



# Who Decides Matters: Individual Agency and Aid Policy Change

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# What factors determine aid policy choices?

*“There is little consensus in the aid literature concerning which factors most influence changes in donors’ aid effort. Even when scholars agree on which variables matter most, they frequently disagree on the precise effects that those variables will have”*

*(Ahmed et al. 2011, 6)*

*“British aid policy has changed in the past five years, and Clare Short is the single most important reason that DFID has become the organisation it now is.”*

*(Morrissey 2002, 23)*



# Individual Decisionmakers Matter...

1. **Why** decisionmakers matter for aid policy;
2. **When** decisionmakers matter for aid policy;
3. **How** decisionmakers matter for aid policy.

## Why decisionmakers matter for aid policy...

### **Four Defining Characteristics of Aid Policy:**

1. Aid has very low political salience
2. Aid policy can encompass many objectives
3. Aid policy straddles the domestic & international spheres
4. Aid policy: no 'crisis moments'

## When decisionmakers matter for aid policy...

### **Conducive conditions for exercising agency:**

1. Decisionmaker has a personal passion for development issues
2. Decisionmaker is able to effectively wield political power
3. Decisionmaker promotes a clear agenda supported by an effective narrative
4. International aid regime characterised by a lack of 'consensus'

## How decisionmakers matter for aid policy...

### Case Study: Clare Short and the establishment of DFID

- Implicit argument: the presence of the person of Clare Short in the role of Secretary of State for International Development was a necessary condition for the emergence of DFID as a world class agency.
- Comparative Counterfactual analysis:
  - ✓ “small, plausible changes in reality that do not violate our understanding of what was... possible” (*Lebow 2006, 4*)
  - ✓ Used to weigh competing historical explanations

## Clare Short: Some background

### 1. Short as Development Secretary nearly didn't happen:

- *"I was stunned and angry"* Clare Short on her demotion from Shadow Transport Secretary, July 1996
- *"She must know that politically she is in a cul-de-sac, far removed from the core concerns of a Labour government-in-waiting"* The Observer, January 1997

### 2. Short had a... reputation:

- *"Labour's front-bench enfant terrible"* The Independent, May 1997.
- *"She has always been a stormy petrel"* African Business, December 1997
- *"He couldn't stand her"...* Tony Blair relates Alistair Campbell's opinion of Short



## Short v Cunningham



≈

Passion for  
Development Issues

≈

✓

Articulates a Clear  
Agenda

-

✓ ✓ ✓

Ability to wield political  
power

✓

## If decisionmakers matter for aid policy...

### Some implications:

- Are aid advocacy efforts sufficiently targeted towards individual political leaders?
- Who has the stomach for a fight?
- How is leadership exercised in the ‘new aid regime’?
- What constitutes ‘a clear message’ in the ‘new aid regime’?