

Attitudes towards Development Policy in the Context of the War against Ukraine

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Veröffentlichungsversion / Published Version

Arbeitspapier / working paper

Empfohlene Zitierung / Suggested Citation:

Zille, H., Gödderz, A., Schneider, S. H., & Bruder, M. (2023). *Attitudes towards Development Policy in the Context of the War against Ukraine*. (DEval Policy Brief, 9/2023). Bonn: Deutsches Evaluierungsinstitut der Entwicklungszusammenarbeit (DEval). <https://nbn-resolving.org/urn:nbn:de:0168-ssoar-88579-1>

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ATTITUDES TOWARDS DEVELOPMENT POLICY IN THE CONTEXT OF THE WAR AGAINST UKRAINE

Key results

- In October 2022, about two thirds of the German population gave a negative assessment of the economic outlook. A negative assessment of the general state of the economy and their own economic situation correlates with negative attitudes towards development cooperation.
- Since the start of Russia's war against Ukraine, national and international policy-making has focused more closely on food and energy security. While the German public approve of measures aimed at improving food and energy security in countries of the Global South, they show stronger endorsement for comparable action geared to directly benefitting the people of Germany.
- The level of agreement to such measures differs according to individuals' political orientation. These differences are particularly wide among people who negatively assess the general state of the economy.

Russia launched its war of aggression against Ukraine in February 2022. Global prices for energy and foodstuffs rose in part dramatically as a result of the invasion, leading to serious consequences for many impoverished countries where food supply had already been critically inadequate. Yet, Germany, too, is impacted by these developments. The German government has implemented countermeasures to mitigate the war's impacts on the nation's population, such as by capping energy prices. Added to this are financial efforts in support of Ukraine. Reconstruction of that country will pose daunting financial and political challenges in the coming years (Grävingholt et al., 2023).

These major financial burdens in particular could lead to trade-offs among Germany's population as to what national and

international measures (preferentially) public funding should be spent for. Such considerations could also impact the level of approval for development cooperation (DC) efforts. The past has demonstrated that economic crises which are consequentially relevant to people's own personal economic situation can negatively impact approval among the population for DC (Heinrich et al., 2016) – despite the fact that the attitude of the German public towards their nation's development policy has generally been very stable over the course of time (e.g., Schneider et al., 2022).

Against this backdrop, the German Institute for Development Evaluation (DEval) has explored three questions based on a representative survey conducted by the Development Engagement Lab (DEL) in October 2022:

1. How does public perception of the state of the German economy correlate with approval for DC?
2. What attitudes do people have towards various development policy measures in response to the war against Ukraine?
3. How does agreement to such measures differ according to individuals' political orientation and assessment of the general state of the economy, and their own, personal economic situation and income?

The general public has a pessimistic outlook on the future

In October 2022, a majority of the German population held a negative view of both the general state of the economy as well as their personal economic situation. Sixty-six percent of the population expressed their belief that Germany's economic situation would deteriorate (substantially) over the coming twelve months. As to the financial situation in their own household, 57 percent

expected their standing to worsen. A correlation analysis shows that general approval of DC depends on the assessment of economic development: the more negative the economic outlook is, the lower the approval rating of DC as well. This holds true for assessing the general state of the economy ($\beta = -0.23$, $p < 0.01$) as well as people's own personal economic situation ($\beta = -0.19$, $p < 0.01$).¹

German food and energy security is prioritised over DC measures

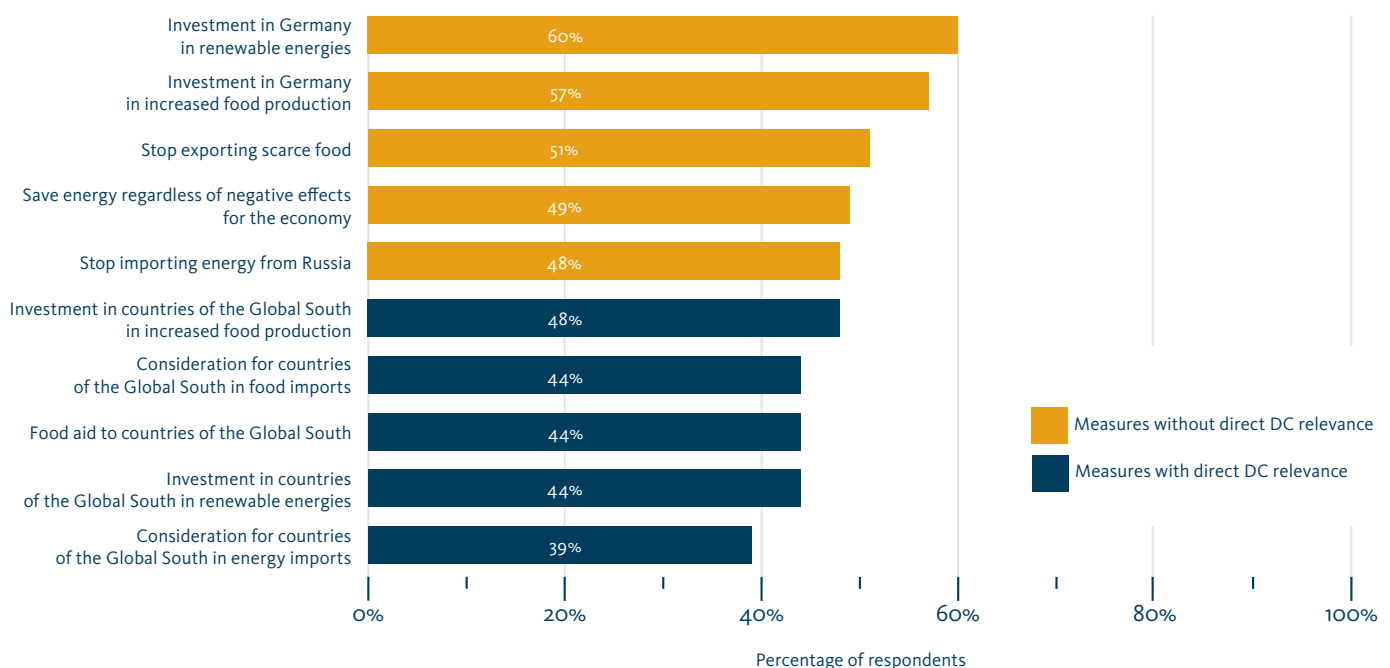
A second question aimed to determine the population's approval of various measures arising from Germany's national food and energy policy (see Figure 1). Results revealed that the call to increase investments in Germany for expanding renewable energy sources received the highest approval, with 60 percent, followed by demand to produce more foodstuffs (57%). Comparable DC measures for investments in countries of the Global South met with a lower approval rating (renewable energy sources: 44%; food production: 48%). Hence, while the general public welcomes development policy measures aimed at promoting food and energy security, overall they prioritise their own food and energy security.

A nuanced picture emerges when outcomes are broken down according to income groups. While lower income earners agree less with food security measures for countries of the Global South, the same does not hold true for comparable measures fostering food security in Germany. Concerning measures aimed at promoting energy supply in Germany, lower income is linked with a lower approval rating, whereas for energy policy measures serving countries of the Global South there is no difference in attitude among the various income groups.

Clear differences in approval along political party lines

The study also revealed differences along political party lines. German citizens who in recent elections voted for Germany's green political party Bündnis 90/Die Grünen (Alliance 90/The Greens) express the highest level of approval for almost all measures. In contrast, followers of Germany's far-right Alternative for Germany (AfD) party express significantly less backing for almost all measures than supporters of other political parties (with the exception of increasing food production in Germany and a ban on exports of scarce foodstuffs).

Figure 1 Approval rating for food and energy policy measures



Source: DEval, own representation based on the DEL panel wave 4 (October 2022), $N \approx 6,000$. The statements were surveyed on the basis of a five-point response scale ranging from 1 = "Do not agree at all" to 5 = "Completely agree". The bar chart indicates the portion of those surveyed who responded with "Agree" or "Completely agree".

¹ β represents standardised regression coefficients (called beta coefficients). Positive values indicate a positive correlation, while negative values show a negative correlation. Beta coefficients enable the comparison of the strength of the correlation between various independent variables and the dependent variables.

This contrast is particularly stark in response to the ban on imports of fossil fuels from Russia. On this issue, AfD voters fall clearly below the scale mean approval figure (52% do not agree with the measure or do not agree with it at all), and tend rather to embrace continuing to import fossil fuels from Russia. All told, the pattern established here roughly corresponds to the political parties' respective orientation observable in the political debate. This holds true as well for the observation that the approval levels indicated by supporters of Germany's liberal-leaning Free Democratic Party (FDP) for all surveyed statements come in noticeably below the average level of the overall population, and thus reveal themselves to be somewhat more sceptical towards proactive state intervention measures.

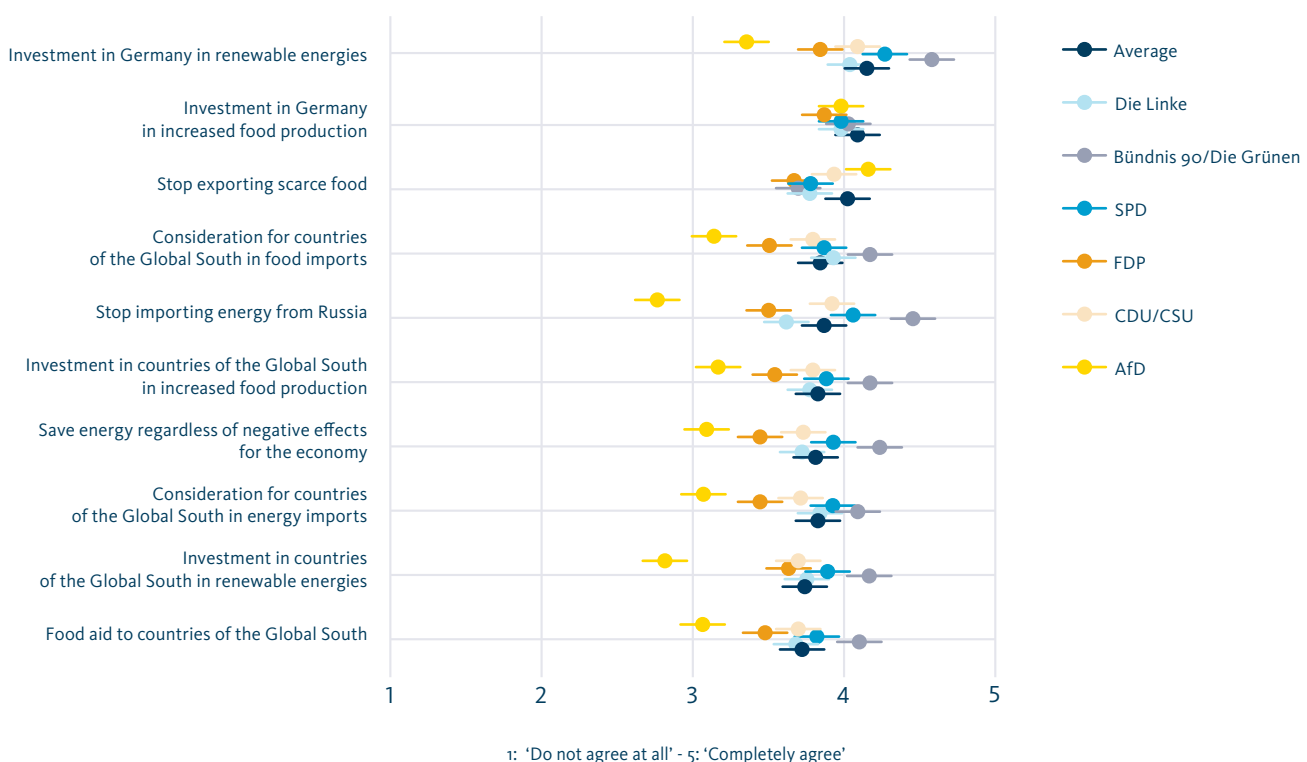
Correlations between economic expectations and political orientation likewise became apparent. The results of a correlation analysis demonstrate that the level of approval for most food and energy policy measures among persons whose political orientation is clearly to the right of centre is lower when they simultaneously assess the general economic outlook to be poor; hence, the lower

approval rating of this group for supporting development cooperation or renewable energy sources decreases even further in the face of a weak economic outlook. An opposite pattern is observable among people who rank to the left of centre politically: if the future general state of the economy appears negative, approval for food and energy policy measures as well as DC is generally even higher. However, this pattern is not manifested when it comes to a similar assessment of their own personal economic situation.

Economic crisis could exacerbate lines of conflict

The results show that national measures for promoting food and energy security garner strong support from the German public – and even for measures which in the short term can lead to higher expenditures, such as expanding renewable energy sources or banning energy imports from Russia. This holds true as well for measures concerning the Global South, even though such measures meet with less approval than measures aimed at supporting Germany.

Figure 2 Approval according to political party preference



Source: DEval, own representation based on the DEL panel wave 4 (October 2022), N = 6,000. The statements were surveyed on the basis of a five-point response scale ranging from 1 = "Do not agree at all" to 5 = "Completely agree". The results are broken down according to the political party for which the respondents voted in the most recent German parliamentary elections.

At the same time, a correlation exists at the individual level between a general state of the economy perceived to be deteriorating and a sinking approval for DC. Lower income, too, correlates with lower approval for measures aimed at fostering food security in countries of the Global South. While so far this has had little impact at the aggregate level (1.3 percentage points less approval for DC compared to before the war), this finding should nevertheless not be underestimated. The war against Ukraine could very well impact the German economy for a long time to come. Other global crises as well, such as the geopolitical tensions with China or the consequences of climate change, pose major challenges for the economy. That such issues could adversely affect agreement to DC efforts over the long term cannot be ruled out.

Differences in the political parties' levels of approval for DC have already been identified in the past (Schneider et al., 2022), and are becoming apparent in public debate on other areas of policy-making as well, for example with regard to the expansion of renewable energy. The results presented here demonstrate that persons of political orientation distinctly to the right of centre reject DC measures more strongly when they perceive that the economy is weakening, whereas approval for DC measures by persons oriented to the left of centre politically becomes stronger under such circumstances. Hence, there is a risk that currently existing lines of political conflict with regard to development policy can grow even more divided in the context of economic crises.

Literature

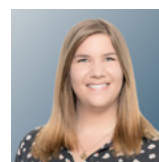
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