

Which meanings do people ascribe to their stances on official development assistance?

Evidence from a Correlational Class Analysis

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Abstract

The research field aiming to understand the public's attitudes towards official development assistance (ODA) has been characterized as "a mile wide and an inch deep". Within this research I aim to enrich the ODA literature by taking an innovative meaning-centered approach to understand people's stances on ODA: I examine different belief systems through which different people ascribe meaning to their stances on ODA. To uncover the belief systems, I take an inductive approach by applying the state-of-the-art method of Correlational Class Analysis to unique and high-quality survey data representative of the Dutch population ($n = 2068$). I uncover three different belief systems through which people ascribe meaning to their stances on ODA: a specific belief system in which people focus on improvement and growth within recipient countries when motivating their stances on ODA; an encompassing belief system in which people additionally take broader world affairs into consideration; and an isolated belief system in which people do not ascribe a clear meaning to their stances on ODA. In terms of the social bases of the belief systems, especially people's education and their political party and media consumption preferences appear relevant. My findings indicate that half of the Dutch population do not ascribe a clear meaning to their stances on ODA, future research should examine whether similar patterns exist within different donor countries. Moreover, other avenues for future research and implications for scholarly debates on the public's attitudes towards ODA are discussed.

Keywords

Official development assistance; correlational class analysis; belief systems; social bases; public opinion

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Introduction

Scholars have argued for the importance of the public's attitudes towards official development assistance (ODA) for effective, sustainable, and legitimate ODA policies within democratic countries (see e.g., Czaplínska, 2007, p. 6). Following the OECD (2023, p. 3; 2024, para 1, 2), ODA is defined as government aid provided by donor countries, through bilateral flows or multilateral development agencies (e.g., the United Nations), to support economic development and welfare within low- and middle-income recipient countries. Effective and sustainable ODA policies are argued to be warranted through public engagement and awareness of the ODA policies employed. Moreover, and more generally, the legitimacy and accountability of democracy at large would be ensured through the active participation and involvement of citizens (Czaplínska, 2007, p. 6).

Concurrently, the research field aiming to understand the public's attitudes towards ODA has been characterized as "a mile wide and an inch deep" (see e.g., Hudson & vanHeerde-Hudson, 2012, p. 6, compare with Bae & Kim, 2016, p. 185-188; Henson & Lindstrom, 2013, p. 67). Whilst the few studies examining the public's stances on ODA have been attentive to drivers of citizens' stances on ODA, such as ideology, generalized trust, religiosity, education, and income, to explain the extent to which they support ODA (i.e., their stance on ODA; see e.g., Bae & Kim, 2016, p. 193; Bayram, 2017, p. 141; Chong & Gradstein, 2008; p. 22; Henson & Lindstrom, 2013, p. 70; Milner & Tingley, 2011, p. 42; Paxton & Knack, 2011; p. 176, 177), the small research field itself has simultaneously been criticized on its superficial understanding of how citizens' motivations, attitudes, and values relate to their stances on ODA (Bae & Kim, 2016, p. 186, 187; Hudson & vanHeerde-Hudson, 2012, p. 14).

Moreover, and since the research field examining the public's stances on ODA is mostly comprised of survey-based research (see e.g., Bae & Kim, 2016, p. 185; Bayram, 2017, p. 133; Henson & Lindstrom, 2013, p. 67), the existing studies have been less sensitive to the possibility that different people may ascribe different meanings to their similar stances on ODA. Identical responses to a survey item may mean different things to different people (DiMaggio et al., 2018, p. 32): people may hold a similar stance on the same phenomenon whilst their understanding of the phenomenon differs (Sotoudeh & DiMaggio, 2021, p. 1841, 1842). This fundamental notion, wherein different people can hold a similar stance on a political phenomenon whilst simultaneously ascribing different meanings to it, also seems to apply to stances on ODA: people with differing social demographics and ideologies can for

instance support (or oppose) ODA to a similar extent (see e.g., Van der Lelij & Knoop, 2007, p. 42, 43). More specifically, ODA is for instance supported by both secular Green party voters and orthodox Christian party voters (Carabain et al., 2012, p. 53). Following this line of reasoning, recent small-scale in-depth qualitative research in the Netherlands suggests that people indeed ascribe different meanings to their stance on ODA: support for ODA was for some people an expression of self-interest, wherein goals of ODA were for instance perceived as having to benefit the donor in the first place, whereas others supported ODA out of moral concerns (Diets, 2019, p. 18, 23).

It is scientifically relevant to build upon and move beyond previous small-scale qualitative research (Diets, 2019, p. 9. 10) to study whether, among the public at large, people indeed ascribe different meanings to their stances on ODA. Previous research on other political themes, such as European Union membership (Van den Hoogen et al., 2022a, p. 502, 503, 504) and welfare benefits (Lindner et al., 2024, p. 15), has recently demonstrated that political phenomena have different meanings for different citizens, and that these differing meanings have diverging social bases. Moreover, this research is highly relevant, as Van den Hoogen et al. (2022a, p. 502) indicated that the meaning which is ascribed to a political theme within extant literature, can be a meaning which is only held by less than half of the population. Building upon abovementioned suggestions that different people may ascribe different meanings to their stances on ODA (see e.g., Diets, 2019, p. 23), and on recent literature (Lindner et al., 2024, p. 15; Van den Hoogen et al., 2022a, p. 502, 503, 504) which indicates that diverse political phenomena have different meanings for different segments of the population, I formulate the following research question: *which different meanings do people ascribe to their stances on ODA, and wat are the social bases of these meanings?*

To answer the research question, I will take an inductive approach by applying the state-of-the-art method of Correlational Class Analysis (CCA) to unique and high-quality survey data representative of the Dutch population ($n = 2068$; i.e., *LISS data* managed by *Centerdata*, January 2020; Tilburg University, the Netherlands; De Koster et al., 2023). The focus on the Dutch context is suitable as the Dutch foreign policy has been characterized through elements of both moralism and economic profit (Herman, 2006, p. 859), which suggests that different viewpoints on ODA may be present amongst the public as well. Apart from its abovementioned scientific relevance, through adding to the literature on the public's stances on ODA by aiming to understand what ODA means for different segments of the population, this research has societal relevance as well: recent global shocks, such as Russia's war against Ukraine and Covid-19, and the gradual but persistent rise in inequality and social

unrest have emphasized the demand for ODA (OECD, 2023, p. 3, 23, 48). Since the largest ODA donators are democratically organized countries (see e.g., Dyvik, 2023, para 1; OECD, 2023, p. 107, 113), wherein governments are often responsive towards the public (see e.g., Hakhverdian, 2012, p. 1402; Hobolt & Klemmensen, 2005, p. 396, 397; see also on ODA Heinrich et al., 2021, p. 1057), it is imperative to better understand the public's stances on ODA.

Below, the notion of “belief systems” is introduced as an approach to uncover the meanings people ascribe to their stances on ODA. Thereafter the relevant social background characteristics to explore the social bases of the uncovered belief systems for ODA are discussed. Subsequently, the analytical strategy for the CCA and the subsequent analyses to explore the social bases are considered, and the data with their corresponding operationalizations are discussed. I find three perspectives through which people ascribe meaning to their stances on ODA: a specific perspective, an encompassing perspective, and an isolated perspective. In terms of the social bases of the three perspectives, especially people's education and their political party and media consumption preferences appear relevant. Lastly, implications and directions for future research are discussed and the scientific and societal relevance are reflected upon.

Theoretical Framework

Using belief systems to uncover the meanings people ascribe to their stances on ODA

When aiming to uncover which different meanings people ascribe to their stances on ODA, it is important to realize that identical responses to a survey item may mean different things to different people (DiMaggio et al., 2018, p. 32). Hence, it is first essential to understand how one can analyze the meanings people ascribe to a survey item. Since the meaning people ascribe to a certain phenomenon is argued to be relational (Boutyline, 2017, p. 354; Mohr, 1998, p. 351, 365), the meaning attached to an attitudinal survey item response does not emerge from that single attitude of the respondent, but from the relationships amongst the respondent's attitudes (DiMaggio et al., 2018, p. 32). It is therefore possible to understand the meaning people ascribe to a survey item by mapping its relation to other survey items (for applications see e.g., Lindner et al., 2024, p. 9, 10; Van den Hoogen et al., 2022a, p. 497). These meanings can be uncovered through networks of attitudes, known as “belief systems”, in which various attitudes “are bound together by some form of constraint or functional interdependence” (Converse, 2006, p. 3, compare with Campbell et al., 1960, p. 189, 190).

If multiple belief systems for ODA exist, in which items tapping into people's stances on ODA and different goals of ODA relate differently amongst each other, the different meanings that people ascribe to their stances on ODA can be uncovered (following Goldberg, 2011, p. 1401, 1402, 1403). Inspired by previous small-scale qualitative research (Diets, 2019, p. 18, 23), the fictitious belief systems in Figure 1 illustrate how people whose stance on ODA is primarily motivated through goals of self-interest (see belief system A) adhere to a different belief system, than people whose stance on ODA is primarily motivated through moral goals (see belief system B).

More specifically, in belief system A in Figure 1 (upper pane) the extent to which people support ODA is closely and positively related to their attitudes on whether ODA from the Netherlands should result in benefits for Dutch trade and Dutch companies. Simultaneously, their stance on ODA is unrelated to their attitudes on whether ODA from the Netherlands should help people in dire need and reduce long-term poverty among people in poor countries. Contrarily, belief system B in Figure 1 (lower pane) indicates a reversed pattern: here the level of support for ODA is closely and positively related to attitudes on whether ODA from the Netherlands should help people in dire need and reduce long-term poverty among people in poor countries. Simultaneously, stances on ODA are unrelated to their attitudes on whether ODA from the Netherlands should result in benefits for Dutch trade and Dutch companies.

Among people who adhere to belief system A, stances on ODA are understood from a self-interested perspective, whilst among people who adhere to belief system B, stances on ODA are understood from a moral perspective. The fictitious belief systems in Figure 1 hence indicate that different people, who adhere to different belief systems, ascribe a different meaning to their stances on ODA (following e.g., Baldassarri & Goldberg, 2014, p. 57, 59, 81). Note that people who adhere to a different belief system, and thus ascribe a different meaning to their stances on ODA, may simultaneously hold the same political stance (following e.g., Van den Hoogen et al., 2022a, p. 499): for instance, whilst some people who adhere to belief system A in Figure 1 may support ODA, as they perceive ODA as a profitable economic investment resulting in benefits for Dutch trade and Dutch companies which thereby benefits their self-interest, people who adhere to belief system B may equally support ODA, but because they perceive ODA as serving moral means through which people in dire need are helped and poverty among people in poor countries is reduced.

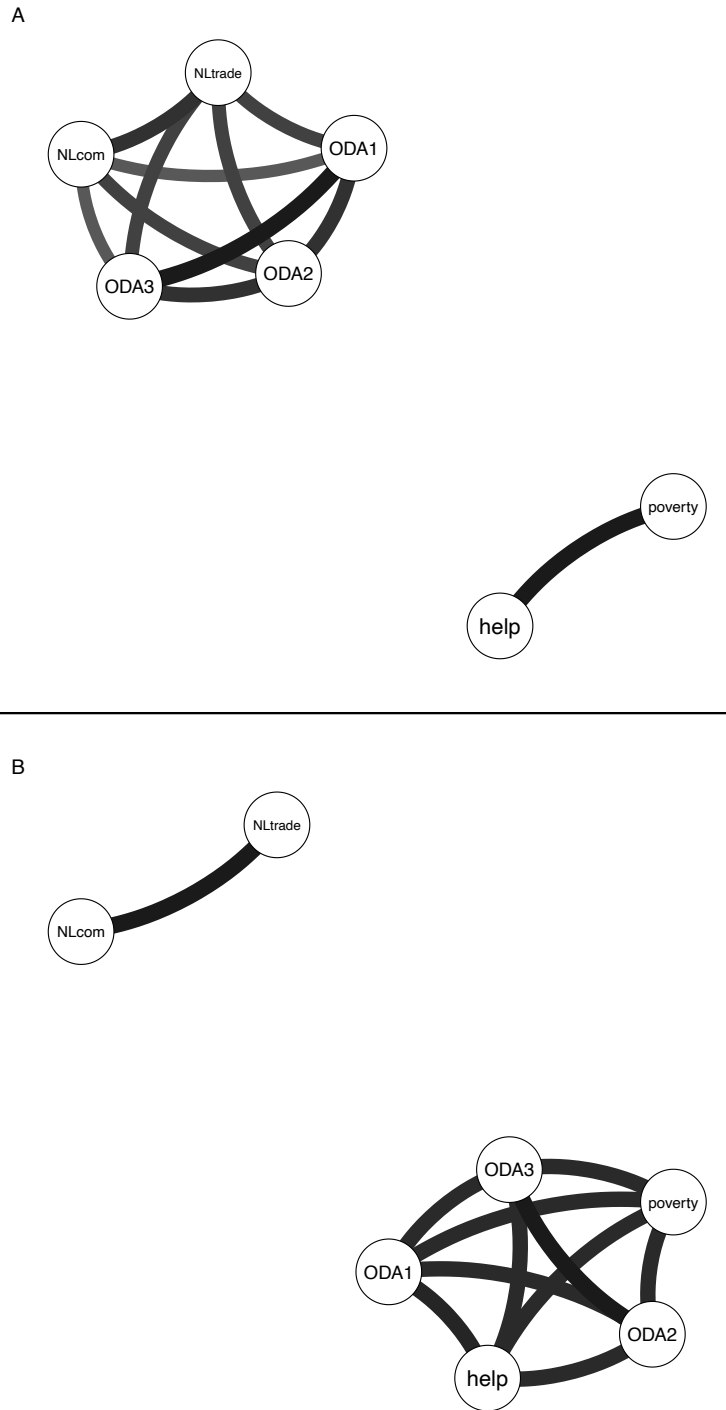


Figure 1. Fictitious belief systems A and B. Nodes represent items, wherein “ODA1”, “ODA2”, and “ODA3” measure the level of support for ODA. Moral goals of ODA are measured through “help”, measuring to what extent people agree that ODA should result in helping people in dire need, and “poverty”, measuring to what extent people agree that ODA should result in reducing long-term poverty among people in poor countries. Self-interested goals of ODA are measured through “NLtrade”, measuring to what extent people agree that ODA should result in benefits for the Netherlands through trade, and “NLcom”, measuring to what extent people agree that ODA should result in benefits for Dutch companies. The lines between nodes indicate associations: thicker lines indicate stronger associations, solid lines indicate positive associations, and dashed lines indicate negative associations.

Likewise, people may hold opposing political stances even though they adhere to the same belief system, and hence ascribe the same meaning to these political stances (Goldberg, 2011, p. 1398, 1402): for instance, among people who adhere to belief system B in Figure 1, some people may support ODA, perceiving ODA as serving moral goals by helping people in dire need and reducing poverty among people in poor countries, whilst others who oppose ODA, may also perceive ODA as serving moral goals by helping people in dire need and reducing poverty among people in poor countries but perceive this as wasted or unnecessary governmental expenses. Belief systems are hence not based on, or confined to, people's degree of support for ODA but refer to how people structure their political stances (Daenekindt et al., 2017, p. 793; Goldberg, 2011, p. 1402). Therefore, belief systems can be employed as an instrument for uncovering the meanings people ascribe to their stances on ODA.

Whilst previous literature suggests that support for ODA is broadly motivated through goals of self-interest or moralist goals (see e.g., Diets, 2019, p. 18, 23), it is simultaneously argued that these goals are to be considered as overarching concepts (Hudson & vanHeerde-Hudson, 2012, p. 15). I therefore consider self-interested and moral goals of ODA only as broad sensitizing concepts within my inductive research approach. All in all, this approach allows me to move beyond the notion of a singular attitudinal structure for all people, and enables me to scrutinize different belief systems in which different people distinctly structure their political attitudes (Daenekindt et al., 2017, p. 793); thereby shifting “focus from *what* people think” about ODA, “to *how* people think” about ODA (Van Noord et al., 2024, p. 1).

The social bases of the meanings people ascribe to their stances on ODA

In addition to scrutinizing different belief systems to understand the meanings different people ascribe to their support for ODA, I aim to uncover the social bases of these different meanings (cf. Lindner et al., 2024, p. 5, 6; Van den Hoogen et al., 2022a, p. 493), as people's social background characteristics appear at the core of their different understanding of the same political phenomenon (see e.g., Baldassarri & Goldberg, 2014, p. 68, 69, 75, 77; Goldberg, 2011, p. 1419, 1420, 1421): “if groups tend to differ in their goals and interests, to receive different information, or to undergo different kinds of changes in circumstances” (Page & Shapiro, 1992, p. 286) their worldviews may differ. Uncovering the social bases of different belief systems for ODA allows me to explore how people differ from others who ascribe different meanings to their stances on ODA. In line with Lindner et al. (2024, p. 5, 6)

and Van den Hoogen et al. (2022a, p. 493) I will focus on people's *education, religious denomination, political party preference, income, and media consumption*.

First, *education* plays an important role in people's perception of political phenomena (Spruyt & Kuppens, 2015, p. 292, 293, 294), and the organization of political beliefs within belief systems (Baldassarri & Goldberg, 2014, p. 75). More specifically, education may shape the structure of the different stances people hold on ODA, as ODA is often directed to foreign countries, and education influences people's perception on the policies directed to foreign countries (Page & Shapiro, 1992, p. 177, 178, 181). Moreover, previous studies, in which survey items measuring attitudes towards ODA were formulated inconsistently (Hudson & vanHeerde-Hudson, 2012, p. 9, 10), have shown mixed results on the relationship between education and attitudes towards ODA (see e.g., Bae & Kim, 2016, p. 195, 196; Chong & Gradstein, 2006, p. 19, 20; Henson & Lindstrom, 2011, p. 72; Paxton & Knack, 2011, p. 183; Prather, 2011, p. 16, 30; vanHeerde & Hudson, 2010, p. 400). These mixed results may be explained through the inconsistent formulation of survey items measuring attitudes towards ODA (Hudson & vanHeerde-Hudson, 2012, p. 9, 10): different segments of the population may have interpreted these dissimilar survey items differently due to the different belief systems from which they understand issues related to ODA.

Second, people's *religious denomination* shapes their views on political phenomena (see e.g., Badassarri & Goldberg, 2014, p. 69; Daenekindt et al., 2017, p. 804; Lindner et al., 2024, p. 14). More specifically, moralist goals which motivate people's support for ODA are argued to originate from both religious and secular inspired worldviews: whilst secular individuals motivate their support for ODA through principles of solidarity and decency, religious individuals support for ODA is motivated through principles of charity or their love for other people (Wetenschappelijke Raad voor het Regeringsbeleid [WRR], 2010, p. 38). Simultaneously, it is argued that individuals with different religious denominations hold distinct worldviews, which, in the political arena, affect a country's foreign policy (Warner & Walker, 2011, p. 114, 115, 118). For instance, and whilst the parable of the Good Samaritan is part of the Christian tradition at large, Protestant individuals in the Netherlands hold a worldview with more focus on social responsibilities and the well-being of others, through socialization in their religious communities, compared to Catholic and secular individuals (Bekkers & Schuyt, 2008, p. 74, 78, 88, 89). Although the Netherlands has been coined "one nation, without God" (Lechner, 2008, p. 135), wherein "the fallout of secularization [...] framed the way the Dutch reimagined themselves" (Lechner, 2008, p. 135), and most individuals in the Netherlands consider themselves as non-religious (55.4 % in 2020), there

are substantial numbers of people who consider themselves Catholic (19.8 %), Protestant (14.4%), and Muslim (5.2%; Centraal Bureau voor de Statistiek [CBS], 2021, p. 28). Moreover, previous research indicates that the remaining Protestant and Catholic affiliates in Western societies endure commitment to their general Protestant and Catholic identities and beliefs (Wilkins-Laflamme, 2016, p. 176, 177).

Third, people's *political party preferences* shape how their political attitudes are structured (see e.g., Lindner et al., 2024, p. 12, 13, 14): through the framing and agenda-setting of political issues by political elites of the preferred party, the belief system held by party elites may be taken over by people who prefer that specific political party (as argued by Daenekindt et al., 2017, p. 795, 796, 804, 805). In the Netherlands, ODA is framed differently by different political parties: whereas the 2023 election manifesto of the Dutch old right party (VVD) explains its proposed budget cuts on ODA primarily from a perspective of self-interest (Centraal Planbureau [CPB], 2023, p. 25, 141; de Volkspartij voor Vrijheid en Democratie [VVD], 2023, p. 18, 19), the Dutch new left party D66 explains its proposed increase of investment on ODA from both a moral and self-interest perspective (Democraten 66 [D66], 2023, p. 227, 228; party classification cf. Daenekindt et al., 2017, p. 800; De Koster et al., 2013, p. 9). The way ODA is framed by political party elites may shape the meaning people ascribe to ODA. This may explain how Dutch citizens can hold similar stances on ODA, whilst simultaneously having distinct political ideologies (see e.g., Van der Lelij & Knoop, 2007, p. 42, 43): in the Netherlands, secular Green party voters and orthodox Christian voters for instance both support ODA (Carabain et al., 2012, p. 53).

Fourth, *income* plays a role in how people structure their attitudes on political issues, as people with different incomes differ in their views on political issues (Gidron, 2020, p. 151, 152; Van Noord et al., 2024; p. 12, 15). Moreover, the ideological worldviews of people are shaped through the (in)security of their economic positions: whilst people with more economic insecurity approach matters of economic redistribution with a perspective directed at economic self-interest, people with more economic security are argued to hold a progressive worldview when approaching matters of economic redistribution (Achterberg & Houtman, 2009, p. 1654, 1663; Lipset, 1959, p. 485, 491, 492). Since ODA can be perceived as "pure redistribution of global income" (Bourguignon et al., 2009, p. 1), people with different incomes may ascribe different meanings to ODA.

Fifth, I will account for people's highbrow or lowbrow *media consumption* as well, as previous research has indicated that people's news consumption may be relevant when uncovering the social bases of the different meanings people ascribe to political phenomena

(Lindner et al., 2024, p. 12, 13, 14; Van den Hoogen, 2022a, p. 502). Since “the world looks different to different people, depending not only on their personal interests, but also on the map that is drawn for them by the writers, editors, and publishers of the papers they read” (Cohen, 1963, p. 13), repeated consumption of media content gradually shapes how people structure their political attitudes (Norris et al., 1999, p. 13). Media effects such as news framing, agenda setting, and priming, within mass media are suggested to shape people’s worldviews (for an overview see e.g., Scheufele & Tewksbury, 2007, p. 13-17). Since the media are the main source from which people receive information on foreign policy (Page & Shapiro, 1992, p. 205, 358; Soroka, 2003, p. 28), media coverage of ODA shapes how people perceive ODA (see e.g., Dasandi et al., 2022, p. 613, 618, 619; Kobayashi et al., 2021, p. 9).

Research Design

Analytical strategy

The analytical strategy within this research comprised two overarching analytical steps. Within the first step, I employed CCA (Boutyline, 2017, p. 354, 355) through the corclass package in R (Boutyline, 2023, p. 1-8), to scrutinize different belief systems and hence the different meanings people ascribe to their stances on ODA in the Netherlands. This method is adopted as it allows to cluster people based on their similar *relations* amongst attitudes, rather than on their similar attitudes (Daenekindt et al., 2017, p. 799; Goldberg, 2011, p. 1404): different attitudinal structures are distinguished based on similar correlations among attitudinal survey items (Boutyline, 2017, p. 360, 361, 362). This method allowed me to move beyond the notion of a singular attitudinal structure for all people (as is assumed in factor analysis). The clusters obtained by the CCA were visualized in R using qgraph and employing the Fruchterman-Reingold algorithm (cf. Linder et al., 2024, p. 6). Following the CCA, I conducted a sensitivity check through structural equation modeling to test the model fitness of the CCA results.

Within the second analytical step, through which I examined the social bases of the belief systems for stances on ODA, I employed two existing approaches in the literature to explore the social bases of people’s belief systems: that is, with a multivariate approach through a multinomial logistic regression (see e.g., Dekeyser & Roose, 2021, p. 485, 486; Van den Hoogen et al., 2022a, p. 494) and with a bivariate approach through examining the distribution of social background variables within a belief system (see e.g., Lindner et al., 2024, p. 4).

Data and Measures

Within this research I employed data gathered in January 2020 from the Longitudinal Internet Studies for the Social Sciences (LISS) panel (De Koster et al., 2023), administered by Centerdata (Tilburg University, the Netherlands). In total 2935 Dutch citizens (aged 18 years or above) were sampled, 2218 of whom completed the survey (i.e., a response rate of 75.6%; De Koster et al., 2023, para 2). Additionally, I employed data from the monthly “LISS panel – Background variables” dataset to account for social background variables included to explore the social bases of the identified belief systems (i.e., January 2020; Elshout, 2022). The available survey data are suitable for my research purposes, as the LISS panel is comprised of a true probability sample drawn from the Dutch population register. This data hence allowed me to move beyond previous small-scale qualitative research (Diets, 2019, p. 9. 10), and study how different people ascribe different meanings towards their stances on ODA throughout society at large.

Moreover, to the best of my knowledge this survey data is unique in its content, as it is the first survey which measures people’s opinions on which goals ODA should serve alongside their stances on ODA. This unique data thereby allows me to move beyond studying the one-dimensional degree of support people have towards ODA (as criticized by Bae & Kim, 2016, p. 186) and allows me to include people’s underlying motivations for their stances on ODA. The data are therefore particularly suitable for studying the different meanings people ascribe to their stances on ODA.

From the 2218 respondents who completed the survey I excluded those respondents who did not fill out one or more of the items included in the CCA, who completed the questionnaire in ten minutes or less, as this was a too short timespan to properly complete the questionnaire, or of whom the time was unknown in which they completed the questionnaire ($n = 93$). Subsequently, I further excluded respondents due to straightlining ($n = 42$). After performing an initial CCA, I identified two classes which could not be meaningfully interpreted as they were comprised of substantially low numbers of respondents. I therefore additionally excluded the respondents within these two classes ($n = 15$) before conducting a subsequent CCA in which the final sample comprised 2068 respondents.

Moreover, and thereafter, some of the 2068 respondents were excluded from the analyses for the social bases of the belief systems due to missing values on a social background variable (see “Variables in the analyses on the social bases” below). Within the January 2020 data from the LISS panel, people’s religious denomination was not included as

a variable. To capture people's religious denomination, I employed data from the 2019 'Religion and Ethnicity' LISS Core Study (wave 12; Elshout, 2020) in which 88.3% of the respondents included in the CCA had indicated their religious denomination (cf. Linder et al., 2024, p. 7).

Variables in the CCA

Table 1 provides all 17 items included within the CCA with their corresponding labels. All items were measured on a seven-point Likert scale ranging from (1) Completely disagree to (7) Completely agree. Three items were included to measure the extent to which respondents support ODA and were coded in such manner that higher scores indicated higher levels of support for ODA. Moreover, 14 items were included to measure respondents' motivations for their stances on ODA, wherein higher scores indicated more agreement with a potential goal of ODA. Given the importance of self-interested and moral motivations for respondents' stances on ODA within the literature (Diets, 2019, p. 23; Hudson & vanHeerde-Hudson, 2012, p. 13), some of these items specifically tap into diverse goals of self-interest whilst others tap into diverse moral goals for stances on ODA. Additionally, some of the items were open to multiple interpretations, as they were formulated at the intersection of both moral and self-interested goals of ODA.

Variables in the analyses on the social bases

Table A1 in the Appendix provides the operationalizations with both the original and applied item categorizations of all social background characteristics included to explore the social bases of the identified belief systems. *Education* was measured by asking respondents about the highest level of education for which they obtained a diploma. The responses were coded into three categories: (1) less-educated individuals (ISCED 0-2), (2) medium-educated individuals (ISCED 3-4), and (3) more-educated individuals (ISCED 5-8; cf. Lindner et al., 2024, p. 8, compare with CBS, 2024, p. 14, 15, 16). Those respondents who indicated they had not (yet) completed or started any education, reported 'other', or did not respond were excluded from the analysis ($n = 57$).

Religious denomination was measured by asking respondents whether they perceived themselves as belonging to a church community or religious group, and if so, to which church community or religious group they felt they belonged (cf. Lindner et al., 2024, p. 8). The responses were coded into six categories: (1) not religious, (2) Catholic, (3) Protestant,

Table 1. All items incorporated in the CCA.

Items		
<i>Support for</i>		<i>Label</i>
ODA		
	It is very important to help poor countries by providing development aid.	ODA1
	I am disgusted by development aid. (reverse coded)	ODA2
	I have sympathy for development aid.	ODA3
Goal of ODA	If the Netherlands provides development aid to poor countries, then the result should be that...	
	...people in dire need are helped.	help
	...people in poor countries quickly get back on their own two feet again.	feet
	...long-term poverty among people in poor countries is reduced.	poverty
	...the inequality between poor and rich countries is reduced.	ineq
	...migration from poor countries to the Netherlands is reduced.	migr
	...population growth in poor countries is slowed down.	pgrowth
	...unrest around the world is reduced.	unrest
	...the Netherlands also benefits from it through trade.	NLTrade
	...Dutch companies benefit as well.	NLcom
	...businesses in poor countries are stimulated.	busin
	...employment opportunities in poor countries are increased.	employ
	...the health situation of people in poor countries is improved.	health
	...human rights in poor countries are promoted.	rights
	...the Netherlands will also be helped if it should need help in the future.	NLhelp

Source: LISS panel managed by Centerdata (2020; Tilburg University, the Netherlands; De Koster et al., 2023).

(4) other Christian denomination, (5) Muslim, or (6) other non-Christian denomination. From the respondents who were originally included in the CCA, the respondents who reported ‘I don’t know’ or did not report their religious denomination were excluded from the analysis ($n = 264$).

Political party preference was measured by asking respondents for which party they would vote if parliamentary elections were to be held today. The responses were coded into eight categories: (1) populist right, (2) old right, (3) new left, (4) old left, (5) Christian democratic, (6) Christian orthodox, (7) other political party preference, (8) do not know (cf. Lindner et al., 2024, p. 8; inspired by Daenekindt et al., 2017, p. 800; De Koster et al., 2013, p. 9). Those respondents who indicated that they would vote ‘Blank’, would not vote, were not eligible to vote, or preferred not to say on which party they would vote were excluded from the analyses ($n = 156$).

Income (continuous, imputed; Elshout, 2022) was the net monthly income in Euros of all household members combined, and was based on a measurement asking respondents individually about their personal net monthly income in Euros (cf. Lindner et al., 2024, p. 8). The net monthly income of those respondents who did not report their personal net monthly income, but did report their gross monthly income, was imputed from their gross monthly income. Moreover, the net monthly income of those respondents who did not report their specific income, but only in terms of categories was based on the average of the indicated category. Those respondents who had zero (0) net monthly household income ($n = 14$) were excluded from the analyses, as it is unclear whether all household members actually have no income, do not know their income, or do not want to share their income. Additionally, those of whom the household income was missing were excluded from the analyses ($n = 202$). Within the multinomial logistic regression, the logarithm of income was used as its distribution was skewed.

Media consumption was measured through two items asking respondents through which of two media sources they would rather follow the news. The first item measured *highbrow newspaper consumption* (continuous; cf. Lindner et al., 2024, p. 8) and ranged from (1) to (7) wherein (4) indicated no preference, a higher value indicated more preference for highbrow newspaper consumption, and a lower value indicated more preference for lowbrow newspaper consumption. The second item measured *highbrow television news consumption* (continuous; cf. Van den Hoogen et al., 2022a, p. 498) and ranged from (1) to (7) wherein (4) indicated no preference, a higher value indicated more preference for highbrow television

news consumption, and a lower value indicated more preference for lowbrow television news consumption.

Lastly, within the multinomial logistic regression I included *gender* (1 = male, 2 = female) and *age* (continuous) as control variables. Those respondents who did not report their gender ($n = 2$) or their age ($n = 2$) were excluded from the multinomial logistic regression.

Results

The CCA uncovered that people adhere to three different belief systems for their stances on ODA; of the 2068 respondents 23.6% adhered to a specific belief system, 24.9% adhered to an encompassing belief system, and 51.5% adhered to an isolated belief system. Since a CCA always produces multiple belief systems, I applied structural equation modeling to test the model fitness of this three-class solution by comparing it with a one-class model (cf. Boutyline & Vaisey, 2017, p. 1406, 1443; Lindner et al., 2024, p. 8): the CCA-produced three class solution had a better model fit (Akaike information criterion [AIC] = 83408.85, and Bayesian information criterion [BIC] = 86248.55) than a one-class solution (AIC = 88415.93, and BIC = 89362.49), which indicates that people in the Netherlands ascribe different meanings to their stances on ODA.

Each of the three belief systems is interpreted separately through its visualized network with a corresponding Pearson's correlation table. Moreover, a histogram for each belief system indicates the distribution of stances people hold on ODA within that belief system (Figure 2, 3, 4). The distribution of stances on ODA is based on item ODA1 ("It is very important to help poor countries by providing development aid."), as this item taps most directly into the extent to which people support ODA and resembles other often used items to measure people's stances on ODA (see e.g., Bae & Kim, 2016, p. 192, 193; Paxton & Knack, 2012, p. 176; Prather, 2011, p. 10). The histograms of the three belief systems indicate that the specific belief system and the encompassing belief system are primarily comprised of supporters of ODA (i.e., nearly all respondents score higher than (4) on item ODA1), whilst both supporters and opponents of ODA, and people who are neutral in their stance on ODA, adhere to the isolated belief system.

Whereas the multivariate approach is suitable to explore the social bases between belief systems, this is only possible when substantial numbers of people have a similar stance on ODA across the belief systems, and when people do not substantially differ in their

stances on ODA within the belief systems: the results of a multinomial logistic regression would be clouded when conducted with polarized belief systems constituting the dependent variable. The bivariate approach is most suitable when people who adhere to the same belief system differ in their stances on ODA. Therefore, for the isolated belief system I include an interpretation of the distribution of each social background variable for both the opponents of ODA and the people who are neutral in their stance on ODA (Figure 5). Since substantial numbers of supporters of ODA are found among adherents of all three belief systems, I explore the social bases of the supporters of ODA through a multinomial logistic regression.

Specific belief system

The specific belief system ($n = 489$, primarily supporters of ODA; Figure 2) corresponds to a specific perspective on the public's attitudes on ODA within the literature, wherein the public is perceived as approaching ODA specifically as a means of producing positive development outcomes in recipient countries by helping its citizens and reducing poverty (see e.g., Bayram, 2017, p. 134, 138; Hudson & vanHeerde-Hudson, 2012, p. 9, 10; Noël & Thérien, 2002, p. 631, 632, 639, 640, 645; Paxton & Knack, 2012, p. 171-174). The visualized network, and the corresponding Pearson's correlations table, of the specific belief system indicate that items on the extent to which people support ODA are closely related to items which tap into goals of ODA explicitly directed at improvement and growth within the recipient countries: items such as "If the Netherlands provides development aid to poor countries, then the result should be that..." (1) "...human rights in poor countries are promoted", (2) "...long-term poverty among people in poor countries is reduced", (3) "...employment opportunities in poor countries are increased", and (4) "...businesses in poor countries are stimulated" are tightly clustered with, and positively related to, the items on the extent to which people support ODA (with correlations ranging from 0.35 to 0.50 for these items).

Contrarily, more broader items focusing on other, but to ODA related, world affairs are only weakly related to the items measuring people's stances on ODA: for instance, "If the Netherlands provides development aid to poor countries, then the result should be that..." (1) "...unrest around the world is reduced", and (2) "...the inequality between poor and rich countries is reduced" (with correlations ranging from 0.19 to 0.27 for these items). Moreover, items tapping into purely self-interested goals of ODA are strongly related to each other, but only weakly and negatively related to the tightly knit cluster from which people ascribe

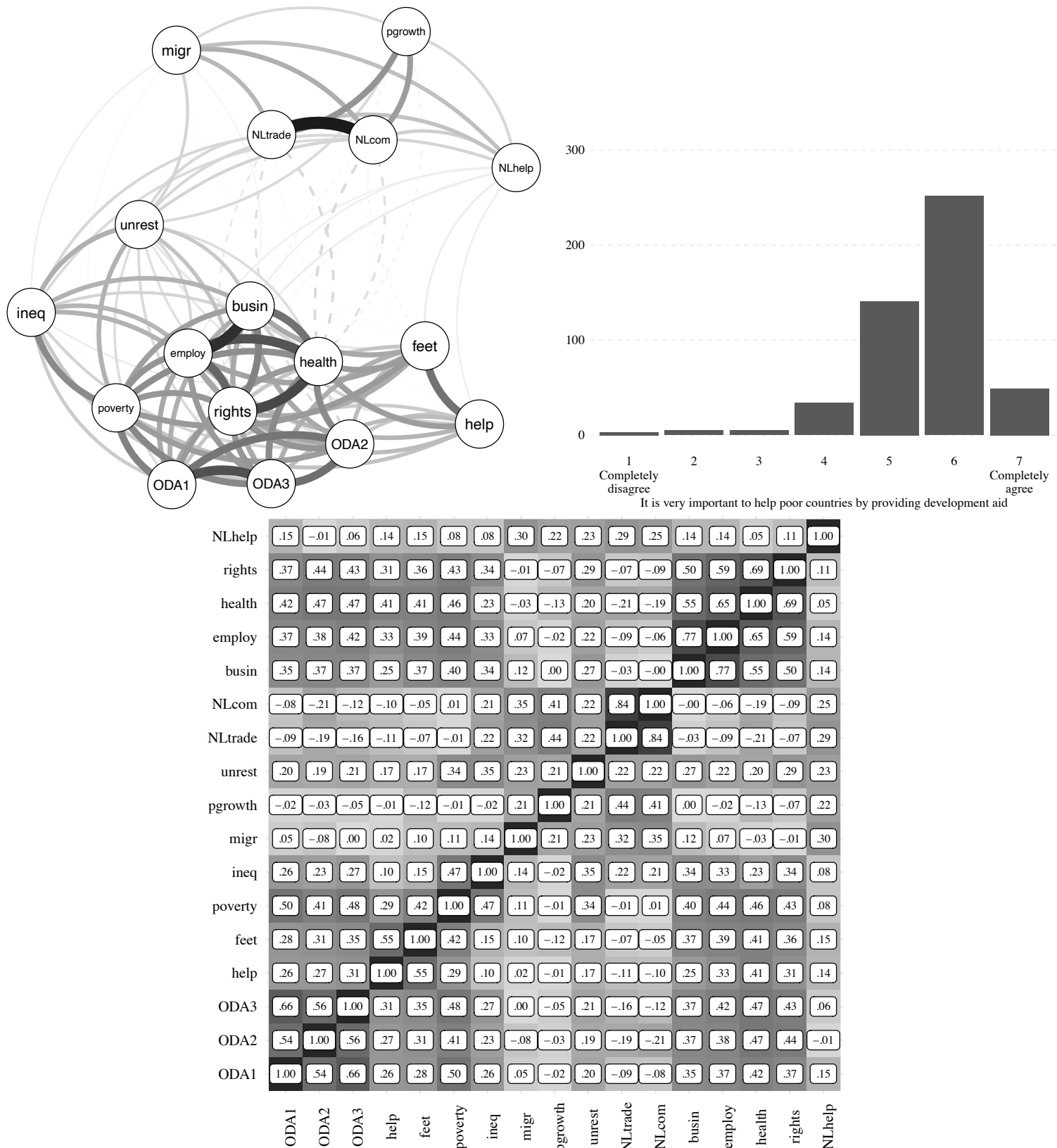


Figure 2. Specific belief system. The distribution of support (opposition) towards ODA within the belief system (upper right pane), with the Pearson's correlations between the items included in the CCA (pane below), and the belief system's visualized network (upper left pane) wherein the nodes represent items and the lines between nodes indicate associations: thicker lines indicate stronger associations, solid lines indicate positive association, and dashed lines indicate negative associations ($n = 2068$).

meaning to their stance on ODA: see for instance the items “If the Netherlands provides development aid to poor countries, then the result should be that...” (1) “...the Netherlands also benefits from it through trade”, and (2) “...Dutch companies benefit as well” (with correlations between these items and items on the extent to which people support ODA ranging from -0.21 to -0.08). All in all, people who adhere to the specific belief system support ODA from a perspective focused on improvement and growth within recipient countries. Such a specific approach to ODA is also engrained within ODA literature, wherein the public’s stances on ODA are typically measured through survey items asking respondents “whether they consider that government should do more or less to reduce poverty in poor countries” (Henson & Lindstrom, 2013, p. 68).

Encompassing belief system

The encompassing belief system ($n = 514$, primarily supporters of ODA; Figure 3) resembles a tightly knit cluster of which only purely self-interested items are no part (i.e., “...the Netherlands will also be helped if it should need help in the future”, “...the Netherlands also benefits from it through trade”, and “...Dutch companies benefit as well”; with correlations between these items and items on the extent to which people support ODA ranging from -0.13 to 0.21). Just like in the specific belief system, the items measuring people’s stances on ODA are also related to the items which tap into goals of ODA explicitly directed at improvement and growth within the recipient countries (e.g., “...human rights in poor countries are promoted”, “...long-term poverty among people in poor countries is reduced”, “...employment opportunities in poor countries are increased”, and “...businesses in poor countries are stimulated”; with correlations ranging from 0.38 to 0.55 for these items).

In contrast with the specific belief system, the broader items focusing on other to ODA-related world affairs, are also part of the tightly knit cluster of the encompassing belief system from which people ascribe meaning to their stances on ODA. Compared to the specific belief system, people who adhere to the encompassing belief system ascribe meaning to their stances on ODA through a broader ‘lens’ which alongside goals of improvement and growth in recipient countries also explicitly encompasses goals related to other and broader ODA-related world affairs, for instance, migration (i.e., “...migration from poor countries to the Netherlands is reduced”; in accordance with research on concerns over migration and support for ODA, Kiratli, 2021, p. 66, 67; with correlations between this item and items on the extent to which people support ODA ranging from 0.33 to 0.38), or unrest and inequality

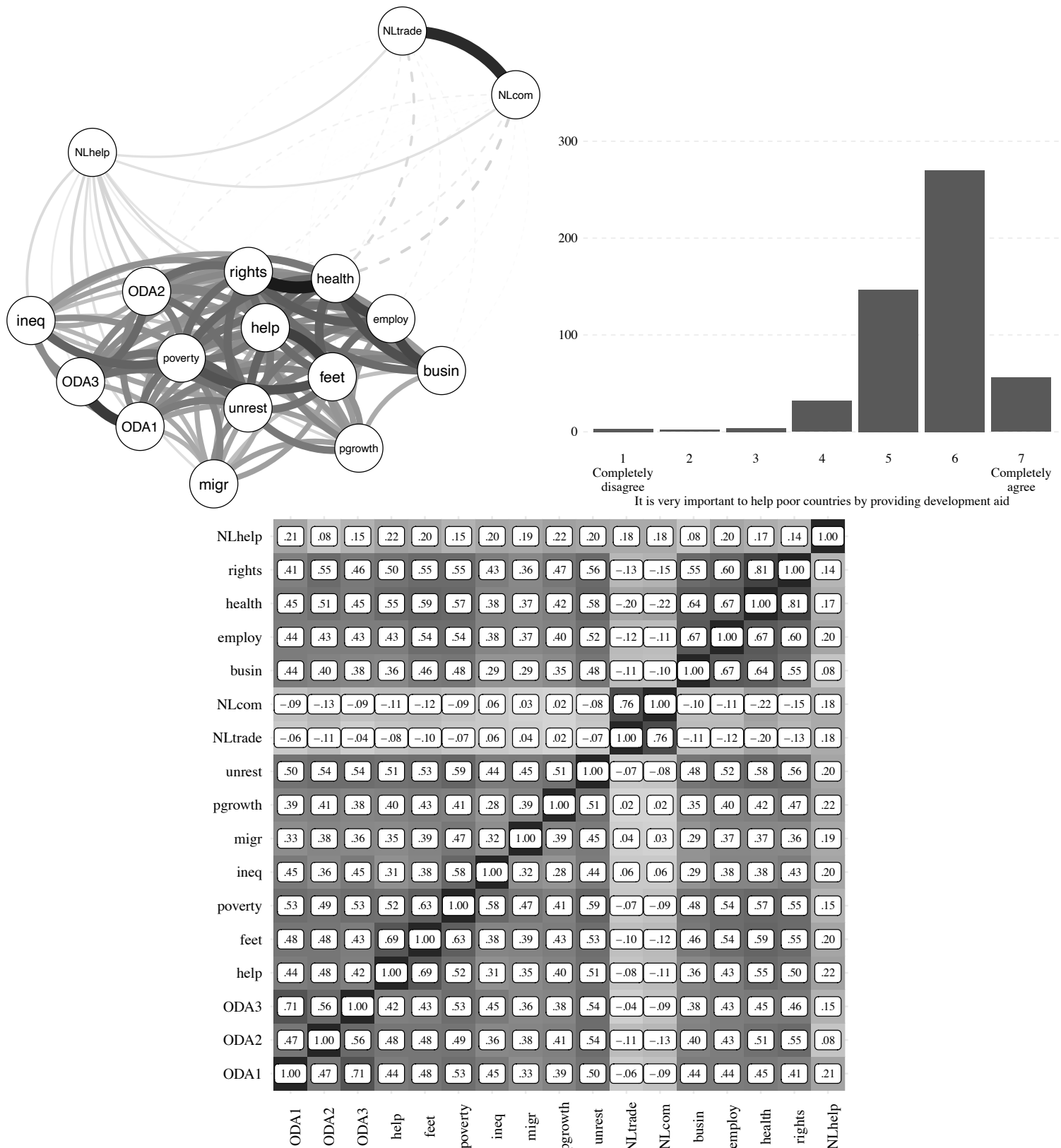


Figure 3. Encompassing belief system. The distribution of support (opposition) towards ODA within the belief system (upper right pane), with the Pearson's correlations between the items included in the CCA (pane below), and the belief system's visualized network (upper left pane) wherein the nodes represent items and the lines between nodes indicate associations: thicker lines indicate stronger associations, solid lines indicate positive association, and dashed lines indicate negative associations ($n = 2068$).

across the world (i.e., “...unrest around the world is reduced”, and “...the inequality between poor and rich countries is reduced”); with correlations between these items and items on the extent to which people support ODA ranging from 0.36 to 0.54). All in all, people who adhere to the encompassing belief system take encompassing issues into consideration when formulating stances on ODA.

Isolated belief system

The isolated belief system ($n = 1065$, supporters and opponents of ODA, and people who are neutral in their stance on ODA; Figure 4) corresponds to the literature arguing that as people have little knowledge on ODA programmes, not only the research field aiming to understand the public’s attitudes towards ODA can be characterized as “a mile wide and an inch deep”, but the public stances on ODA as well (Henson & Lindstrom, 2013, p. 67, 68; Hudson & van Heerde-Hudson, 2012, p. 6, 16; Smillie, 1999, p. 72). Within the isolated belief system, the items measuring people’s stances on ODA are isolated from the items which tap into which goals ODA should serve (e.g., “...human rights in poor countries are promoted”, “...long-term poverty among people in poor countries is reduced”, “...unrest around the world is reduced”, and “...the inequality between poor and rich countries is reduced”; with correlations ranging from 0.05 to 0.25 for these items).

Such isolated belief systems, wherein certain (political) attitudes are hardly related to other (political) attitudes or ideas, have been identified before in previous research employing either Relational Class Analysis (RCA; i.e., the method where CCA is built upon; Boutyline, 2017, p. 353) or CCA (see e.g., Baldassarri & Goldberg, 2014, p. 60, 61; Brensinger & Sotoudeh, 2022, p. 1061, 1063, 1065; Daenekindt et al., 2017, p. 802, 803; Dekeyser & Roose, 2021, p. 484, 485; DiMaggio et al., 2018, p. 41, 42). Within the context of this research, the weak relation between the items measuring stances on ODA and the items measuring goals of ODA implies that people who adhere to the isolated belief system have no well-defined evaluation of ODA directing their stances, and hence do not ascribe a clear meaning to their stances on ODA. This finding is in line with previous in-depth qualitative research on people’s attitudes towards the European Union, which indicated that people may hold certain political stances whilst ascribing no explicit meaning to their stances, as they verbalize no precise evaluation or reason for their attitudes (Van den Hoogen et al., 2022b, p. 1443).

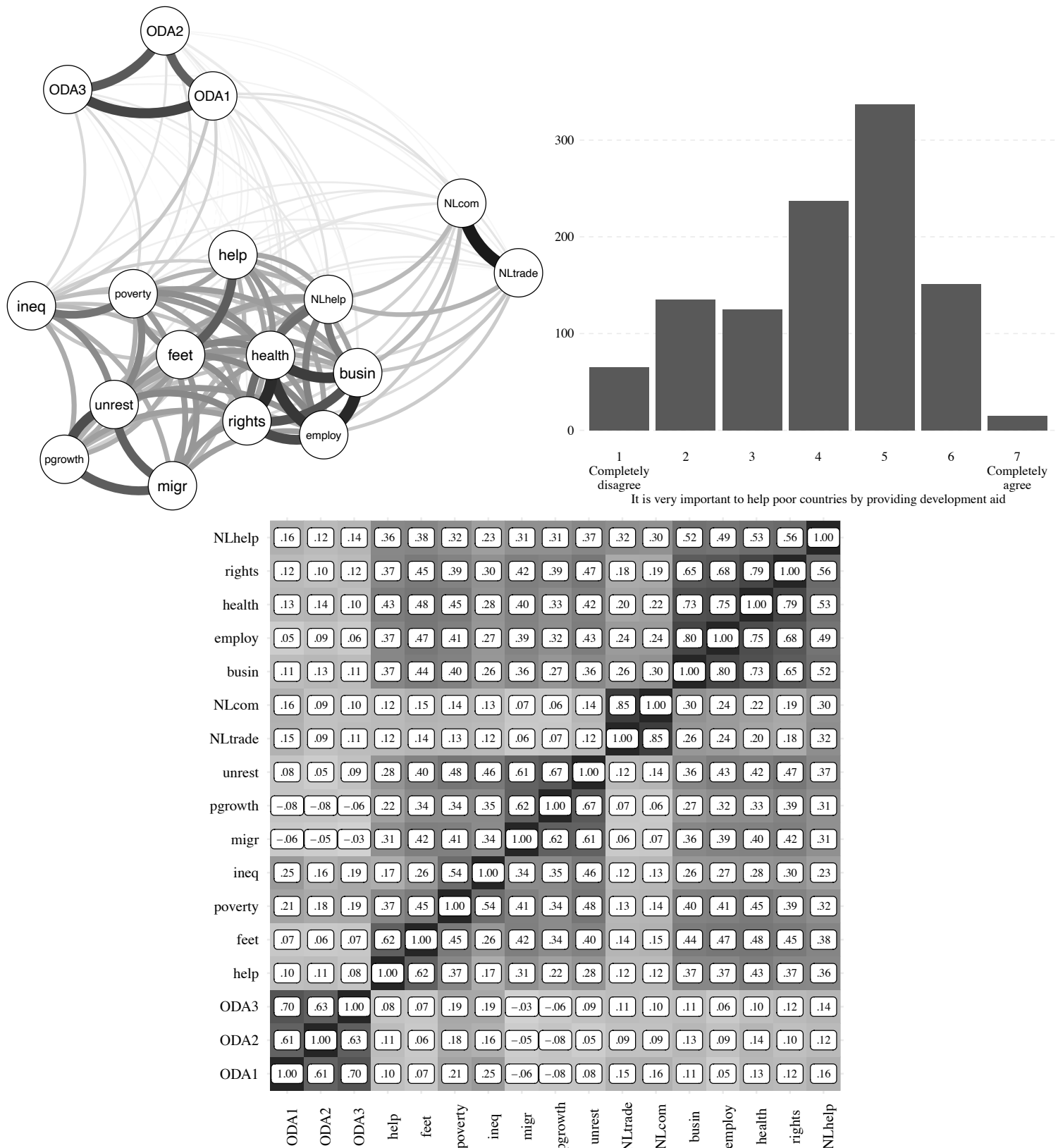


Figure 4. Isolated belief system. The distribution of support (opposition) towards ODA within the belief system (upper right pane), with the Pearson's correlations between the items included in the CCA (pane below), and the belief system's visualized network (upper left pane) wherein the nodes represent items and the lines between nodes indicate associations: thicker lines indicate stronger associations, solid lines indicate positive association, and dashed lines indicate negative associations ($n = 2068$).

Since most people do not have personal experiences with political issues such as ODA, people may be guided in their stances on ODA through for instance political institutions or media outlets (Lupia & McCubbins, 2000, p. 47, 48, 56-59; Scott, 2014, p. 169): people who are relatively uninformed about certain political issues may use signals from information providers they perceive trustworthy as heuristics to determine their own stance on these political issues (Lupia, 1994, p. 66, 67). Figure 5 indicates that of those people adhering to the isolated belief system, people neutral in their stance on ODA (18.3%), but especially people who oppose ODA (33.4%), more often prefer populist right parties compared to the entire population (11.8%). Simultaneously, both opponents of ODA (new left, 7.7%; old left, 7.4%) and people neutral in their stance on ODA (new left, 7.2%; old left, 9.6%) who adhere to the isolated belief system, substantially less often prefer the political left compared to the entire sample (new left, 19.2%; old left, 13.9%). In this context, it is striking to note that the largest populist right party PVV argues for a complete stop on ODA, whereas the left parties Groenlinks and PvdA collaboratively support ODA (CPB, 2023, p. 25, 52, 141, 168; Groenlinks and de Partij van de Arbeid [Groenlinks-PvdA], 2023, p. 17, 89, 98; de Partij voor de Vrijheid [PVV], 2023, p. 43).

Moreover, it stands out that of those adhering to the isolated belief system, people neutral in stance on ODA (33.2%) substantially more often do not know their political party preference compared to the entire sample (20.9%). Since most people are relatively uninformed about ODA programmes (Henson & Lindstrom, 2013, p. 67, 68; Hudson & van Heerde-Hudson, 2012, p. 6, 16) and may use signals as heuristics from political institutions they perceive trustworthy for their stances on political issues (Lupia, 1994, p. 66, 67; Lupia & McCubbins, 2000, p. 47, 48, 56-59), this finding could imply that as people do not have a political party preference, and hear mixed messages from political elites in general (see e.g., CPB, 2021, p. 27, 28, 60, 77, 94; D66, 2023, p. 227, 228; PVV, 2023, p. 43; VVD, 2023, p. 18, 19), they may be less inclined to take over specific stances on ODA of party elites (building onto Slothuus & De Vreese, 2010, p. 636-642). Alternatively, this finding could imply that some people are overall disengaged from political issues, having neither well-defined reasons for their neutral stance on ODA nor a political party preference.

In terms of media consumption, I find weaker but similar patterns to political party preference: it particularly stands out that opponents of ODA and people neutral in their stance on ODA adhering to the isolated belief system substantially less often prefer highbrow newspaper and television news consumption compared to the entire sample (i.e., highbrow

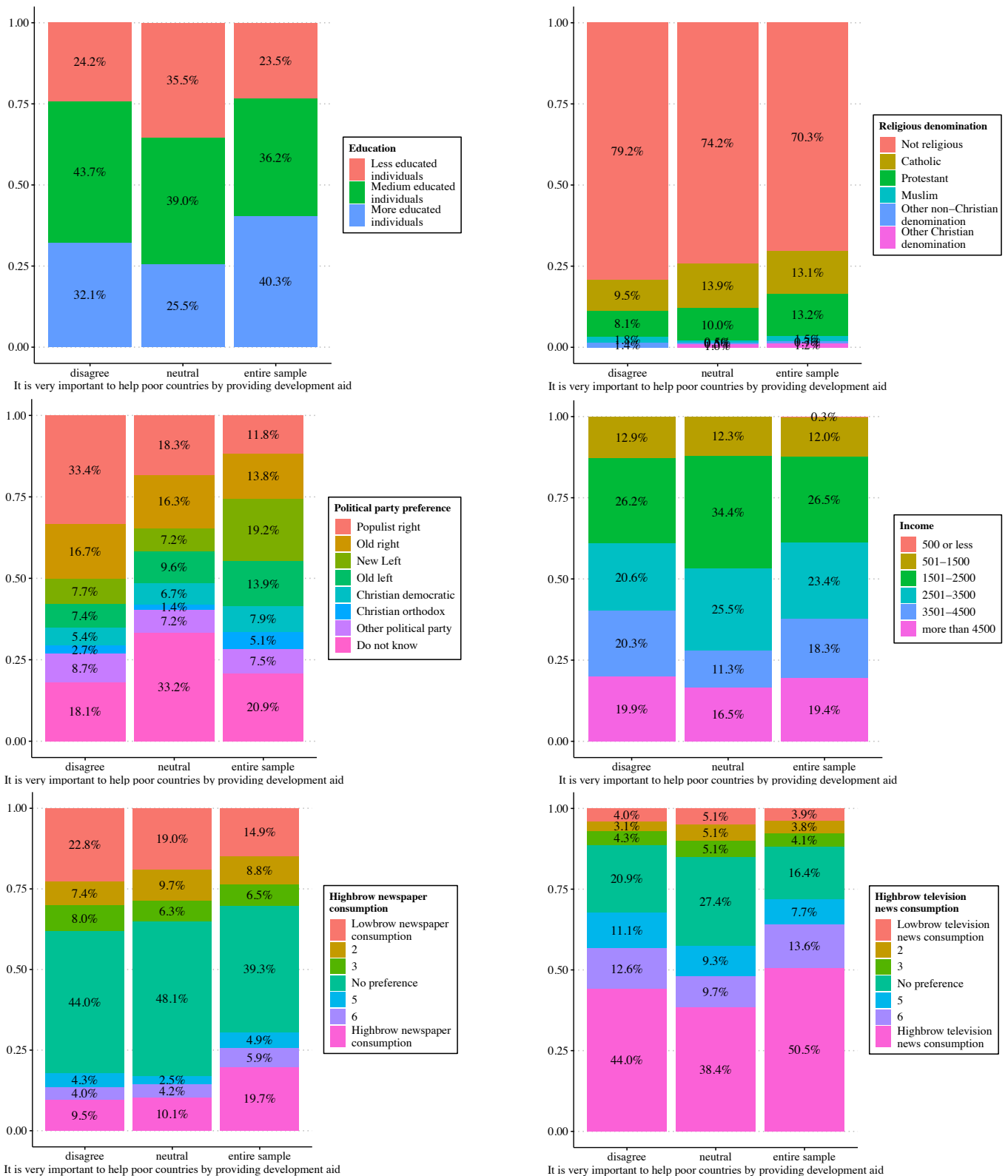


Figure 5. Distribution of social background characteristics for the opponents of ODA and people neutral in their stance on ODA who adhere to the isolated belief system, and the entire sample (education, opponents $n = 318$, neutral $n = 231$, entire sample $n = 2011$; religious denomination, opponents $n = 284$, neutral $n = 209$, entire sample $n = 1804$; political party preference, opponents $n = 299$, neutral $n = 208$, entire sample $n = 1912$; income, opponents $n = 286$, neutral $n = 212$, entire sample $n = 1852$;ighbrow newspaper consumption, opponents $n = 325$, neutral $n = 237$, entire sample $n = 2068$;ighbrow television news consumption, opponents $n = 325$, neutral $n = 237$, entire sample $n = 2068$).

newspaper consumption, opponents: 17.8%, neutral: 16.8%, entire sample: 30.5%; highbrow television news consumption, opponents: 67.7%, neutral: 57.4%, entire sample: 71.8%). Moreover, especially opponents of ODA (38.2%) more often prefer lowbrow newspaper consumption compared to the entire sample (30.2%), whereas people neutral in their stance on ODA more often have no preference in media consumption compared to the entire sample (i.e., no newspaper preference, neutral: 48.1%, entire sample: 39.3%; no television news preference, neutral: 27.4%, entire sample: 16.4%). These findings on news media consumption may imply that people who adhere to the isolated belief system take over less well-defined reasons for their stances on ODA: again, people may be guided in their stances on ODA through information providers, such as media outlets, they perceive as trustworthy (Lupia, 1994, p. 66, 67; Lupia & McCubbins, 2000, p. 47, 48, 56-59; Scott, 2014, p. 169). Moreover, whilst increases of political knowledge through media exposure are contingent on the informative content presented on political issues (De Vreese & Boomgaarden, 2006, p. 331, 332), lowbrow entertainment-oriented news outlets offer more heuristics cues and informational shortcuts on political issues, influencing people's political stances without increasing their well-defined evaluations of these political stances (building onto Baum, 2003, p. 174, 181, 186, 187).

In line with these findings for media consumption, and since political information alongside heuristic cues appears especially important for the political stances of more-educated individuals (for an overview see e.g., Gilens & Murakawa, 2002, p. 21-25), I find similar patterns for education: of those people who adhere to the isolated belief system, opponents of ODA (32.1%) and people neutral in their stance on ODA (25.5%) are less often more-educated compared to the entire sample (40.3%); and especially opponents of ODA (43.7%) are more often medium-educated compared to the entire sample (36.2%), whereas people neutral in their stance on ODA (35.5%) are more often less-educated compared to the entire sample (23.5%). Apart from opponents of ODA (79.2%) adhering to the isolated belief system being more often not religious compared to the entire sample (70.3%), and people neutral in their stance on ODA (1501-2500, 34.4%; 3501-4500, 11.3%) somewhat more often having a lower net monthly household income compared to the entire sample (1501-2500, 26.5%; 3501-4500, 18.3%), no other patterns stood out for religious denomination and income. Since substantial numbers of supporters of ODA adhere to all three belief systems, I explore the social bases of the supporters of ODA through a multinomial logistic regression of which the results are described below.

The social bases of supporters of ODA across the belief systems

Table 2 reports the results of the multinomial logistic regression analysis which identifies which people who support ODA (i.e., all respondents who score higher than (4) on item ODA1) are more likely to adhere to a particular belief system. The descriptive statistics of all independent variables (no multicollinearity detected) are available in the Appendix Table A2. The dependent variable within the multinomial logistic regression was people's adherence to a particular belief system, wherein the specific belief system was the reference category.

I found that supporters of ODA who adhere to the encompassing belief system are more likely to be less-educated individuals than supporters of ODA who adhere to the specific belief system. Specifically, less-educated individuals are 1.790 ($1/e^{-0.582}$) times more likely than medium-educated individuals, and 1.732 ($1/e^{-0.549}$) more likely than more-educated individuals, to adhere to the encompassing belief system rather than to the specific belief system. Moreover, supporters of ODA who adhere to the encompassing belief system are 5.485 ($e^{1.702}$) times more likely to prefer populist right parties rather than new left parties, compared to supporters of ODA who adhere to the specific belief system. Regarding the control variables, supporters of ODA who are older, are with each increase of one year in age 1.013 ($e^{0.013}$) more likely to adhere to the encompassing belief system rather than to the specific belief system. All in all, supporters of ODA who adhere to the encompassing belief system compared to the specific belief system are more likely to be less-educated (compared to medium- and more-educated), are more likely to prefer populist right parties (compared to new left parties) and are more likely to be older in age. This implies that if people with the abovementioned social background characteristics are supporters of ODA, they are more likely to support ODA from a perspective which encompasses considerations of broader ODA-related world affairs alongside specific considerations of improvement and growth within recipient countries, than from a perspective solely focusing on improvement and growth within recipient countries.

Moreover, supporters of ODA who are less-educated (compared to medium- and more-educated) or prefer populist right parties (compared to new left parties) are even more likely to adhere to the isolated belief system compared to the specific belief system, than to the encompassing belief system compared to the specific belief system. More specifically, less-educated individuals are 2.545 ($1/e^{-0.934}$) times more likely than medium-educated individuals, and 3.582 ($1/e^{-1.276}$) times more likely than more-educated individuals, to adhere to the isolated belief system rather than to the specific belief system. Moreover, and compared to supporters of ODA who prefer new left parties, supporters of ODA who prefer

Table 2. Multinomial logistic regression analysis for the social bases of supporters of ODA across the belief systems.

	Encompassing belief system	Isolated belief system
Intercept	0.134 (1.316)	0.931 (1.412)
Education		
Less-educated	Ref.	Ref.
Medium-educated	-0.582* (0.268)	-0.934*** (0.261)
More-educated	-0.549* (0.266)	-1.276*** (0.268)
Religious denomination		
Not religious	Ref.	Ref.
Catholic	-0.194 (0.252)	0.202 (0.250)
Protestant	0.024 (0.264)	-0.046 (0.285)
Other Christian denomination	-1.034 (0.716)	-1.592 (0.865)
Muslim	0.952 (1.246)	2.302* (1.108)
Other non-Christian denomination	0.456 (1.249)	0.892 (1.178)
Political party preference		
New left	Ref.	Ref.
Populist right	1.702* (0.786)	3.487*** (0.759)
Old right	-0.234 (0.288)	0.970** (0.297)
Old left	0.441 (0.254)	0.760* (0.302)
Christian democratic	-0.069 (0.322)	0.468 (0.354)
Christian orthodox	-0.466 (0.375)	-0.678 (0.484)
Other political party preference	-0.431 (0.377)	0.718 (0.367)
Do not know	0.220 (0.252)	1.064*** (0.277)
Income	-0.176 (0.352)	-0.026 (0.379)
Highbrow newspaper consumption	-0.022	-0.116*

	(0.042)	(0.045)
Highbrow television news consumption	0.101	-0.085
	(0.056)	(0.052)
Age	0.013*	0.011
	(0.005)	(0.006)
Gender (female)	-0.237	-0.345
	(0.167)	(0.180)
Pseudo R^2	0.228	

Sources: LISS panel managed by Centerdata (2019, 2020; Tilburg University, the Netherlands; De Koster et al., 2023; Elshout, 2020, 2022) (own calculations).

Note: Multinomial regression analysis (support for ODA ≥ 5). Reference category: specific belief system. Entries are log odds, standard errors in parentheses; $n = 1018$.

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

populist right parties are 32.688 ($e^{3.487}$) times more likely to adhere to the isolated belief system rather than to the specific belief system.

Additionally, in line with the abovementioned patterns for the opponents of ODA and people neutral in their stance on ODA adhering to the isolated belief system, I find that supporters of ODA who prefer more lowbrow newspaper consumption are more likely to adhere to the isolated belief system compared to the specific belief system. Specifically, supporters of ODA who prefer more highbrow newspaper consumption (i.e., indicate one unit higher on the seven-point measure for highbrow newspaper consumption) are 1.123 ($1/e^{-0.116}$) times less likely to adhere to the isolated belief system than to the specific belief system. Furthermore, supporters of ODA who do not know their political party preference, prefer old right parties, or prefer old left parties (compared to new left parties) and supporters of ODA who are Muslim (compared to not religious) are more likely to adhere to the isolated belief system compared to the specific belief system. More specifically, and compared to supporters of ODA who prefer new left parties, supporters of ODA who do not know their political preference are 2.898 ($e^{1.064}$) times more likely to adhere to the isolated belief system rather than to the specific belief system; supporters of ODA who prefer old right parties are 2.638 ($e^{0.970}$) times more likely to adhere to the isolated belief system rather than to the specific belief system; and supporters of ODA who prefer old left parties are 2.138 ($e^{0.760}$) times more likely to adhere to the isolated belief system rather than to the specific belief system. Lastly, in terms of religious denomination, supporters of ODA who are Muslim are 9.994 ($e^{2.302}$) times more likely than supporters of ODA who are not religious to adhere to the isolated belief system rather than to the specific belief system. All in all, considering the comparisons

between the isolated belief system and the specific belief system, these findings imply that supporters of ODA with the abovementioned social background characteristics are more likely to ascribe no clear meaning to their stances on ODA compared to taking a specific perspective which focuses on improvement and growth within recipient countries.

Conclusion and Discussion

The research field aiming to understand the public's attitudes towards ODA has been characterized as "a mile wide and an inch deep" (see e.g., Hudson & vanHeerde-Hudson, 2012, p. 6). Most research focuses on the extent to which people support ODA, being less sensitive to the possibility that different people may ascribe different meanings to their similar stances on ODA. Based on previous research, which demonstrated that identical political phenomena have different meanings for different citizens (Lindner et al., 2024, p. 15; Van den Hoogen et al., 2022a, p. 502, 503, 504), I aimed to uncover the different belief systems through which people ascribe meaning to their stances on ODA. I employed the state-of-the-art method of Correlational Class Analysis to unique and high-quality survey data representative of the Dutch population to uncover such belief systems. Additionally, I explored the social bases of the belief systems by employing both a bivariate and a multivariate approach existing within the literature on citizens' understanding of political phenomena. In doing so, I aimed to extend the literature on ODA whilst answering the following research question: *which different meanings do people ascribe to their stances on ODA, and what are the social bases of these meanings?*

The CCA uncovered three belief systems through which Dutch citizens ascribe meaning to their stances on ODA. First, a specific belief system was identified which mostly comprised supporters of ODA who approach ODA with a perspective focused on improvement and growth within recipient countries. Second, an encompassing belief system was identified which mostly comprised supporters of ODA who approach ODA with a perspective which not only encompasses considerations of improvement and growth within recipient countries, but also encompasses considerations of broader ODA-related world affairs. Third, an isolated belief system was identified which comprised people with various stances on ODA, without well-defined evaluations which underly these stances.

It is striking to note that half of the Dutch population adheres to the isolated belief system, implying that large segments of the public do not ascribe a clear meaning to their stances on ODA. Moreover, it particularly stands out that those people who adhere to the

isolated belief system, and are hence disengaged from ODA-related issues, distinguish themselves through their lower levels of education and their preference for populist right parties and lowbrow media consumption. All in all, whereas public engagement and awareness is argued to be imperative for effective and sustainable ODA policies (Czaplińska, 2007, p. 6), the isolated belief system with its social bases indicates that large segments of the Dutch population do not ascribe a clear meaning to their stances on ODA and are disengaged from ODA-related issues.

Whilst half of the population adheres to the isolated belief system, only a quarter of the population takes the specific perspective which is engrained within the ODA literature, approaching ODA specifically as a means of producing positive development outcomes in recipient countries by helping its citizens and reducing poverty (see e.g., Bayram, 2017, p. 134, 138; Hudson & vanHeerde-Hudson, 2012, p. 9, 10; Noël & Thérien, 2002, p. 631, 632, 639, 640, 645; Paxton & Knack, 2012, p. 171-174). Simultaneously, the other quarter of the population ascribes meanings to their stances on ODA through the encompassing perspective, wherein other and broader ODA-related world affairs are considered alongside specific considerations of improvement and growth within recipient countries. Most people adhering to the encompassing and the specific belief system are supporters of ODA, and supporters of ODA who are less-educated, prefer populist right parties or are older in age, are more likely to adhere to the encompassing belief system compared to the specific belief system.

All in all, the findings of this research add to the research field aiming to understand the public's attitudes towards ODA, which has primarily focused on the individual-level and country-level determinants (interactively) shaping the extent to which people support ODA (see e.g., Bae & Kim, 2016, p. 193; Bayram, 2017, p. 141; Chong & Gradstein, 2008; p. 22; Henson & Lindstrom, 2013, p. 70; Milner & Tingley, 2011, p. 42; Paxton & Knack, 2011; p. 176, 177): this research indicates that different people ascribe different meanings to their stances on ODA, which implicates that merely examining people's degree of support for ODA within society at large does not suffice when examining how people understand and motivate their stances on ODA. By uncovering three different belief systems through which Dutch citizens ascribe meaning to their stances on ODA, this research argues for the significance of a research approach within the ODA research field which acknowledges people's different perspectives on ODA. This research thereby moreover adds to the innovative branch of literature within public opinion research, which argues for the importance of accounting for relationality among survey items to uncover the different

meanings people may ascribe to their stances on political issues (see e.g., Lindner et al., 2024, p. 15; Van den Hoogen et al., 2022a, p. 505).

This research has further theoretical implications for the research field examining public attitudes on ODA: whereas previous ODA research has indicated and theorized from the notion that people's stances on ODA are motivated through moral goals and goals of self-interest (see e.g., Diets, 2019, p. 18, 23; Paxton & Knack, 2011, p. 173; Prather, 2011, p. 7, 8), I found that moral and self-interested goals are not the classifying principles which direct people's stances on ODA. In principle, people motivate their stances on ODA differently through their different perspectives on ODA: namely, through a specific perspective focused on improvement and growth within recipient countries; an encompassing perspective additionally taking broader ODA-related world affairs into consideration; or an isolated perspective in which people do not have a well-defined evaluation for their stances on ODA. In all three perspectives, purely self-interested goals of ODA are not part of the core from which people ascribe meaning to their stances on ODA. Generally, the research findings are in line with Hudson & vanHeerde-Hudson (2012, p. 15), who argue that there is no crude distinction between either moral or self-interested motivations for people's stances on ODA.

Whilst this research is the first to account for the different meanings people ascribe to their stances on ODA by employing unique in-depth survey data representative of the Dutch population, this research is simultaneously restricted in its scope due to its focus on the Netherlands. Future research could examine possible between country differences in belief systems for ODA and the percentual adherence to these belief systems (inspired by e.g., Van Noord et al., 204, p.1), when other cross-national public opinion surveys such as the European Social Survey, the European Values Study, the World Values Survey, the International Social Survey Programme, or the Eurobarometer would adopt the LISS panel items measuring people's stances on ODA and different goals of ODA (De Koster et al., 2023; see e.g., European Commission, Brussels, 2023, para. 3). Future research aiming to understand the public's attitudes towards ODA could thereby be responsive to previous calls for research based on more nuanced measurements of the underlying motivations for people's stances on ODA (Hudson & vanHeerde-Hudson, 2012, p. 12, 13).

More specifically, future research should examine whether people ascribe different meanings to their stances on ODA within different donor countries. Since at the country-level, culture and processes of political socialization shape citizens' political attitudes, beliefs and engagement (Jäckle & Bauschke, 2011, p. 369, 370; for an overview on political socialization see e.g., Neundorf & Smets, 2016, p. 2), people in different countries may

understand political issues such as ODA differently. If people in different donor countries do approach ODA from a specific, encompassing, or isolated perspective, future research could examine whether and how social background characteristics across belief systems differ in different donor countries. Since for instance educational attainment levels (Eurostat, 2024, para 6) and political party preferences for the populist right (Rooduijn et al., 2023, p. 7, 8) have generally increased over time across Europe, but differences in aggregate educational attainment levels and populist right party preferences between European countries exist, differences in the social bases of the belief systems between countries may exist. For instance, relatively more people are more educated in the Netherlands compared to Portugal, whereas relatively more people prefer populist right parties in Hungary compared to the Netherlands (Eurostat, 2024, Figure. 1, 2; Silver, 2022, Figure. 1). Building onto my research findings, and based on educational attainment, it could be argued that Dutch citizens are more likely than Portuguese citizens to adhere to the specific belief system compared to the encompassing or the isolated belief system, whereas based on populist right party preferences it could be argued that Hungarian citizens are more likely than Dutch citizens to adhere to the encompassing or the isolated belief system rather than to the specific belief system. All in all, future research should examine whether belief systems (and their social bases) differ across donor countries.

Moreover, and in the absence of in-depth survey data on people's different goals of ODA across donor countries, future research could adopt the same innovative meaning-centered approach employed in this research but examine the meanings people ascribe to their stances on ODA through interrelations with other political attitudes (in accordance with e.g., Lindner et al., 2024, p. 5, 6). Such future research could for instance consider people's stances on ODA alongside their populist and nativist attitudes, as people with populist and nativist ideas *perceive* political party elites to not represent the interests of "the people" within the donor country when deciding on ODA policy (Heinrich et al., 2021, p. 1042, 1047, 1048, 1057); their economic egalitarian values, as ODA can be perceived as "pure redistribution of global income" (Bourguignon et al., 2009, p.1); and their welfare state attitudes, as research indicates different patterns for the relationship between people's stances on ODA and their welfare state attitudes: whilst some research indicates that people's stances on ODA are positively related to their welfare state attitudes (see e.g., Noël & Thérien, 2002, p. 644, 645, 650, 651), other research indicates that some segments of the population may support the welfare state but oppose ODA (as described by Prather, 2024, p. 1). Such ambivalent research findings could imply that different people adhere to different belief

systems, wherein their attitudes towards the welfare state are clustered differently with their stances on ODA. To illustrate with a fictitious example, if people's stances on ODA would be positively and tightly clustered with their welfare state attitudes and egalitarian values, people would ascribe meaning to their stances on ODA from a perspective specifically focused at economic redistribution; which is in line with the notion that segments of the population "support redistribution at home in the form of a strong welfare state and redistribution abroad in the form of foreign aid" (Prather, 2024, p. 1). Contrarily, when people's stances on ODA would be specifically negatively and tightly clustered with their populist and nativist attitudes, people who oppose ODA would not ascribe meaning to their stance on ODA from a perspective focused on economic redistribution, but from an anti-elitist perspective focused on "the people" within their domestic country (see e.g., Heinrich et al., 2021, p. 1042).

Whilst this research has uncovered different belief systems through which people ascribe meaning to their stances on ODA, this research has simultaneously indicated that half of the Dutch population do not ascribe a clear meaning to their stances on ODA. Moreover, it is striking to note that of those people who adhere to the isolated belief system, opponents of ODA more often prefer populist right parties, whereas people neutral in their stance on ODA substantially more often do not have a political party preference compared to the population. These findings are in line with previous research arguing that people who are relatively uninformed about certain political issues may use signals from information providers, such as political institutions or media outlets, they perceive trustworthy as heuristics to determine their own stance on these political issues (Lupia, 1994, p. 66, 67; Lupia & McCubbins, 2000, p. 47, 48, 56-59). Additionally, I found weaker but similar patterns to political party preference for media consumption, wherein opponents of ODA adhering to the isolated belief system especially more often prefer lowbrow newspaper consumption, whilst people neutral in their stance on ODA especially more often have no preference in media consumption. Whereas to the best of my knowledge research has primarily focused on how partisanship (see e.g., Slothuus & De Vreese, 2010, p. 630) and media coverage (see e.g., Dasandi et al., 2022, p. 613, 618, 619; Kobayashi et al., 2021, p. 9) shape political attitudes, future research should be attentive to those citizens disengaged from political issues such as ODA without a political party or media consumption preference. Moreover, since this research indicated patterns through which different people ascribe meaning to their stances on ODA, future in-depth research should aim to examine the narratives through which different people articulate their stances on ODA.

All in all, whilst the research field aiming to understand people's attitudes towards ODA has focused on the extent to which people support ODA, this research indicates the importance of considering the meaning people ascribe to their stances on ODA. Within this research I uncovered that among the Dutch population, people approach ODA either through a specific, an encompassing, or an isolated perspective. Since half of the population adheres to the isolated belief system, many people do not ascribe a clear meaning to their stances on ODA and are disengaged from ODA-related issues. These findings are in line with previous research arguing that not only the research field aiming to understand the public's attitudes towards ODA can be characterized as "a mile wide and an inch deep", but the public stances on ODA as well (see e.g., Henson & Lindstrom, 2013, p. 67; Hudson & van Heerde-Hudson, 2012, p. 6, 16; Smillie, 1999, p. 72). Since governments are often responsive towards the public and recent global shocks have emphasized the demand for ODA (Hakhverdian, 2012, p. 1402; Heinrich et al., 2021, p. 1057; OECD, 2023, p. 3, 23, 48), it is imperative to better understand the public's stances on ODA. This research contributes to such better understanding of people's stances on ODA and indicates amongst others that many people are disengaged from ODA-related issues whilst public engagement and awareness is simultaneously argued to be imperative for effective and sustainable ODA policies (Czaplińska, 2007, p. 6). Future research should examine whether these findings differ between donor countries.

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Appendix

Table A1. Operationalizations of all social bases variables.

Operationalization	Original answer categorization	Applied answer categorization
Education		
Highest level of education with diploma	(1) primary education	(1) less-educated (ISCED 0 – 2)
	(2) vmbo	(1) less-educated (ISCED 0 – 2)
	(3) havo/vwo	(2) medium-educated (ISCED 3 – 4)
	(4) mbo	(2) medium-educated (ISCED 3 – 4)
	(5) hbo	(3) more-educated (ISCED 5 – 8)
	(6) wo	(3) more-educated (ISCED 5 – 8)
	(7) other	(7) missing
	(8) not (yet) completed any education	(8) missing
	(9) not yet started any education	(9) missing
Religious denomination		
Merged Do you see yourself as belonging to a church community or religious group?	(1) yes	
	(2) no	(1) not religious
	(-9) I don't know	(-9) missing
If item above was answered with (1) yes, then: Which church community or what religious group is that	(1) Roman Catholic	(2) Catholic
	(2) Protestant Church in the Netherlands (this includes the former denominations of the Dutch Reformed Church, the Reformed Church in the Netherlands, the Reformed Church in the Netherlands (synodal) and the	(3) Protestant

	Evangelical-Lutheran Church)	
(3)	Reformed Churches in the Netherlands (Liberated)	(3) Protestant
(4)	Christian Reformed Churches in the Netherlands	(3) Protestant
(5)	Dutch Reformed Churches	(3) Protestant
(6)	Reformed Congregations	(3) Protestant
(7)	an Evangelical, Pentecostal or Baptist congregation	(3) Protestant
(8)	an Eastern Orthodox church	(4) other Christian denomination
(9)	another Christian church congregation	(4) other Christian denomination
(10)	Islam	(5) Muslim
(11)	Hinduism	(6) other non-Christian denomination
(12)	Buddhism	(6) other non-Christian denomination
(13)	Judaism	(6) other non-Christian denomination
(14)	another non-Christian faith	(6) other non-Christian denomination
(-9)	I don't know	(-9) missing

Political party preference

If parliamentary elections were held today, for which party would you vote?

(1)	VVD	(2) old right
(2)	PVV (Wilders freedom party)	(1) populist right
(3)	CDA	(5) Christian democratic
(4)	D66	(3) new left
(5)	Groenlinks	(3) new left
(6)	SP (Socialist party)	(4) old left
(7)	PvdA (Labor party)	(4) old left
(8)	ChristenUnie	(6) Christian orthodox
(9)	Partij voor de Dieren	(3) new left
(10)	50PLUS	(7) other political party preference

(11) SGP (Reformed Political Party)	(6) Christian orthodox
(12) DENK	(7) other political party preference
(13) Forum voor Democratie	(1) populist right
(14) Blank	(14) missing
(15) Other party, namely... [string] Volt	(3) new left
Go	(1) populist right
De Nederlandse burgerpartij	(7) other political party preference
(16) I wouldn't vote	(16) missing
(17) I'm not eligible to vote	(17) missing
(18) I prefer not to say	(18) missing
(19) I don't know	(8) do not know

Income

Net monthly household income in Euros.

Based on

Personal net monthly income in Euros

[continuous measure]

(0) Means (1) no income or (2) does not know what income is or does not want to tell what income is	(0) missing
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Highbrow newspaper consumption

If I had to choose between two sources, I'd rather follow the news on Volkskrant – Algemeen Dagblad [continuous measure]

Range from (1) *Volkskrant* to (7) *Algemeen Dagblad*, with (4) *No preference*

Range from (1) *Algemeen Dagblad* to (7) *Volkskrant*, with (4) *No preference* [reverse coded]

Highbrow television news consumption

If I had to choose between two sources, I'd rather follow the news on EenVandaag – Shownieuws [continuous measure]

Range from (1) *EenVandaag* to (7) *Shownieuws*, with (4) *No preference*

Range from (1) *Shownieuws* to (7) *EenVandaag*, with (4) *No preference* [reverse coded]

Gender

Gender

(1) Male
(2) Female

(1) Male
(2) Female

Age

Age

[continuous measure]

Sources: LISS panel managed by Centerdata (2019, 2020; Tilburg University, the Netherlands; De Koster et al., 2023; Elshout, 2020, 2022) (own calculations).

Table A2. Descriptive statistics of the supporters of ODA (≥ 5 on “It is very important to help poor countries by providing development aid”).

	<i>n</i>	Mean	SD	Minimum	Maximum
Education					
Less-educated (ref.)					
Medium-educated	1376	0.341		0	1
More-educated	1376	0.444		0	1
Religious denomination					
Not religious (ref.)					
Catholic	1230	0.142		0	1
Protestant	1230	0.154		0	1
Other Christian denomination	1230	0.012		0	1
Muslim	1230	0.017		0	1
Other non-Christian denomination	1230	0.006		0	1
Political party preference					
New left (ref.)					
Populist right	1328	0.061		0	1
Old right	1328	0.127		0	1
Old left	1328	0.160		0	1
Christian democratic	1328	0.089		0	1
Christian orthodox	1328	0.064		0	1
Other political party preference	1328	0.074		0	1
Do not know		0.191		0	1
Income	1275	3.462	0.246	2.000	5.166
Highbrow newspaper consumption	1418	4.260	1.988	1	7
Highbrow television news consumption	1418	5.736	1.729	1	7
Age	1416	55.621	17.769	18	93
Gender (female)	1416	0.561		0	1

Sources: LISS panel managed by Centerdata (2019, 2020; Tilburg University, the Netherlands; De Koster et al., 2023; Elshout, 2020, 2022) (own calculations).