not necessarily mean that liberal and neorealist scholars are wrong, but that the constructivist view can account for differences in behaviour that other approaches fall short to explain. Drawing again in the case study of Myanmar, concepts such as perception and beliefs are found to be central to any meaningful explanation of why the military junta rejected aid multiple times. The fact that the junta first declared that aid was not needed because they could handle the situation themselves to later request foreign aid suggests that state leaders perceived the magnitude of the disaster and state capabilities differently over time. That they were distrustful of bilateral offers and initially of international institutions show how leaders' beliefs also played a role in their decision-making, and the fact that they later changed their decision into accepting aid supports one of Wendt's key proposals: that intersubjective meanings change over time (Wendt, 1992, p.423).

*RSQ2. What is the role of culture and identity in shaping states' decision to reject aid?*

This last chapter builds on knowledge from constructivist and Foreign Policy Analysis schools of thought, providing a different perspective to explore the issue of aid rejection, and further illustrating how this phenomenon is not reducible to a single explanation. Culture and identity are two of the social constructions that are expected to shape states' behaviour, and which are thought to condition the acceptance of offers of humanitarian aid. This analysis will apply the concepts of political culture and social identity to a case study of India's long-term policy of aid rejection.

Since the Indian Ocean Tsunami struck India in 2004, the government has followed a 'thanks but not thanks' policy of rejection: "The government of India deeply appreciates offers from several countries, including from foreign governments, to assist in relief and rehabilitation efforts after the tragic floods," the Ministry of External Affairs said in a response to offers of international assistance after floods in 2018 in Kerala (ANI, 2018). "In line with existing policy, govt is committed to meeting requirements for relief and rehabilitation through domestic efforts", he continued (2018). In line with this policy were rejections of humanitarian aid in at least five other cases, including floods in 2013, 2008, 2007 and 2005, and an earthquake also in 2005. Whether the government of India had the necessary capabilities to respond to all the humanitarian needs as a result of these disasters is a matter of debate. A controversial case has been the aforementioned floods in Kerala, where the United Arab Emirates offered the Indian authorities \$100 million to help with the relief efforts. The country's rejection of this offer was received with frustration by some in the affected region, as India contributed less than the United Arab Emirates was offering for humanitarian and rehabilitation efforts, but was also a small fraction of the estimated damages by the Finance Minister (Venkataraman *et al.*, 2018).

But how can culture and social identity help us understand India's position in the acceptance of foreign humanitarian aid? To show how these constructs may have shaped the creation of this policy, it is important first to determine whether India has a particular political culture and social identity with relevance to humanitarian aid. One of the findings of this study is that India effectively has a distinctive and widely shared political culture that is relevant to this topic, namely a shared aversion to colonialism and its legacies (Patnaik, 2015). Colonialism was a traumatic experience for many regions around the world, and which did not end in India until 1947, when the country achieved its independence. In a movement that begun

with Gandhi's peaceful protests in 1930 (Global Nonviolent Action Database, 2021), this common past motivated the politics of various Indian leaders such as Indira Gandhi or Jawaharlal Nehru (Fontera, 1960). Anti-colonialism 'has always brought Indians together', and has been used by Indian leaders for more than six decades to assert their strategies internationally (Patnaik, 2015). An example of these are India's stance in core international forums such as the United Nations Conference on the Environment in Stockholm in 1972, where India used arguments about colonialism to strongly oppose a call by western governments on a multilateral reduction on emissions, or to avoid the signing of the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty, which would have limited India's nuclear programme (2015).

A strong influence of colonialism in India's domestic politics is also apparent, mainly enrooted in nationalist sentiments of the right-wing parties of the country, as Venkatesh explains (Venkatesh, 2019), and the behaviour of the political elites also coincides with the widely shared orientation of the Indian society with this aspect of its political culture. As it can be seen, the influence of India's political culture on Colonialism can be consistently observed through India's behaviour internationally, especially in those policies that make the country cautious of multilateralism and prone to self-dependence and nationalism. Although clear causal links between this cultural characteristic of India and its foreign policies cannot be drawn neatly, India's political culture and its political behaviour seem highly coherent. It seems then reasonable to argue that India's stance in the acceptance of humanitarian aid has also been shaped by the particularities of India's culture. Moreover, this explanation is further reinforced by the inability of structural theoretical approaches such as neorealism to explain India's behaviour, as rejecting aid goes against its basic premises.

Similarly, India has for decades been found to possess a distinct social identity that has been shaped by this colonial past, one that cultivated a feeling of detachment, of 'us versus them' to the Western World and specially Europe. These parts of the world, as well as India's own past form part of the 'other' in India's identity that the country avoids. The rejection of this past initially corresponded to India's ambition to become an independent, sovereign state, social identity that India already possesses, to later correspond to its current ambition of equal recognition in the United Nations Security Council (Zeeshan, 2021). As Dany concluded in his study, states may reject aid when accepting it is incongruent with their national identities (2020, p.199). In this case, accepting aid would seem to contradict India's desired identities of 'regional leader', 'world leader' and 'major donor. India's policy on aid rejection is a behaviour highly consistent with the country's attempts to change its identity

from aid taker to aid giver, or as Roche argues, moving up in the ranks ‘from beneficiary to donor’ (2012).

## V. Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to understand why states reject humanitarian assistance after natural and human-made disasters. To answer this question, this work began by analysing existing literature surrounding the rejection of humanitarian aid, which produced various insights. It showed that offers of humanitarian aid are often rejected on the basis that they are not needed or because they are inadequate, both of which can be legitimate actions. It also revealed that the reality of accepting or rejecting international offers of aid is surrounded by political considerations. Several authors have shown how aid is not only rejected when it is unneeded, but that both domestic and external factors highly influence these decision-making processes. These included arguments about the political nature of aid offers, perception, political risk, state reputation and the influence of political transitions. A review of publications on the relationship between international law and this issue led to the conclusion that uncertainties in the current legal framework and its enforcement mechanisms also condition the possibility of aid being rejected. After several gaps in the literature were identified, this study pursued a mixed-methods approach combining quantitative and qualitative analysis. After analysing 296 disasters and finding 58 cases of aid rejection, correlations between these and various independent variables were sought. The results of the first hypothesis led to confirm the political nature of aid rejection, while the weak correlations found led to discard the remaining five hypotheses. These results also led to conclude that aid rejection cannot be explained alone by using quantitative approaches. Regime type, regime transition, time to elections, economic freedom, or relative power were all found to be statistically indeterminate in conditioning aid rejection. Although they may in effect play a role in shaping this behaviour, a quantitative study presents itself as insufficient to suggest any such relationships.

For this, an interpretivist, qualitative analysis proved itself valuable to provide alternative explanations. Three IR theoretical approaches were used to explain how international law and institutions can influence states into accepting aid, and they showed how they are also useful to explain the shortcomings of the current legislation and the mechanisms that enforce them. Finally, India's foreign policy of aid rejection was analysed through the prisms of political culture and identity, with promising results. Characteristics of India's political culture and its social identity were found to be highly conditioning the state's foreign policies, and they seem to have played the same role in shaping India's position when managing



international offers of aid. The two chapters of the qualitative analysis led to a last conclusion: The rejection of humanitarian aid is a complex phenomenon that cannot be attributed to a single cause. IR theoretical approaches remain today useful tools to understand issues of international relations, humanitarian assistance and the politics that lie behind it. Culture and identity are fundamental to a more complete understanding.

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## Appendix

**Table 1.** Cases of humanitarian aid rejection from 1991 to 2021

<b>Year</b>	<b>State</b>	<b>Disaster type</b>	<b>Level of rejection</b>
2018	Indonesia	Earthquake	4
2018	Indonesia	Earthquake	2
2018	India	Flood	5
2015	Nepal	Earthquake	3
2013	Bangladesh	Industrial accident	5
2013	India	Flood	5
2011	Japan	Earthquake	4
2011	Philippines	Storm	2
2011	Thailand	Flood	2
2011	Turkey	Earthquake	2
2010	Russian Federation	Extreme temperature	2
2010	Pakistan	Flood	2
2010	Indonesia	Earthquake	2
2009	Indonesia	Earthquake	3
2009	Taiwan	Storm	3
2008	Myanmar	Storm	5
2008	China	Earthquake	4
2008	India	Flood	5



2008	Philippines	Storm	2
2008	Cuba	Storm	3
2007	India	Flood	5
2005	Pakistan	Earthquake	2
2005	United States	Storm	4
2005	India	Earthquake	5
2005	India	Flood	5
2005	Indonesia	Earthquake	3
2005	Iran	Earthquake	4
2004	Indonesia	Earthquake	3
2004	Sri Lanka	Earthquake	2
2004	Thailand	Earthquake	5
2004	India	Earthquake	5
2004	Haiti	Flood	2
2004	Bangladesh	Flood	2
2003	Iran	Earthquake	3
2003	Algeria	Earthquake	3
2002	Malawi	Drought	3
2000	South Africa	Epidemic	3
1999	Venezuela	Flood	3
1999	Turkey	Earthquake	3
1999	Taiwan	Earthquake	3
1999	Turkey	Earthquake	4

1999	Mexico	Flood	2
1999	Mexico	Flood	2
1998	Afghanistan	Earthquake	3
1998	Nicaragua	Storm	3
1998	Afghanistan	Earthquake	3
1998	Bangladesh	Flood	2
1997	Vietnam	Storm	2
1997	Somalia	Flood	3
1996	Vietnam	Storm	2
1995	Japan	Earthquake	5
1995	Russian Federation	Earthquake	2
1992	Indonesia	Earthquake	3
1992	Pakistan	Flood	2
1992	Egypt	Earthquake	3
1992	Bahamas	Storm	2
1991	India	Earthquake	2
1991	Philippines	Storm	2

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Figure 1: Relationship between level of aid rejection and disaster severity (total number of casualties).

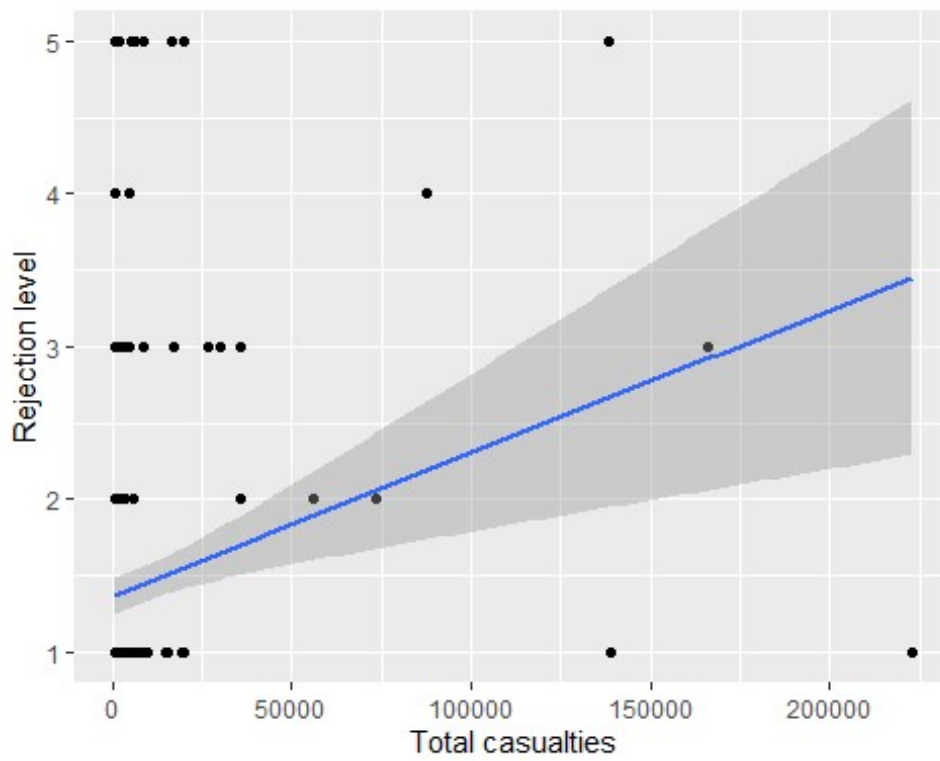


Figure 2: Relationship between level of aid rejection and level of institutional democracy.

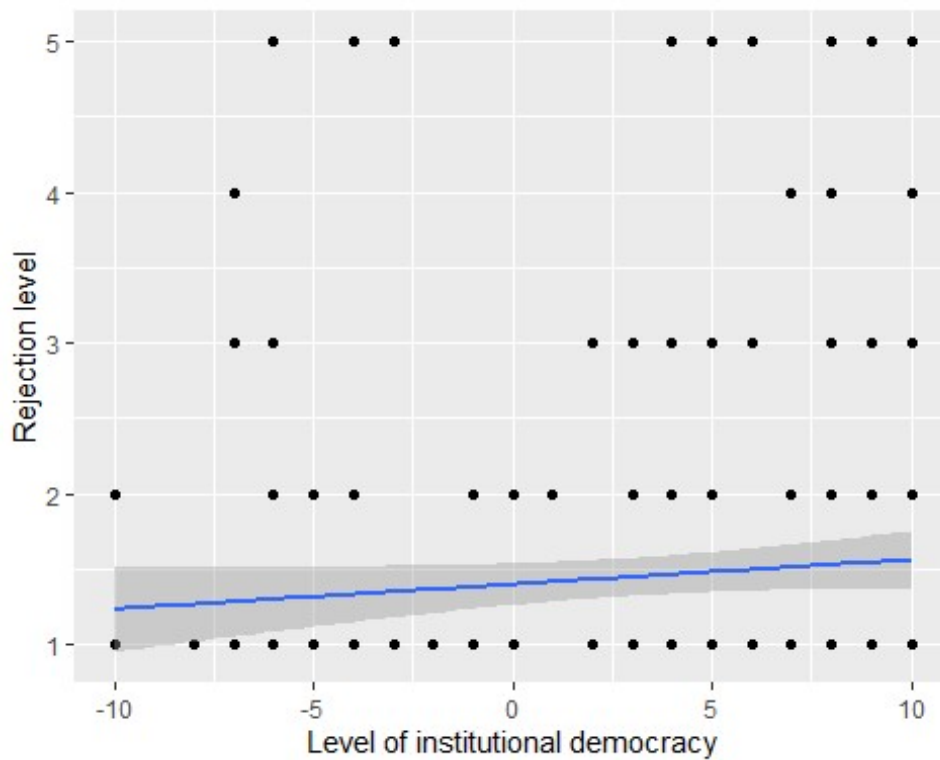


Figure 3: Relationship between aid rejection and years since the state has undergone a transition.

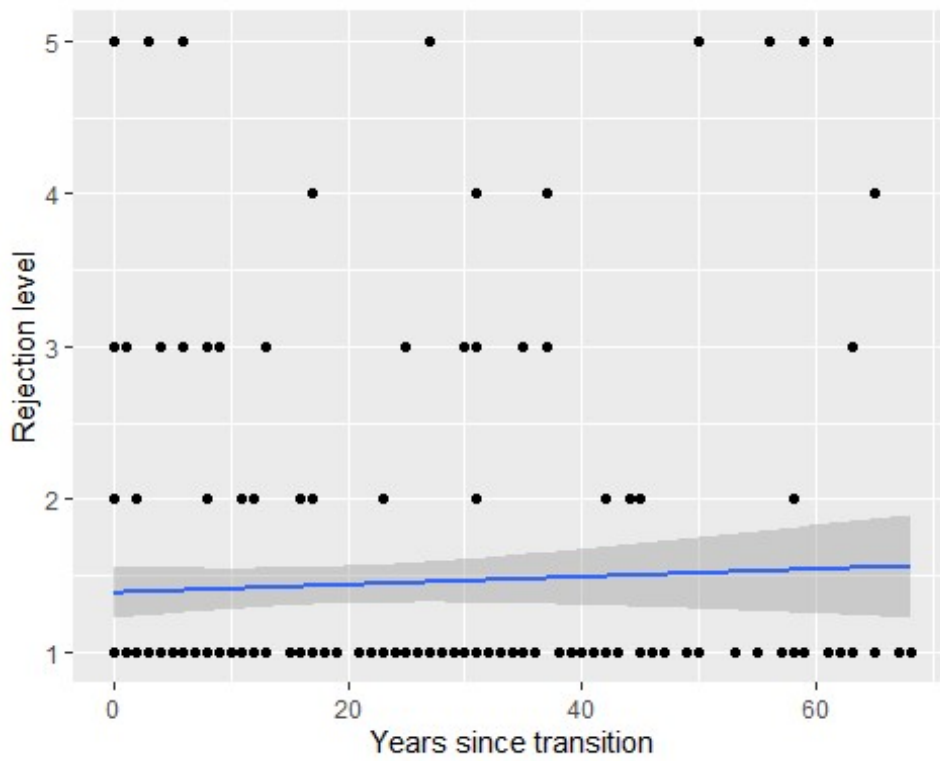


Figure 4: Relationship between level of rejection and months passed until next elections.

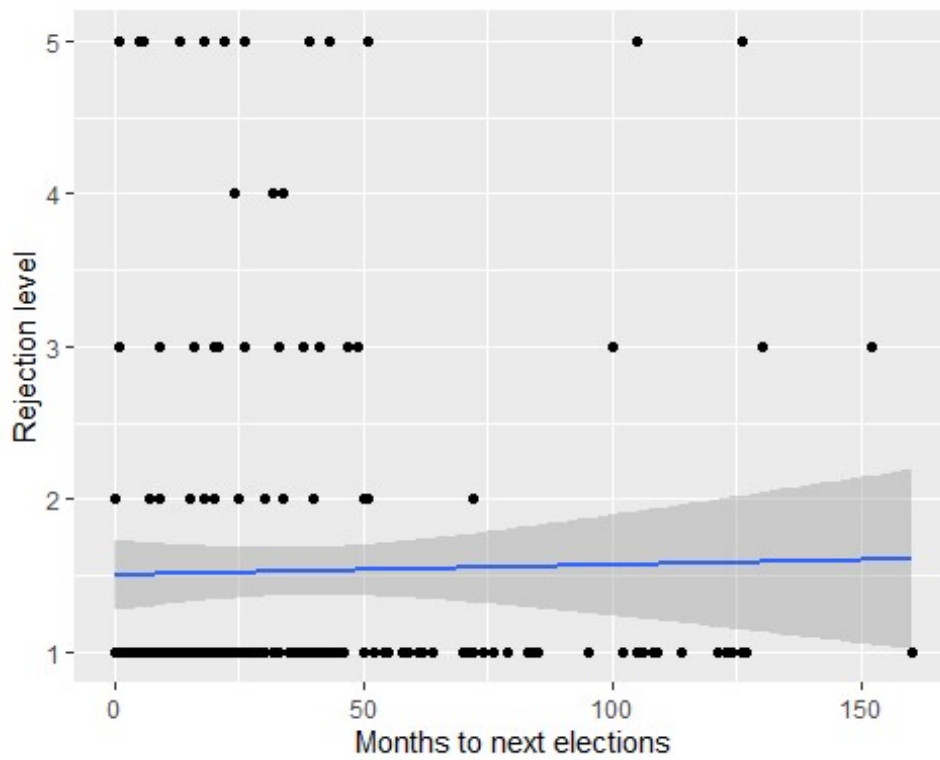


Figure 5: Relationship between aid rejection and level of economic freedom.

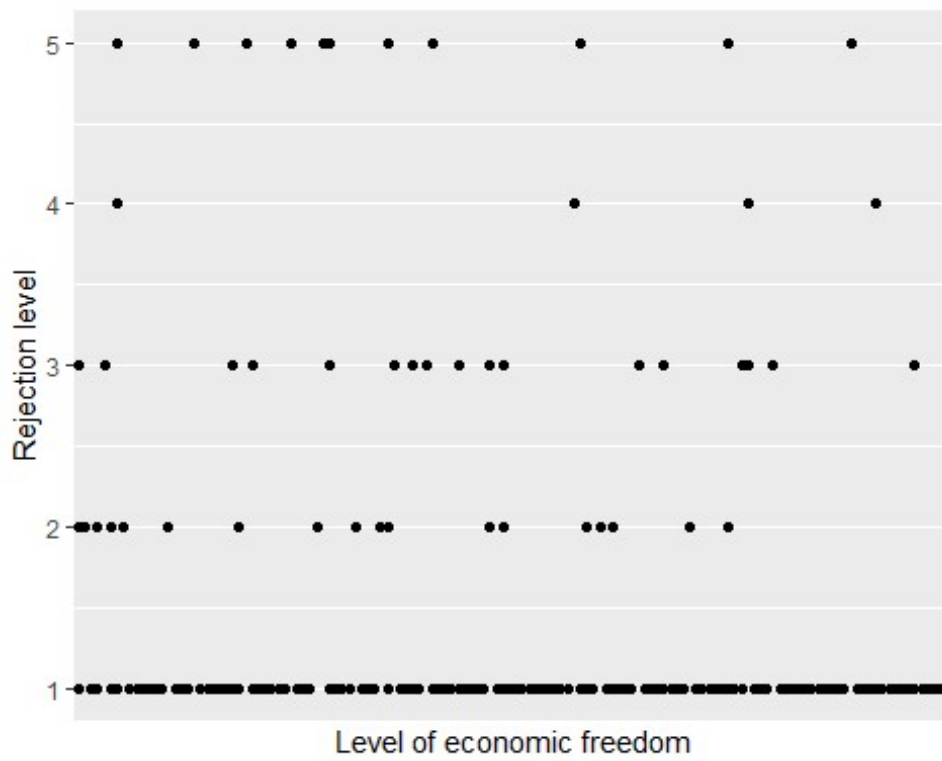


Figure 6: Relationship between aid rejection and GDP (constant 2010 dollars).

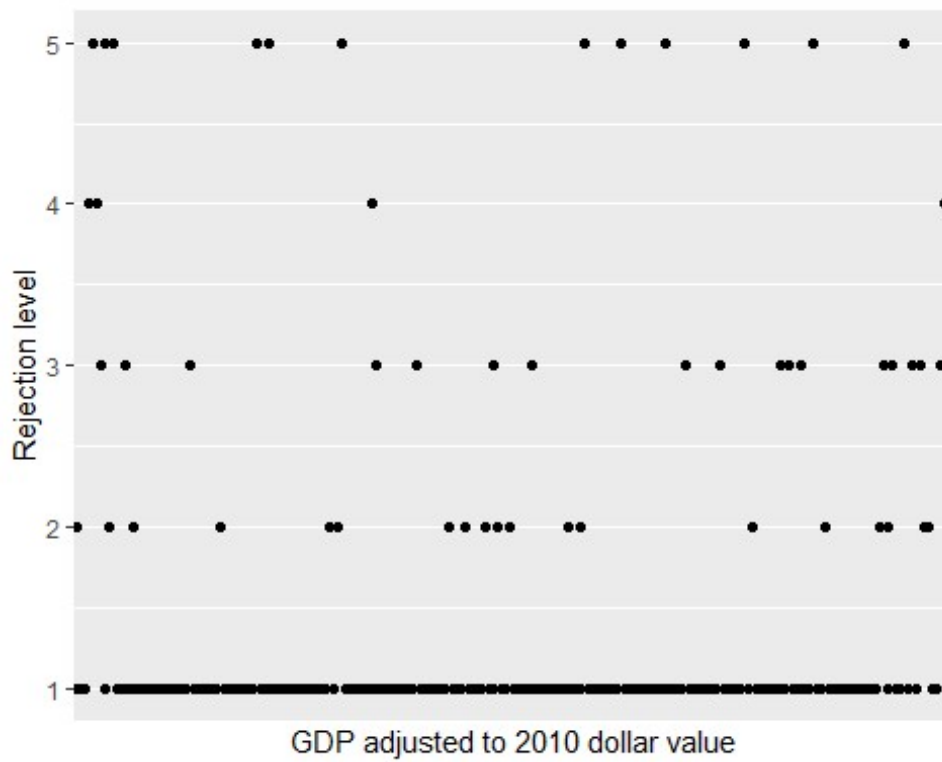


Figure 7: Relationship between level of rejection and level of military expenditure.

