

A Report for WFP USA by Stearns Swetnam  
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# Communicating Food Security to Congress



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## Dedication

This project is dedicated to my parents, Tricia and Steven. Thank you for being a constant support and always encouraging me to achieve my dreams.

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## Disclaimer and Honor Statement

*The author conducted this study as part of the program of professional education at the Frank Batten School of Leadership and Public Policy, University of Virginia. This paper is submitted in partial fulfillment of the course requirements for the Master of Public Policy degree. The judgments and conclusions are solely those of the author, and are not necessarily endorsed by the Batten School, by the University of Virginia, or by any other agency.*

*On my Honor as a University of Virginia student, I have neither given nor received unauthorized aid on this assignment.*



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## Executive Summary

The number of food insecure people in the world is on the rise and has increased past 820 million for the first time in a decade (Figure 1; FAO, 2019). Four famines have generated migration crises and instability worldwide as governments struggle to grapple with the effects of climate change. Increased funding for food aid is necessary to address the growing needs of people in crisis.

For decades, the U.S. has been a champion of global food security and maintains a strong relationship with the WFP through the WFP USA. The U.S. is the largest state donor to humanitarian food aid, and over the past decade Congressional funding for food aid has been steady. Due to recent developments worldwide with the novel coronavirus and impending global recession, world funding levels for humanitarian aid could become diminished as countries divert funds inward (Kumar, 2020; Saldinger & Igoe, 2020). To ensure that funding for global food security initiatives remains steady, WFP USA must work to optimize its message to congressional leaders on the importance of food security in the current day. An effective message is critical to ensuring that food security stays on the appropriations agenda at this time.

In order to assess improve messaging on food security it is important to understand how WFP USA currently messages to Congress. This report uses a machine learning text analysis program to assess different messages WFP USA can use to communicate the importance of food security issues to Congress. These messaging strategies include appeals to emotions, tying food security to the American identity, highlighting the jobs benefits from food aid funding, and highlighting the relationship of instability and food insecurity. Based on the model and an analysis of food security literature, WFP USA should focus their messaging on the linkage between food security and national security.

Security messaging is the optimal focus for WFP USA because it aligns with the key topics that legislators discuss, and will require the least amount of change to the organization's mission and strategy. The potential for co-optation of security messaging by U.S. national security actors can be minimized by emphasizing the humanitarian principles of neutrality and impartiality.

While this study identifies common topics discussed in Congressional hearings, further research should be done to analyze the legislative discourse around food aid. This report recommends that WFP USA work to increase data gathering capabilities surrounding perceptions and perspectives of food aid in Congress. Long term discourse analysis can help provide data-driven information to optimize WFP USA's communications.



## Overview and Problem Statement

Mother Nature does not discriminate in crises, but people do: while delivering food to hungry people can be thought of as apolitical, this is not the case in practice. Over 820 million people in the world are currently suffering from food insecurity (Figure 1; World Food Program, 2019). Much of the world's food-scarce areas are currently fraught with instability and violent conflict (World Food Program USA, 2017). In these conflict zones, militias, gangs, and state governments are often the actors distributing aid. In food-scarce areas, those in power determine the distribution of resources which highly disadvantages racial and ethnic minorities and the poor (Barber, 1997). Humanitarian aid is inherently political; from allocation in appropriations committees in U.S. Congress to distribution, aid organizations must negotiate political hurdles in order to achieve their mission.

The state of the undernourished in the world will be exacerbated by climate change. According to food security data in Figure 1, the number of food insecure people worldwide has increased back to 2010-2011 levels from its low point in 2015. Warming temperatures worldwide will decrease the number of areas where food can be grown, making areas uninhabitable. The decrease in available food has already triggered mass migrations: thousands have left their homes in the Northern Triangle (Guatemala, Honduras, and El Salvador) due to food insecurity, and those who do not migrate often are caught up in cycles of violent conflict (WFP USA, 2017). Violence, mass migration, and food insecurity are all wrapped up in a vicious cycle where each factor exacerbates the other; farmers and laborers that would have produced and grown food have either left the country or been caught up or killed in conflict.

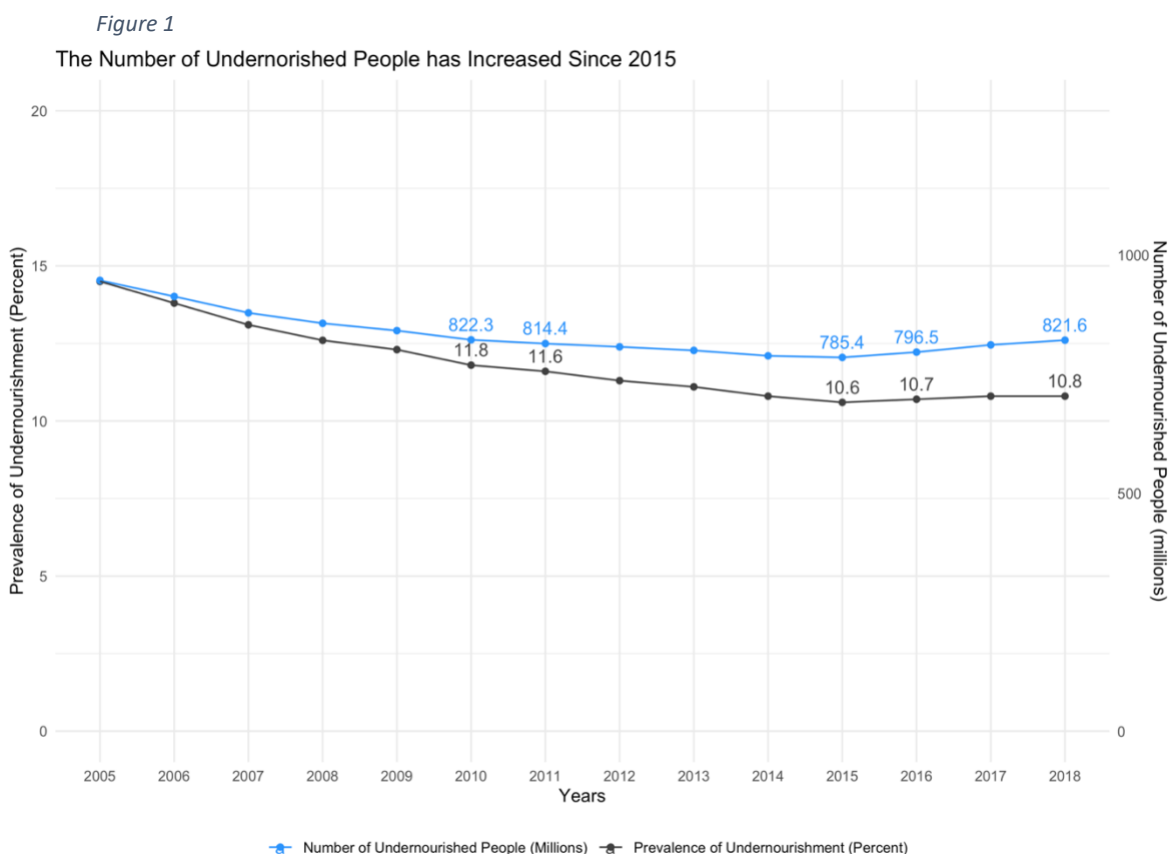
The purpose of the World Food Program USA (WFP USA) is to build support in the United States for the World Food Programme (WFP), an international humanitarian NGO under the UN. The WFP USA's mission is cooperation "with U.S. policymakers, corporations, foundations and individuals to help provide financial and in-kind resources and develop policies needed to alleviate global hunger" (WFP USA, n.d). While the WFP USA and the WFP share a mission, WFP USA is not incorporated under the UN and works alongside the WFP in the U.S.A. raising support for combating food insecurity.

Money from the WFP USA's messaging to Congress assists in aid from the WFP, reaching around 90 million people a year, from Yemen to El Salvador. This aid takes the form of school meals, women's empowerment programs, food vouchers, and other programs. WFP also conducts emergency response in areas struck by natural disasters, extreme weather, and conflict. Food insecurity disproportionately affects those in rural areas, and children are one of the main concerns: poor nutrition, or inadequate access to quality foods can lead to stunting, obesity, and other diet-related diseases.

Multiple humanitarian NGOs worldwide work to combat food insecurity, but the WFP is the leader. The funds gathered by the WFP USA directly benefit the mission of the WFP, and directly affect its ability to combat food insecurity. WFP USA's role of informing government

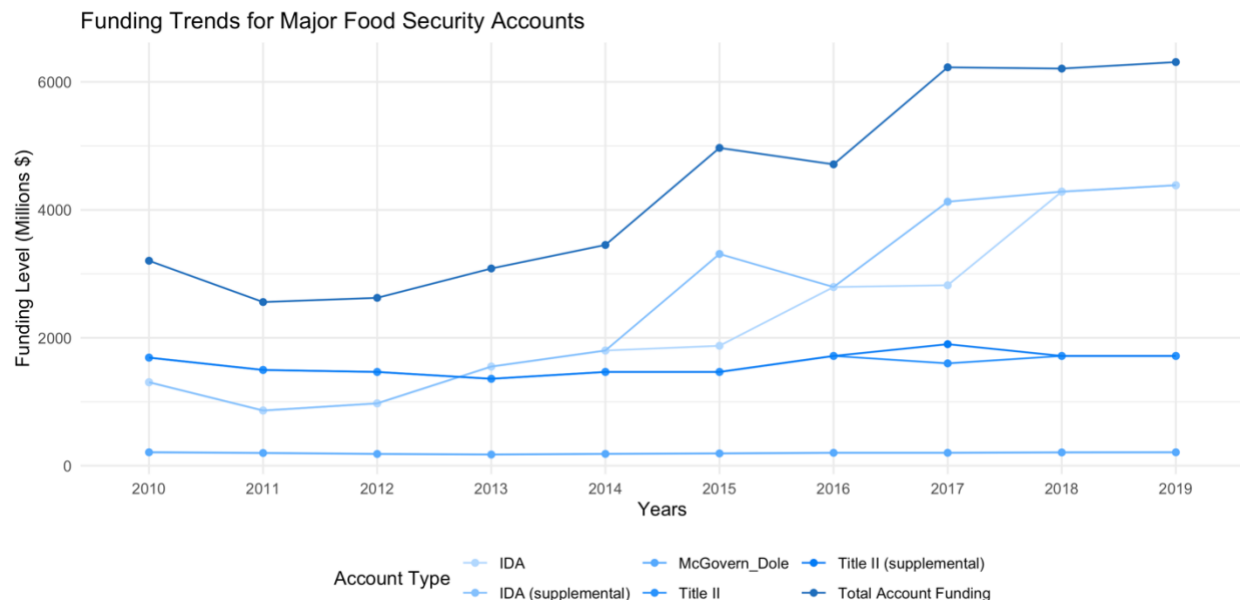
officials on food insecurity is of the utmost importance. The United States has been the largest state contributor to the WFP for around thirty years, donating approximately \$2.5 billion each year. Further, the politics surrounding humanitarian aid have become more polarized with issues such as immigration. In 2018, democratic and republican divisions attained new heights on subjects like immigration and human rights (Pew Research Center, 2018). This division has been reflected in discourse on the Hill, with Republican and Democratic Members of Congress reaching greater levels of partisanship. Increasing partisanship hampers the efforts of the WFP USA and other aid organizations. WFP USA must navigate American interests, competing parties, and legislative hurdles in order to advocate for food insecurity issues on the Hill. **In order to more effectively secure Congressional funding for issues of food security, the WFP USA's strategies for communicating emergent trends in food security must adapt to the U.S. government's shifting attitudes toward foreign policy and humanitarian aid.**

## Literature Review



Source: FAO. 2019

Figure 2



### Financial and Budgetary Trends – WFP USA Operations within Congress

Over the past decade, Congress has directed an average of \$4.7 billion per year to the major accounts that fund WFP (WFP USA, n.d; USAID, 2018b, 2018a). WFP usually obtains more than half of the money dedicated to these accounts in the form of USAID grants. There are two forms of food aid the U.S. provides:

- *In-kind* – physical food products donated by the U.S. such as vegetable oil, wheat, and corn (Casey, 2018).
- *Cash based* – direct cash transfers or food vouchers to beneficiaries (Casey, 2018).

Figure 2 shows the appropriations trends for the three major accounts from which the WFP derives funding over the past decade. The numbers on the graph represent the total amount of money that Congress sets aside for each account before the money is distributed by USAID to organizations like the WFP. Congressional funding for food security has increased since 2011 mainly due to an increase in the money appropriated to International Disaster Assistance account.

The majority of WFP funding comes from three main accounts:

#### *Food for Peace Title II*

FFP Title II is funded through agricultural appropriations bills and deals mainly with in-kind aid for emergency assistance. Under FFP Title II the U.S. government sells domestic commodities on local markets in developing countries to fund aid projects, or donates in-kind aid to humanitarian organizations.

#### *McGovern-Dole International Food for Education and Child Nutrition*



McGovern-Dole is funded through agricultural appropriations bills and mainly uses in-kind aid, but has been authorized for some local and regional procurement (LRP, a kind of cash-based assistance where humanitarian organizations purchase food in-country). This program works to improve child health outcomes in developing countries by helping fund national school feeding programs in recipient countries.

*Emergency Food Security Program - International Development Assistance (IDA)*

EFSP is entirely cash-based and is funded through the IDA account from the State and Foreign Operations appropriations bills. This aid increases the versatility of humanitarian response, and serves as a complement to in-kind aid provided in Title II.

Once the money is appropriated to these accounts, it goes to USAID to disburse to humanitarian organizations in the form of grants. WFP USA works with Congress to secure funding for these accounts. The money for these accounts then goes to USAID where the WFP works to secure it in the form of grants.<sup>1</sup> The amount appropriated to these accounts has been steadily increasing since 2012, mostly due to appropriations to the cash-based IDA account (Figure 2; WFP USA, n.d; USAID, 2018b, 2018a).

### Food Security in Congress

Policies to combat food insecurity have historically received widespread bipartisan support in Congress (WFP USA 2019). President Dwight Eisenhower and Senators Bob Dole, Tom Daschle, and George McGovern have been champions of food security policy from both sides of the aisle. These men served as the framers and founders of modern-day food security policy (WFP USA 2019). Today, policy has been shaped by Senators Robert Casey (D-PA) and Johnny Isakson (R-GA) with the 2016 Global Food Security Act.

The Global Food Security Act of 2016 requires the President to develop a Global Food Security Strategy and authorizes them to deliver emergency food assistance, coordinate a cross-government food security policy, and report to Congress annually on these activities. Further, the Act authorizes \$1 billion for the Department of State (DoS) and Agency for International Development (AID) for FY2017 and FY2018 to carry out the Global Food Security Strategy (Global Food Security Act of 2016). These appropriations were extended through FY2023 with the Global Food Security Reauthorization Act of 2017 (Global Food Security Reauthorization Act of 2017).

### The Politics of Aid

Humanitarian aid has always been a tool with political aims. Modern U.S. humanitarian aid began with the Marshall Plan in the 1950s as a way to rebuild the European continent's economy. Millions of dollars and U.S. manufactured goods were pumped into Western European countries to help them recover from the Second World War. This stimulus also served as strategy of containment of communism from the Soviet Union. U.S. aid in the second half of

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<sup>1</sup> This information was gathered from informal interviews and conversations with Chase Sova and Galen Fountain of WFP USA.

the 20<sup>th</sup> century followed the same model as the Marshall Plan, preventing communist factions from taking control of governments around the world through providence of goods and services (Barber, 1997; Bridges 2010). Sometimes these factions used violence and oppression as tactics to gain and maintain control, using humanitarian aid from the United States as a resource to fuel their population control. Violent actors will also use refugees as a tool to further their organizations aims through coercion and controlled media of refugee suffering. From appropriations to disbursements, modern humanitarian aid has always taken on a dimension of political interests.

### Decision Making in the Allocation and Distribution of Aid

As one of the largest donors to humanitarian organizations worldwide, the U.S. has a large amount of influence over the humanitarian space (Donini et al., 2004; MacFarlane & Weiss, 2000). This influence gives humanitarian organizations little power to resist any co-optation of aid and allows Western countries to guide humanitarian action, such as during the Iraq war when large amounts of money were quickly allocated for a UN mission in Iraq while other crises struggled to receive enough funds (Donini et al., 2004). The more that humanitarian aid is used as a political tool, the less effective humanitarian actors will be at accomplishing their objectives (Brennan & Sondorp, 2006; Donini et al., 2004; Lischer, 2007). Humanitarian organizations must address this donor pressure in order to balance their humanitarian principles with the necessity of acquiring funding to conduct operations.

When making funding decisions, governmental justifications of humanitarian aid may take the forms of bargaining, selfish humanitarianism, or pure humanitarianism depending on the utility function of the donor (Heinrich 2013). These decisions are motivated by factors such as media coverage of human misery/suffering in crisis, strategic importance of the aid recipient to the donor country, and the salience of the donor country's policy preferences.

Bargaining is giving humanitarian aid as a quid pro quo: the receiving state will alter a policy in some way (Heinrich 2013). In this scenario, humanitarian aid acts as a sort of "bribe" for political actions desired by the donor (Morgenthau 1962).<sup>2</sup> This bribe represents the minimum cost that the aid recipient is willing to receive in exchange for a policy change. Bargaining scenarios usually occur when there is a high salience of a donor state's policy interests in media, and reflects the economic rational self-interest of states looking to maximize their returns on investment (Fielding 2014). Bargaining takes into account that foreign aid is not exclusively selfless, and that states will maximize their own national interest by providing assistance strategically (Drury, Olson, and Van Belle 2005).

Humanitarianism is foreign aid driven primarily by media and news coverage of human suffering (Heinrich 2013). "Selfish" humanitarianism is similar to bargaining; aid is donated in exchange for a policy change, except aid donated is much more than the minimum cost of a policy change due to the level of media coverage. "Pure" humanitarian aid refers to aid that is

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<sup>2</sup> "Bribe" is often a term used in realist foreign policy literature to reflect a more transactional type of foreign aid with less regard to the principles of humanitarianism.

given without the “purchase” of a policy change. This is either because the opportunity cost of the domestic good trade-off is too high or that the policy concession has low saliency among the donor government (Heinrich 2013). Due to lack of data available on policy concessions and negotiations, it is nearly impossible to distinguish between selfish and pure humanitarian aid.

The frame of decision-making a government takes is crucial to identifying what messaging will be most effective. In order to optimize a message’s impact, it is important to understand the considerations that go into a final decision to allocate funds. When communicating food security policy in the U.S, it is important to address the nexus of national security and food aid. Following 9-11, counterterrorism became a prominent item on the U.S. foreign policy agenda. U.S. interactions quickly began to resemble its new War on Terror Posture, with humanitarian action being regarded as a security intervention (Minear, 2002).

### National Security Implications of Humanitarian Aid

Lack of access to nutritious, quality food is closely correlated with political instability, violence, and migration (WFP USA 2017). This instability and violence can lead to an increase in terrorism, violent extremism, and civil war. In these situations, non-state actors sometimes begin supplying key civil services in countries. For example, Hezbollah, a U.S. designated terrorist group, rose to prominence in Lebanon through their provision of key social provisions to impoverished members of the population (Brennan and Sondorp 2006). This model has been repeated by other organizations worldwide, such as offshoots of the Muslim Brotherhood and Latin American drug cartels (Berman, 2003; Cockayne, 2016). Targeted humanitarian aid can be used to counter the rise of violent extremists globally and strengthen United States national security (Schwartz 2012).

While there is ample literature on humanitarian aid in the field and from the perspective of the executive branch, there are few studies highlighting the specificities of food aid funding from the legislative branch. Many sources in this literature review focus on general humanitarian/foreign aid concepts and trends, which limit their specificity. I found very little content on Congressional discourse surrounding food security during my literature review. When applicable, I generalize the broad concepts of humanitarian aid policy to apply them to a food security context within Congress. Understanding the dynamics between the stages of appropriations by the legislature, disbursement by the executive, and operations by the humanitarian community are essential when considering how food aid is funded. Due to the lack of research on the legislative side of food aid, it is harder to map the discourse of food aid in Congress. This report seeks to fill the gap in the literature by establishing a baseline for how aid is talked about in Congress.

### Challenges to Food Aid Advocacy

Communicating the importance of combatting food insecurity to legislators must overcome several barriers:

### Time Constraints

Members of Congress and their staff often have very limited time and resources to spend on all issues. These constraints mean they do not have the time to grasp the nuance and inner workings of most policy issues they come across, making it hard to effectively discuss the inner workings of a policy problem like food insecurity.

### Re-Election

Representatives and Senators prioritize issues that they think will make them the most viable for reelection. Legislators thinking about their re-election tend to prioritize policy issues that they think their constituents care about during the election cycle rather than opinions their constituents currently hold (Arnold 1990).

### Ideological Differences

The current Congressional environment is highly polarized with few ideological similarities between the Republicans and Democrats (Farina 2015). This environment makes it harder to find common ground between the two groups in order to pass legislation.

### Finite Resources

There is a finite amount of resources in budgetary appropriations and not all issues are able to get the funding they need. A good strategy must find creative ways to communicate that humanitarian food aid should be a budgetary priority.

A strategy to more effectively secure humanitarian food aid from Congress must address these challenges while working to achieve the WFP USA's mission of providing resources to alleviate world hunger. These strategies must also address the WFP USA's operational responsibility of increasing the amount of U.S. dollars directed towards humanitarian food security aid during legislative appropriations.

An effective strategy for messaging food security that addresses these barriers must also conform to the ways that Members of Congress talk about food security. The lack of literature surrounding food aid discourse in the legislature means it is essential to map the conversation on food aid before formulating different strategies. Charting the discussion in Congress will give the WFP USA a greater understanding of how to best convey their message.

## Methodology

To better understand the discourse surrounding food security I conducted a text analysis on Congressional hearings and WFP USA reports. I trained the Machine Learning for Language Toolkit (MaLLET) on text files derived from these Congressional hearings and reports. The machine learning program produced 20 groupings of commonly used words that are found across the documents. I categorized the output of text groupings into five categories based on social psychologist Jonathan Haidt's moral frameworks (Appendix A).

## Input - Text Documents

The first category of text documents is composed of WFP USA reports. This group consists of four reports produced by WFP USA from 2016-2020 and were obtained from WFP USA website. Each of the reports focuses on a different topic related to food aid: climate change, broad humanitarian challenges in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, food aid's relationship to instability, and a summary of WFP and WFP USA operations in 2017. In consultation with my client, I gathered that the WFP USA has a consistent voice that they use in writing these documents. Therefore, these documents should provide a baseline for the voice the organization uses when communicating with an external audience

The next three buckets are sections of transcripts from 23 Congressional hearings on food security from 2001-2019. These transcripts include the full text and witness testimony from WFP USA affiliates, both WFP and WFP USA executives, to House and Senate appropriations and foreign affairs committees and subcommittees. During these hearings, legislators ask questions about food security operations from a number of experts including WFP USA affiliates. WFP USA affiliates either submit a technical testimony or appear in person as a panelist in addition to the technical testimony.

I extracted the technical and in-hearing testimony from WFP USA affiliates as well as any remarks by Members of Congress on food security from the hearings. Out of the 23 hearings, seven included full testimony of dialogue between WFP USA and legislators. For these hearings, I copied the text of each individual's comments into separate text files. I excluded comments exclusively talking about the procedure of the hearing, this includes one-word affirmatives/negatives (yes/no), questions asking about time or order of speaking, etc. because they do not reveal anything about a subject's own voice in describing the topic being discussed. Comments about procedure at the end of longer comments regarding food security were left in to preserve as much of the text as possible. Punctuation including parenthesis was excluded to ensure the model read identical words as the same ("word." would be recognized as different than "word"). Each aspect of this testimony was separated by speaker and hearing.

The first hearing category is testimony by WFP USA affiliates to Members of Congress. This category includes testimony by Executive Directors of the UN World Food Programme to Congress, technical testimony by WFP USA members, as well as budgetary requests submitted by WFP USA to the House and Senate Appropriations Committees. The purpose of this category is to determine how WFP USA communicates issues of food security to Congress. I include testimony by the Executive Directors of the UN World Food Programme because WFP USA is responsible for the briefing and assembly of the Executive's testimony to Congress.

The next two buckets are for Democrat and Republican Members of Congress. These texts include transcripts of Democrat and Republican members as they ask questions and make comment in hearings. I separated each transcript into different text files for each Member of Congress who spoke in the Hearing. These comments will provide a sense of the issues in which Congresspeople on both sides of the aisle are interested for food security legislation.

After separating the media into 92 separate text files, I conducted a topic model analysis of WFP USA media as well as their interactions with Members of Congress.

### How MaLLET Works

MaLLET is a machine learning software that deals in topic modeling. Topic modeling is where a program uses an algorithm to create clusters of words based on the frequency that they occur together in a document.

After inputting all the text files, MaLLET measures the number of words as “tokens.” The number of tokens assigned to topic  $k$  is:

$$N_k = \sum_d N_{d,k}$$

Where  $N$  is the number of tokens per topic  $k$  is equal to the number of tokens per document-topic for every  $d$  document.

Document entropy measures the spread of a topic across multiple documents, and is designed to identify unique and common topics. The formula below gives us the probability distribution of documents across a given topic.

$$P(d|k) = \frac{N_{d,k}}{\sum_{d'} N_{d',k}}$$

Using this, the information entropy of the distribution can be calculated:<sup>3</sup>

$$H(P(d|k))$$

A topic with low entropy is highly predictable and concentrated in few documents, a topic with high entropy is not very predictable and is distributed more evenly across all documents.

MaLLET iterates over all of the text files and creates common sets of words based on their groupings in the text. For each bucket above, MaLLET will produce a specified cluster of words based on its algorithm along with the probabilities that each group appears in a document. The program uses these groupings to create a model which indicates the probability a given word grouping will be found in a certain text. I trained my topic model on the documents across all the text buckets to produce common groups of words, and then mapped those groupings by their probabilities of occurrence in the documents.

### Output

I categorized each word grouping produced by the topic model based off of the moral frameworks of Jonathan Haidt (Appendix A). I altered these frameworks into categories, and broke them down into 5 common themes based on word groupings produced by the model.

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<sup>3</sup> Entropy is a concept from information theory that is used to denote a level of uncertainty in a random variable's possible outcomes established by Shannon in his 1948 paper *A Mathematical Theory of Communication*.



#### Economic

The economic category reflects words such as contributions, cash, donor, etc. This descriptor is based in the fairness framework of creating jobs and economic development for both American farmers and people in crisis-hit areas.

#### National

The national descriptor consists of groups of words that reflect a national/domestic interest such as corn, oil, land, America. This descriptor is based in the Authority and Loyalty frameworks.

#### Humanitarian

These are words that reflect a humanitarian imperative like assistance, emergency, international, humanitarian. The Humanitarian descriptor is based off of the Care and Fairness frameworks.

#### Procedural

Procedural groups are high-entropy and consist of words that Members of Congress used during hearings such as question, report, senator, chairman. These words are commonly used throughout the hearing and are not reflective of a moral framework. Procedural topics were excluded from the final analysis of the model.

#### Security

The security descriptor defines words that reflect stability or instability such as riots, civil, war, safety. This category is based off of the Authority and Care frameworks because it deals with a concern for restoration of order and the harm of others in crisis environments.

After creating these common themes, I assigned a theme to each of the twenty topics in the model based on the key words associated with each topic on the output as described above (a category with “security” and “war” would be categorized as security, etc.). Following the categorization, I visualized the topics using R.

## Alternatives - Strategies for More Effective Humanitarian Food Aid Advocacy

A strategy to more effectively secure humanitarian food aid from Congress must address these challenges while working to achieve the WFP USA's mission of providing resources to alleviate world hunger. Strategies for advocating for food aid will revolve around the content and focus of messaging rather than the strategy or method of communication. The aim for these alternatives is to give WFP USA a number of different options to focus their messaging efforts and narrative of helping the hungry toward Congress. Using these strategies should focus the message and appeal to the issues that are of greatest concern to Members of Congress. These options are meant to provide direction in messaging and not understate the importance of other topics of messaging.

### Emotional Appeals

Researchers at Carnegie Mellon in 2004 found that emotional triggers lead to an increase in charitable behavior (Heath and Heath 2008). Issues on a large scale tend to have a focus on the macro impact which can shift listeners into an analytical state of mind rather than an emotional state. In an analytical state of mind people are less likely to be moved to donate to alleviate human suffering. Food security issues framed in the context of stories of individuals and families to Members of Congress can help break them out of an analytical mindset and allocate more money to food aid. This strategy may be more effective with liberal Members of Congress because the liberal moral framework responds more to appeals to care for others and egalitarianism (Haidt, 2012).

### "Americanism"

Americanism is messaging focused on the moral obligation of Americans to contribute to alleviating world hunger. Generally, the messaging focus of humanitarian aid is on helping those in need on a global scale. This messaging often plays to the moral foundations of more liberal Members of Congress.

A focus on the direct relationship of Americans and food aid can cater to the moral foundations of conservatives by framing aid in terms of the loyalty foundation. Loyalty is one of the moral foundations which plays an important role in the concepts of patriotism and nationalism. Illustrating the rich history of U.S. food aid as an aspect of American culture will trigger the loyalty foundation and tie humanitarian aid to the American identity. Tying food aid to Americanism will appeal to more conservative Members of Congress and unite the ideological gap around U.S. food aid.

### Creating Jobs

Creating jobs is a message focused on the potential for food aid to create jobs domestically and boost the agricultural sector. Legislation to create American jobs would give Members of Congress something to message to their constituents during elections, and make them more receptive to increased food aid legislation. This would target legislators' political calculus which

focuses on the potential preferences of their constituents. Members of Congress who think that passage of a bill will help them campaign to their constituents are more likely to vote in favor of that bill.

## Security

Security messaging illustrates the importance of humanitarian food aid to U.S. national security and would bring an unexpected angle to a typical conversation on aid. Much of the migration crisis the United States currently faces has been generated by food insecurity from the Northern Triangle countries. Media coverage of this issue rarely acknowledges food security as a primary driver of instability and displacement. The association of food insecurity with the U.S. national security goals of stability worldwide allows Members to see food security in a new light, and could allow them to prioritize it in the budget.

## Criteria

### Goals for Criteria

The main goal of these criteria is determining the most effective communications method that the WFP USA can use when communicating the importance of Food Security Issues to Congress. Communication strategies are vital to effectively lobbying Members of Congress, often times these Members and their staff have a limited amount of time to dedicate their attention to multiple competing interests. Strategies will sometimes have unintended externalities that may disrupt or restrict future efforts for communication. An effective strategy now may pigeonhole the WFP USA into a role that denies them flexibility down the road. Some strategies may be difficult to implement due to institutional or labor constraints. In addition to raising awareness of key issues in global food security, a good communications strategy must internalize the short-term/long-term consequences trade off, be institutionally feasible, and align with the interests and goals of legislators.

The measurements I will use to achieve the stated goals are as follows:

**Effectiveness** – Ensuring an alternative achieves an outcome that aligns with the goal of WFP USA is essential. This criteria will measure how a strategy will increase salience of food security issues among Members of Congress through projected money and materials appropriated towards global food security issues. Effectiveness will take into account the probabilities of each of the four substantive categories discussed above (excluding the procedural category) to assess how well a strategy would mesh with the issues Members of Congress talk about.

**Feasibility** – WFP USA must be able to implement a strategy in order for it to be effective. Feasibility measures how well the WFP USA will be able to implement a strategy based on its current institutional structure. This criteria will assess whether or not the WFP USA will impose extra organizational costs in order to implement a strategy.

**Potential for Negative Effects** – Strategies that alter the discourse surrounding food security have the potential to change the future of the field. The language of the War on Terror altered the way in which conflict in the Middle East is viewed, applying a sectarian lens through which U.S. counterterror operations were conducted. This language had a lasting impact and has allowed governments worldwide to frame conflict in terms of sectarianism, allowing the repression of and discrimination against Muslims worldwide (Brandt 2017). A good communications strategy must be mindful about the long-term consequences of framing. An effective strategy in the short-term could harm long-term humanitarian food aid and restrict the organizational flexibility of the WFP USA. Long-term effects will be measured with an assessment of stakeholders and those potentially affected by a communications strategy. This criteria seeks to internalize lasting consequences of a communications strategy in order to ensure the sustainability of food aid fundraising.

## What do Legislators Talk About in Hearings?

The figures below is a categorical scatterplot of the probability of each of the 20 text groupings by each of the text buckets. Each of the topics is colored by their assigned descriptor class. The x-axis displays each of the four categories of text documents, while the y-axis displays the probability that the topic occurs in a given text bucket. The majority of topics fall below 0.05 probability of being found in a document while very few outlier topics fall above a 0.1 probability. Figure 3-b provides a closer look at the points below 0.05. Each of the points in the Figures is numbered corresponding to their key in Appendix B.

The figures reveal that topics with the security descriptor is the most prevalent topic, and that a few procedural topics are clouding the analysis of the relevant topics. The probability that a topic occurs in a given document does not necessarily indicate its importance in answering the discourse of food security. For instance, some of the most commonly used topics between the text buckets are 17, 10, and 11. While topic 17 has a security descriptor, topics 10 and 11 are procedural and are not relevant to identifying food security discourse. The high prevalence of these few procedural topics muddies the majority of the lower-probability topics which make up most of the categories relevant to mapping food security discourse.

Figure 3-a      Figure 4-b

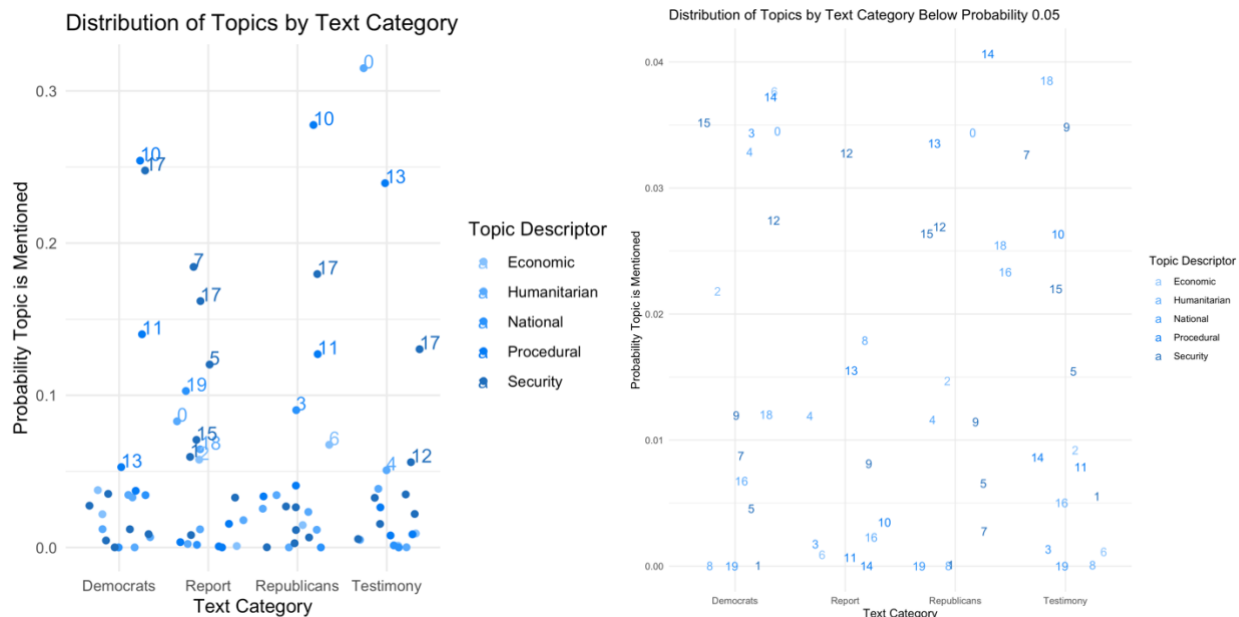
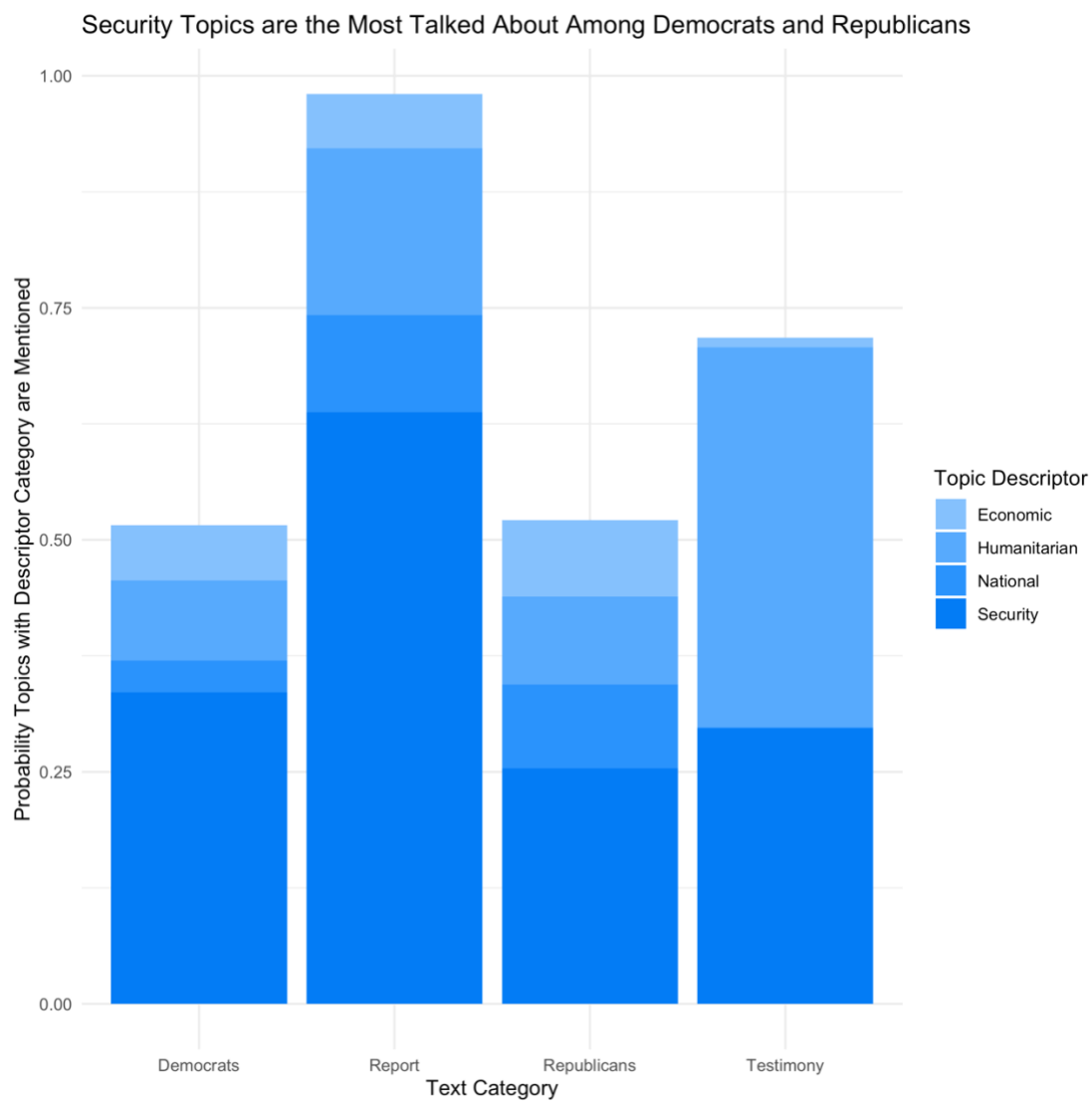


Figure 4 represents the aggregated topics by descriptor category broken down among the four text buckets. In order to illustrate the food security-related topics discussed by Democrats and Republicans, this graph omits procedural topics. The x-axis displays each of the four categories of text documents, while the y-axis displays the probability that the topic descriptor occurs in a given text bucket.

This graph shows the discrepancy between Legislators and WFP USA: while WFP USA affiliates divide time evenly between security and humanitarian topics, Democrats and Republicans mainly discuss security issues. While humanitarian topics feature prominently in WFP USA testimony, this topic is not reflected in Republican or Democrat discourse. Categories of the economic and national descriptor feature very little among all text categories. Based on the results of this analysis, there is a misalignment in the how food security is discussed between WFP USA and legislators at hearings. WFP USA should realign its discussion of food security issues in order to increase the effectiveness of its message to legislators.

Figure 5





To improve food security messaging, WFP USA should focus their communication in a way that aligns with the Congressional discourse. The following section assesses the alternatives discussed earlier with the results from the text analysis. The best messaging strategy will be one that optimizes the criteria of Effectiveness, Feasibility, and the Potential for Negative Effects.

## Emotional Appeals

### Effectiveness – Low

This alternative strongly aligns with the goals of WFP USA, but Democratic and Republican Members of Congress do not mirror the emotional language. Based on the Testimony column in Figure 4, I did not find that Democrats or Republicans associated with topics that reflected the reception of humanitarian-style language. Based on a reading of the hearings and the high prevalence of procedural topics in figure 3a, the majority of hearing testimony does not focus on stories meant to target the emotions of legislators. Instead, the overwhelming majority of the testimony is technical language. While the abundance of technical language would make an emotional intervention unexpected, it is unlikely that such an intervention would be effective because most of testimonies are technical hearings on the budget (Heath & Heath, 2008). These hearings would involve a high level of analytical engagement, which would undermine the value of an emotional argument.

### Feasibility – High

Emotional appeals are highly feasible for WFP USA to implement because this strategy is already present in much of its reports, blog posts, op-eds, and testimony to Congress (WFP USA, 2020a, 2020b, 2020c, 2020d, 2020e). It would not be hard for WFP USA to incorporate this strategy as a focus for its messaging efforts to Congress because of its breadth of resources already directed towards this messaging strategy.

### Potential for Future Negative Effects – Low

The number of stakeholders adversely affected by this strategy is low. Emotional appeals are often used among the humanitarian community, and would be in line with the humanitarian core values; there should not be any additional adverse effects on potential aid recipients (Maxwell & Gelsdorf, 2019).

## Americanism

### Effectiveness – Low

Effectiveness for this alternative is moderate and aligns with the WFP USA goal of carrying on the legacy of American support for food aid. Remarks by Republican Members of Congress did not score high on domestic topics based on their columns in Figure 4. Democrats scored slightly lower on the domestic topics in Figure 4, and focus more on topics related to humanitarianism and security.

### Feasibility – High

The feasibility for this option is high. WFP USA was founded to promote engagement and awareness in the United States on issues of food security. WFP USA's U.S. specific mission

allows it to message in a way that other, globally focused, humanitarian actors cannot. WFP USA would not incur high costs to pivot toward a focus on Americanism and domestic politics.

#### Potential for Future Negative Effects – High

This strategy has a high potential for future negative effects because it could lead to increased politicization of aid. Increased association of American interest and food aid can undermine humanitarian core principal of neutrality and impartiality (Bridges, 2010). An increased focus on national interest could lead to a rise in instances of humanitarian aid as bribery (Heinrich, 2013; Morgenthau, 1962). Emphasis on the national interest could lead to more aid being disbursed as a bribe to create a dependency of the crisis country to the United States, and undermine the state's sovereignty (Packenham, 1966). This could pervert the incentive structure surrounding aid and harm the humanitarian principle of neutrality and independence.

### Creating Jobs

#### Effectiveness – Moderate

This strategy is moderately effective and does not align well with the WFP USA's mission or goals. In Figure 4, both Democratic and Republican speech during hearings scored higher on economic issues in the topic model in respect to language related to the American economy. Republicans talked the most about American markets based on their column in Figure 4. Figures 3a and 3b, cross-referenced with the table in Appendix B, show that Republicans focused on the agricultural sector and farmers specifically when talking about economic issues.

#### Feasibility – Low

This messaging angle scores low on feasibility. While humanitarian aid can be beneficial to both donors and recipients, the WFP USA is not an organization whose main focus is creating jobs in the U.S. economy (WFP USA, n.d.). Domestic jobs are an issue indirectly related to the main thrust of humanitarian aid, and a focus on them would redirect the WFP USA messaging in a way that would cause an overhaul of its narrative.

#### Potential for Future Negative Effects – High

Domestic Markets scores high in potential future negative effects. If domestic job creation was the main interest in U.S. food aid, it would undermine the efficiency of humanitarian aid. Over the past decade, the U.S. over-reliance on in-kind aid has been found to be detrimental to the vulnerable communities who benefit from U.S. food aid (Park, 2019).

### Security

#### Effectiveness – High

An emphasis on the national security benefits of humanitarian food aid ranks high in effectiveness. Security issues featured prominently in every column of Figure 4, and discourse over security-related topics were highly prevalent among WFP USA, Democratic, and Republican Members of Congress in hearing testimony as shown in Figures 3a, 3b, and 4.

#### Feasibility – High

A focus of messaging on security is highly feasible. WFP USA’s messaging content has recently focused on the linkages of instability and food insecurity based (WFP USA, 2017). It would not be difficult for the organization to pivot towards a strategy with greater emphasis on this connection.

#### Potential for Future Negative Effects – Moderate

This option has a moderate potential for negative future effects. Framing food aid through the security lens could lead to increased militarization of aid through the financing of militias or armed groups. During the Cold War, humanitarian aid was a tool of U.S. foreign policy to stop the spread of communism. In this period, the U.S. government would often fund anticommunist militias and other armed groups under the guise of humanitarian aid. Following the Cold War, the government tried to direct aid back to purely humanitarian goals unsuccessfully (Barber, 1997). An emphasis in messaging on the nexus of security and food aid could erode the legitimacy of humanitarian aid to provide assistance to those in need.

Table 1 - Assessment of Alternatives

Based on the Criteria, Security Messaging is the Most Optimal Alternative			
	Effectiveness	Feasibility	Potential for Future Negative Effects
Emotional Appeals	Low	High	Low
Americanism	Low	High	High
Creating Jobs	Moderate	Low	High
Security	High	High	Moderate

### Recommendation – Focus Messaging Around a Security Theme

Messaging focused on food aid’s role in instability is recommended for the WFP USA’s strategy for communicating issues of food security to Congress. Emphasizing the relationship of food security and global instability/national security will bring messaging in line with how legislators discuss food security based on the topic model. While the security angle has the potential to lead to aid creating increased militarization and co-optation of aid by the U.S., it is the best balance of increasing support in Congress and how easy it would be for WFP USA to implement the strategy.

Co-optation of aid has been an increasingly prevalent policy problem between the humanitarian community and the U.S. in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, starting with the Occupation of Iraq. During the war, the U.S. government often used humanitarian aid as a “force multiplier,” for military activities, this undermined the independence of humanitarian organizations to deliver aid (Barnett, 2005; Donini, Minear, and Walker, 2004; Lischer, 2007; Maxwell & Gelsdorf, 2019).

This issue is inevitable to a degree when dealing with a large donor country such as the United States: more money, more influence. Humanitarian actors must constantly balance the

interests of their donors with the principle of independence (Modirzadeh et al., 2011). It is therefore hard to determine how much aid would already be co-opted by U.S. interest absent this recommendation.

Americanism and Security messaging are distinct in their future consequences in the focus on nationalism. While they create similar dilemmas, Americanism would have greater consequences because it would directly undermine core humanitarian principles. Messaging focused on Americanism could bring more conservative Members under the food aid umbrella, but there is a greater risk that Americanism could undermine the core humanitarian principles.

Emotional appeals are highly feasible but fail to be as effective as issues of national security which have garnered wide bipartisan support. This messaging would be the easiest organizational lift for WFP USA, but would not be effective in the technical environment of a Congressional Hearing.

Domestic job messaging is neither feasible and have the potential to have a lasting negative impact on the direction of humanitarian aid. Focusing on U.S. jobs could muddy the communication of WFP USA's main mission of assisting the food insecure.

## Limitations of the Study and Next Steps

While this study was able to identify common topics and themes in Congressional hearings on Food Aid, it was limited in several ways. First, MaLLET is able to detect common topics and their salience in text documents but it cannot identify mood or tone of words. There is no way of knowing whether or not the levels of positive or negative connotations that Members of Congress have for the topics identified. Second, this study did not have enough documents to conduct an analysis on how discourse changes over time, and aggregated the analysis over the past two decades. Third, due to resource limitations the study was not able to expand outside of hearing testimony.

Based on these limitations, further analyses should be conducted by WFP USA on legislative discourse surrounding food security in order to better understand the how food security is talked about in different contexts. WFP USA should look into other aspects of semantic analysis such as tone and mood, and compiling an internal database of documents that represent the various aspects of their messaging to begin more rigorously testing the effectiveness of their messaging. This database would allow the organization to test and compare how food security discourse changes across different groups so they can tailor their messaging to meet a specific group's interests and concerns. Through expanding their data collection and analytic capability, WFP USA can enhance their messaging with data-driven decision making.

## Appendix A

### Haidt's Moral Frameworks

Jonathan Haidt is a social psychologist who specializes in the psychology of morality. Over his career he has built upon the research of moralists and psychologists who have sought to understand the development of morality in the human brain, and how different members of society develop different conceptions of morality. Haidt conceptualizes that morality varies by culture, “gut feelings” drive an individual’s reasoning, and that morality is a mixture of nature and nurture. Haidt uses this concept to construct his Moral Foundations Theory: a framework that seeks to address the adaptive challenges of social life identified by evolutionary psychology. This framework identifies five main adaptive challenges that humans have developed over thousands of years to face environmental challenges. These adaptive challenges are:

- Protection and care of vulnerable children.
- Reaping the benefits of two-way partnerships with non-kin.
- Forming coalitions to be competitive with others (tribalism).
- Negotiating status hierarchies.
- Keeping oneself and family free of parasites and diseases (Haidt, 2012).

In *The Righteous Mind*, Haidt identifies five primary moral frameworks that serve as the basis of how people make decisions in politics: care for others, egalitarianism, loyalty to an in-group, respect for authority, and veneration of sanctity.<sup>4</sup> Mapping onto liberalism and conservatism in the United States, Haidt finds that conservatives prioritize respect for authority and loyalty to an in-group when making moral decisions and liberals prioritize care for others and egalitarianism. A main theme between liberals and conservatives across the frameworks is universalism vs. in group-out group mentality: liberals tend to prioritize a universal approach to things such as fairness and equity, while conservatives tend to prioritize loyalty and fairness along more in-group/out-group lines. These moral foundations can be used to identify what frame of humanitarian aid to use for different groups of people.

Below is a brief account of how Haidt distinguishes between liberal and conservative thought along these five frameworks.

#### *Care/Harm*

Conservatives care more about nation and sacrifice, while liberals care more about individuals, animals, victims. The care framework conventionally plays more into the moral foundations of liberals.

#### *Fairness/Cheating*

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<sup>4</sup> Veneration of sanctity can be anything from aversion to physical “impurities” like germs or environmental pollution to more intangible “impurities” such as spiritual purity or societal purity (sociocultural homogeneity, ethnic purity, etc.)

On the left, fairness means egalitarianism and social justice, that the wealthy exploit the poor and therefore need to pay their “fair share” of the wealth they control. On the right, fairness is about proportionality, that someone should get out what work they put into a project.

#### *Loyalty/Betrayal*

Loyalty to an in-group tends to be associated with feelings of tribalism and nationalism and is innate to forming coalitions to fending off attacks from rival groups. This in-group, out-group mentality is essential to nationalist ideology. American conservatism tends to have loyalty front and center because of the prioritization and prevalence of nationalism. The American left is much more universalist, which makes loyalty much less prevalent and sometimes contrary to liberal ideology.

#### *Authority/Subversion*

Authority reflects the adaptive challenge of navigating and forging relationships in a hierarchy. Right-wing thought tracks with the veneration and respect of authority and superiors, and is supportive of hierarchical relationships. Due to the left’s prioritization of egalitarianism and universality, liberals often identify against structures of power and hierarchy.

#### *Sanctity/Degradation*

The sanctity framework was developed in response to preserving tradition and avoidance of new experiences and concepts. The ideology of the religious right is most grounded in the preservation of sanctity and avoidance of what is considered “impure” by traditional standards. This ideology is also prevalent in the spiritual left, but left ideology is much more focused on openness to new experiences and disruption of tradition and dogma (Haidt, 2012).



## Appendix B

### Mallet Output

Below is a list of the word groupings produced by MaLLET with the assigned descriptors. The weights are an indicator of the prevalence of the topic across all documents.

Topic	Weight	Key	Descriptor
0	0.42006	food assistance emergency funding million billion world international wfp people humanitarian support development programs security local global nutrition level program	humanitarian
1	0.00874	conflict price war civil riots change climate fragile journal social unrest abstract prices increase terrorism markets likelihood temperature safety positive	security
2	0.08171	contributions cash donors kind countries wfps country government top give republic continued pakistan japan working received largest rising half donor	economic
3	0.1067	oil prices technology crisis corn agricultural trade price agriculture lugar thought rice ethanol land real problem energy demand chairman india	national
4	0.13286	food wfp world school percent hunger year crisis prices nations markets children hungry cup feeding humanitarian million billion global cost	humanitarian
5	0.0389	food instability conflict insecurity agricultural percent global land security violent related state economic extreme political violence relationship development conflicts resource	security
6	0.08992	prices policy rising dollar bill federal inflation sheeran price congress costs point commodities fed higher root families sugar economy make	economic
7	0.09297	humanitarian populations development crisis affected assistance conflict crises private response resources international refugees risk funding support countries national local actors	security
8	0.00433	hendrix population crises isolated fao barrett rome deviation sociopolitical annex societies mixed biological buhaug explaining maystadt institute insecure study niger	humanitarian
9	0.09038	assistance program security section trust act systems expertise commodities project emerson usda nutrition agencies ensure technical secretary measures related stability	security

Topic	Weight	Key	Descriptor
10	0.51162	food aid issue hearing make senator chairman things time back issues don good work kind question percent country lot people	procedural
11	0.18342	programs program aid trade bill agriculture farm transportation usda gao funding testimony title emergency report products melito cash foreign question	procedural
12	0.21822	global hunger programs address efforts safety administration comprehensive initiative strategy development support emergency net response based ensure planning commitment country	security
13	0.31932	food school program programs mcgovern dole feeding education peace countries hunger children nutrition bill lrp local aid global wfp regional	procedural
14	0.07181	hunger secretary agriculture administration tony hall house clinton members state important ethiopia university person rick served white witnesses jim leach	procedural
15	0.20391	africa drought weather water social increased systems urban factors economy stability half risk rise middle linked reduced agriculture east region	security
16	0.03476	humanitarian yemen cranes saudi director programme world international hodeidah port law today beasley deliver led coalition nigeria parties supplies letter	humanitarian
17	0.73604	food world people countries years today global security assistance united government hunger farmers states long term agricultural increase year work	security
18	0.09391	wfp million famine people conflict humanitarian countries emergencies united children syria states somalia south yemen refugee access funding sudan reach	humanitarian
19	0.00218	climate change agriculture global https security fao impacts united emissions states pdf wfp development http migration usaid ghg csis america	national

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