Noblesse Oblige

Status Motivations and Public Support for Foreign Aid

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Abstract. What drives support for foreign aid provision? Conventional explanations posit that donors give aid for strategic reasons, to achieve domestic or foreign policy goals; or for altruistic reasons, to help those in need. In this paper, we argue that status can also motivate aid. Hierarchical relationships typically involve a sense of noblesse oblige, as privileged actors are expected to behave charitably towards the less privileged. Therefore, the more citizens value their country's international status, the more they should support foreign aid provision. Using an original survey experiment in the United States, we show that respondents cued to consider that a reduction in foreign aid spending would hurt U.S. status are more supportive of foreign aid than respondents not cued to consider such an impact. Moreover, respondents are more supportive of aid the higher their reported need for national status—whose substantive impact is comparable to that of important factors traditionally considered in foreign aid research. While previous research on status-seeking behavior focuses on conflict, our results suggest that status can also motivate international cooperation. In addition, the analysis indicates that framing foreign aid in terms of donor status can encourage richer states to help more those in need.

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Though a recent innovation in historical terms, foreign aid has become an expected feature of relations between rich and poor countries (Lancaster, 2007; Morgenthau, 1962). In the United States, for example, we observe backlash at both the public and elite levels in the face of potential cuts to foreign aid spending. When the U.S. foreign aid budget saw massive cuts in the 1990s during the Republican Revolution, after voters elected a wave of isolationist legislators to Washington, this mobilized aid supporters among elites and the public, who successfully lobbied Congress to restore previous aid levels (Lancaster, 2007, 90-91). Similarly, when the Trump administration's budget proposal for 2019 put forward a significant cut in foreign aid funding for the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), it encountered bipartisan rejection even in the polarized political climate of contemporary American politics.[1]

Previous research indicates that leaders are responsive to the public's preferences regarding foreign aid. In the United States, Congress is responsible for determining what proportion of the federal budget will be allocated to foreign aid each year. As electorally-driven actors (Canes-Wrone, 2015; Mayhew, 1974), members of Congress take into account the views of their constituents when determining the aid budget. As Milner and Tingley (2010, 2011) find, the economic characteristics of a district, as well as its left-right ideological makeup, influence how members of the House of Representatives vote on foreign aid policy. Since legislators anticipate that challengers will attack them if they support policies that hurt their districts or lack popularity, they are mindful of how policies impact their constituencies. Similarly, Heinrich et al. (2018) find that, when news coverage of foreign aid policy is high, policy outputs tend to reflect the preferences of citizens. As such, public opinion helps explain how legislators vote on foreign aid policy.

But what drives public support for foreign aid provision? Conventional wisdom holds that donors give aid either (1) for strategic reasons, to achieve domestic or foreign policy goals; or (2) for altruistic reasons, to help those in need (Heinrich, 2013; Schraeder et al., 1998). On the one hand, a large body of research focuses on the donor's interests, arguing that donors use foreign aid

[1] *New York Times*, "Trump Administration Drops Proposal to Cut Foreign Aid After Intense Debate," August 22, 2019, https://www.nytimes.com/2019/08/22/us/politics/trump-foreign-aid.html; *Politico*, "Trump kills plan to cut billions in foreign aid," August 8, 2019, https://www.politico.com/story/2019/08/22/white-house-backs-off-foreign-aid-cuts-1472130.

as a tool to attain goals at home and abroad. According to these studies, donors use foreign aid to help domestic industries or ensure access to natural resources (Lancaster 2007, 14-15, 78; Milner and Tingley 2010, 2011), to reduce immigration from developing countries (Bermeo and Leblang, 2015), to influence the recipient country's domestic policies (de Mesquita and Smith, 2007, 2009; Early and Jadoon, 2019), or to sway the recipient's voting behavior in the United Nations (Alexander and Rooney, 2019; Vreeland and Dreher, 2014). On the other hand, a smaller number of studies focuses on the needs of the recipient country, arguing that donors provide foreign aid in response to natural disasters and other humanitarian crises (Desai and Kharas, 2018; Kevlihan et al., 2014), as well as to promote development or good governance abroad (Dietrich, 2013; Lumsdaine, 1993). Similarly, other studies find that those citizens who hold prosocial or altruistic values are more likely to support foreign development assistance (Bayram, 2016, 2017).

In this paper, we argue that status can also motivate the provision of foreign aid. While existing research suggests that donor countries may give aid to achieve prestige abroad (Gilady 2018, 90-120; Hattori 2001; Lancaster 2007), this kind of explanation still receives little attention from International Relations (IR) scholars. We build on existing research to make both theoretical and empirical contributions. To begin, we draw on interdisciplinary research to develop an argument that directly links status motivations and foreign aid provision. We argue that hierarchical relationships typically involve a sense of noblesse oblige, as privileged actors are expected to behave charitably towards the less privileged. As such, foreign aid establishes or maintains an asymmetrical relationship between donor and recipient. Our argument is fundamentally relational: it focuses on the relationship between donor and recipient, rather than on the self-interest of the donor or the needs of the recipient. Based on this theoretical framework, we expect that citizens will be more likely to support foreign aid provision the more they value their country's international standing.

Empirically, we assess the observable implications from our argument using a pre-registered survey experiment embedded in the 2020 Cooperative Congressional Election Survey (CCES). Our analysis involves an observational and an experimental components, both of which entail methodological innovations. First, using an original survey scale, we show that respondents are more sup-

portive of foreign aid the higher their reported need for national status—that is, the more they care about the United States' standing abroad. In fact, the substantive impact of a respondent's need for national status is comparable to the impact of important psychological predispositions traditionally considered in foreign aid research, such as internationalism (or isolationism) and altruism. Next, using experimental methods, we demonstrate that respondents cued to consider that a reduction in foreign aid spending would hurt U.S. status are more supportive of foreign aid than respondents not cued to consider such an impact. While existing studies suggest that status motivates the provision of foreign aid at the elite level, within middle powers like Denmark or Japan, we provide direct evidence of the relationship between status motivations and foreign aid provision at the public level, within an established great power like the United States.

This study integrates two strands of research that rarely come into dialogue: (1) research on status-motivated behavior in international politics; and (2) research on the determinants of foreign aid provision. In doing so, it makes four contributions to existing scholarship. First, while previous research tends to emphasize the connection between status motivations and conflictual behavior at the state level (Barnhart, 2020; Dafoe et al., 2014; Murray, 2018; Renshon, 2017), our results demonstrate that status can also motivate international cooperation. Second, while status research typically focuses on emerging powers or countries dissatisfied with their status (Larson and Shevchenko, 2010; Paul et al., 2014; Pu and Schweller, 2014), we show that status can motivate foreign policy even within an established great power like the United States. Third, while status research typically focuses on the state level, indicating that states and leaders value status (Gilady, 2018; Musgrave and Nexon, 2018), we open the black box of the state to show that status considerations also sway opinion among the mass public. As such, we provide evidence of the domestic sources of status-motivated behavior. Finally, our analysis highlights a powerful motivation for aid provision that is neglected in foreign aid research. While previous research indicates that leaders are responsive to the public's preferences regarding foreign aid (Heinrich et al., 2018; Milner and Tingley, 2011), our results show that framing foreign aid in terms of the donor's status can encourage citizens from richer countries to help more those in need abroad.

Existing Explanations of Foreign Aid Provision

IR scholars traditionally use two theoretical models to explain foreign aid provision. First, most studies rely on what we call the *strategic model*, whereby donors use foreign aid as a tool to achieve domestic or foreign policy goals. The strategic model focuses on the donor's interests. Based on this model, donors are more likely to give aid when this action provides benefits, serving their security or economic interests. Second, some studies rely on what we call the *altruistic model*, whereby donors provide aid to help those in need. The altruistic model focuses on the needs of the recipient. Based on this model, donors are more likely to give aid to those who need it—for example, following a natural disaster or a humanitarian crisis. We discuss each of these models in turn.

The Strategic Model

A large body of foreign aid research focuses on the donor's interests, arguing that donors use aid as a tool to advance their goals at home and abroad (Alesina and Dollar, 2000; McKinlay and Little, 1977). According to the strategic model, donors provide aid to get something in return from the recipient state—following Morgenthau (1962, 303)'s maxim that foreign aid is, more often than not, "bribery disguised." These studies argue that donors use aid to help domestic industries, by mandating that a certain percentage of the aid provided be used to buy products from the donor country (Lancaster 2007, 14-15; Morsy 1986); or to ensure access to natural resources like oil (Lancaster, 2007, 15, 78). Likewise, policymakers who wish to limit immigration into their country use foreign aid to promote development in migrant-sending countries, thereby decreasing demand for migration (Bermeo and Leblang, 2015). By improving the overall standard of living in recipient countries, donors incentivize would-be migrants to stay in their home country rather than migrate.

In addition, some studies indicate that donors use foreign aid to influence the recipient country's domestic policies. According to de Mesquita and Smith (2007, 2009), leaders of donor and recipient countries often engage in aid-for-policy deals that mutually improve their chances to remain in office. These aid-for-policy deals help leaders in donor countries stay in office, by improving the

wellbeing of key constituents (their winning coalition) or by enabling leaders to achieve other policy goals. While the leaders of recipient states benefit from the non-tax revenue provided by foreign aid, donor countries benefit from policy concessions from the recipient state. Similarly, (Early and Jadoon, 2019) posit that, after a donor uses foreign aid to extract policy concessions from a recipient state, it can further coerce the recipient by threatening to cancel the promised aid.

Finally, other studies argue that donors use aid-for-policy deals to influence the recipient's voting behavior in the UN General Assembly (Dreher et al., 2008; Wang, 1999) or the Security Council (UNSC). According to Vreeland and Dreher (2014), UNSC resolutions increase the level of domestic support for a given action by signaling its international legitimacy. Therefore, donors recognize that putting a UNSC member in their debt can facilitate the achievement of foreign policy goals. Accordingly, the authors detect a sharp increase in the amount of foreign aid a country receives when it becomes a nonpermanent member of the UNSC. On average, nonpermanent members receive an additional US$16 million in aid from the U.S. and US$1 million from the UN Children's Fund (UNICEF). During years when the UNSC votes on issues considered important to the U.S., received aid increases even more, as nonpermanent members receive an additional US$45 million from the U.S. and US$8 million from the UN (Kuziemko and Werker, 2006).

The Altruistic Model

On the other hand, a smaller number of studies focuses on the needs of the recipient country. According to the altruistic model, donors provide foreign aid in response to natural disasters and other humanitarian crises (Desai and Kharas, 2018; Kevlihan et al., 2014), as well as to promote economic development or good governance in the recipient country (Lumsdaine, 1993). As Dietrich (2013) finds, donors bypass recipient governments to deliver aid through non-state actors in poorly-governed countries but not in countries with a higher quality of governance. By bypassing recipient governments, donors deny themselves the ability to extract policy concessions from the recipient country. Unless the donor's intentions were primarily humanitarian, Dietrich argues, it seems unlikely that they would circumvent recipient governments when providing aid.

Public opinion surveys show that citizens in donor countries are far more supportive of foreign aid given for humanitarian reasons than they are of foreign aid given for strategic reasons (Heinrich, 2013; Wood, 2018). Moreover, various groups and organizations lobby donor countries to increase their development aid to countries in need (Bermeo and Leblang, 2015; Lumsdaine, 1993). As such, there are constituencies in donor countries that advocate for their leaders to distribute aid in a humanitarian way. Heinrich (2013) connects these humanitarian preferences among constituents with a robust finding in the aid literature—that the more news coverage a country facing a humanitarian crisis receives in the donor country, the more it is likely to receive foreign aid. When voters pay attention to the situation in a recipient country, leaders have an incentive to allocate aid on a humanitarian basis. Finally, in line with the altruistic model, Bayram (2016, 2017) finds that citizens who hold prosocial or altruistic values are more likely to support foreign development assistance not only in the U.S. but also in other developed countries.

A Status Model of Aid Provision

While most explanations of foreign aid provision focus on the donor's interests or the recipient's needs, a couple of studies suggest that status motivates the provision of foreign aid. Gilady (2018, 100) argues that foreign aid constitutes an example of conspicuous consumption, whereby a country gains prestige by demonstrating that it has so much wealth that it can afford to donate resources to other countries. Using anecdotal evidence, Gilady (2018, 116, 182) highlights patterns of state behavior consistent with this claim. To begin, donors often make their donations visible and identifiable. In fact, one of the core functions of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development's Development Aid Committee (DAC)—an exclusive club of aid donors—is to compile and distribute information about the aid policies of its members, thereby ensuring that each state's generosity does not go unnoticed. In addition, most states stake their position as aid donors by providing just enough aid to ensure membership in the donors' club—or a little over 0.7 percent of the donor's GDP, following the DAC's arbitrary threshold.

Other studies find evidence of status motivations in countries considered "middle powers" by examining official documents and leader speeches. In her study of aid-giving in major donor countries, Lancaster (2007) observes status motivations among policymakers in Denmark and Japan. An essay published on the website of the Danish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, for example, expresses concern about the country's role in the post-1945 international order, given its relatively small size and marginal geographic location in Europe. According to Lancaster (2007, 135), development cooperation addressed precisely this concern, by providing Denmark with a niche to punch above its weight. Similarly, Japan's 1997 report on Official Development Assistance (ODA) described the country's sizable foreign aid program as a fulfillment of the desire to "occupy an honored place in international society," expressed in the country's Constitution after its defeat in the Second World War (Lancaster, 2007, 204). Likewise, van der Veen (2000, 395-519) finds evidence of status motivations in Italy and Norway—small states where decision-makers perceive foreign aid as a marker of their country's international presence and prestige.

But while existing research suggests that donor countries may provide foreign aid to achieve prestige, this kind of explanation still receives little attention from IR scholars. As a result, a couple of questions remain unaddressed. First, why do states use foreign aid, rather than other policies, to achieve status? As Gilady (2018) notes, countries can demonstrate excess wealth through sundry actions, from buying expensive military equipment to participating in peacekeeping missions and funding space programs. In addition, these other actions arguably provide additional benefits to the status-seeking country, increasing its military or technological capabilities. Given the different policies countries may adopt, why would they choose foreign aid? Second, how widespread is the connection between status motivations and foreign aid provision? While existing studies focus on countries considered "middle powers," we still do not know if status motivates aid elsewhere. And while existing studies provide evidence of status motivations among elites, we still do not know if these motivations resonate with the public. When it comes to foreign aid policy, do status motivations sway public opinion? Finally, while existing studies suggest that status motivates foreign aid, we still lack direct evidence of a causal relationship between these factors.

In this paper, we build on existing research to make both theoretical and empirical contributions. To begin, we develop an argument that directly links status motivations and foreign aid provision. Like Hattori (2001), we argue that foreign aid marks a hierarchical relationship between donor and recipient. Drawing on studies of social relations in the social sciences, Hattori classifies foreign aid as a form of giving (Mauss, 1990)—which differs from other types of resource allocation in two fundamental ways: (1) it is voluntary and (2) it does not entail a commitment on the part of the recipient to repay the donor. Because this form of giving suspends the obligation to reciprocate, it establishes or maintains a social hierarchy (Sahlins, 2017). As such, Hattori (2001, 639) argues, foreign aid constitutes a form of symbolic domination (Bourdieu, 1992), "or a practice that signals and euphemizes social hierarchies." The voluntary and unreciprocated nature of foreign aid transforms the relationship between dominant and dominated states into a relationship between the generous and the grateful. Because it involves consent by the recipient state, foreign aid serves to legitimate the underlying hierarchy between donor and recipient.

Building on these ideas, we argue that hierarchical relationships typically involve a sense of noblesse oblige, as privileged actors are expected to behave charitably towards the less privileged. As Gouldner (1973) argues, stable social systems usually involve a norm of beneficence, whereby dominant actors should help those in need. Since leaders are expected to look after those they lead, elites legitimate their leadership by giving "something for nothing." The beneficence of leaders thus elicits deference and respect. As Fiske (1991, 42-43) notes, noblesse oblige is one the manifestations of a hierarchical relationship. Depending on the relational model that governs an interaction, actors share different expectations regarding their respective contributions. In communal relations, for example, actors are expected to give what they have, without keeping track of individual contributions. In egalitarian relations, actors are expected to match each other's contributions in kind. But because hierarchical relations involve asymmetry, they entail a different set of expectations: the less privileged do not reciprocate donations in kind; neither do privileged actors, on the other hand, give what they have without keeping track of their contributions. Rather, in hierarchical relations, superiors demonstrate their nobility and largesse by giving beneficently.

Our argument focuses on the relationship between donor and recipient, rather than on the self-interest of the donor or the needs of the recipient. Foreign aid marks a hierarchical relationship between donor and recipient: By accepting aid, the recipient acknowledges an asymmetrical relationship with the donor. By declining aid, on the other hand, a country denies such a relationship. It is no coincidence that countries often refuse international assistance, even when they need it. As Carnegie and Dolan (2021, 500) note, out of the 66 natural disasters observed between 2004 and 2012, countries declined aid about half the time, in 32 cases. India is a case in point. As a country located in a disaster-prone area and with limited resources, India would greatly benefit from international assistance after natural disasters. And yet, India stopped accepting aid offers in 2004, claiming that it no longer needs aid (Carnegie and Dolan, 2021, 503). And in fact, India's decision to reject aid is consistent with its position as an emerging power that seeks international status (Gilady, 2018; Paul et al., 2014). As Carnegie and Dolan (2021) show using experimental methods, observers rank India's status more highly after reading that New Delhi rejected aid rather than accepting it. In other words, aid rejection boosts India's perceived status.

Our argument builds on existing research in two additional ways. First, we argue that status motivates aid from high-status states, rather than merely from states dissatisfied with their status. We understand foreign aid as the manifestation of a hierarchical relationship between donor and recipient. Because our argument focuses on the relationship between donor and recipient, it applies not only to emerging powers, but also an established great power like the United States. In a hierarchical relationship, privileged actors are expected to provide for those in need. Therefore, foreign aid may simply reflect the "natural" way of doing things, rather than constituting an attempt to achieve higher status. Second, we argue that status considerations mobilize support for foreign aid provision among members of the public. When facing the decision of whether to provide foreign aid, individuals take into account the relative status of their country. In asymmetrical relationships, the norm of beneficence applies. Because high-status countries are expected to behaved charitably toward the less privileged, we expect that citizens should be more likely to support foreign aid provision the more they value the status of their country.

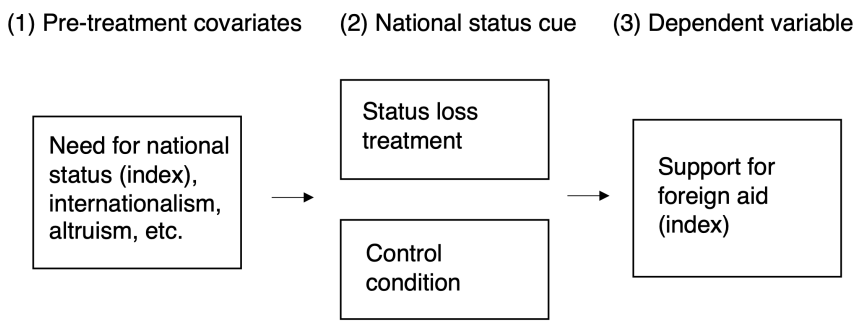

Figure 1. Survey Experiment Flow

Empirical Strategy

To assess the observable implications from our argument, we embedded a pre-registered survey experiment on the 2020 Cooperative Congressional Election Study (CCES), a national stratified sample survey administered by YouGov. Our analysis uses an original online survey (N = 993 respondents) conducted during the the pre-election wave of the CCES in October 2020. The survey follows the steps shown in Figure 1. First, we measure participants' need for national status using a six-item scale, as well as other control variables. Next, respondents answer questions unrelated to our survey experiment, included in this order so as to reduce the salience of status considerations by the time respondents answer our questions about foreign aid. We then randomly assign participants to either a treatment group (reduced U.S. status cue) or a control group (no cue). All participants read that U.S. officials may cut foreign aid spending, while participants in the treatment group also read that, according to experts, a reduction in foreign aid spending would hurt U.S. international status. Finally, we measure participants' support for foreign aid.

Our empirical analysis involves an observational and an experimental components, both of which entail methodological innovations. First, we assess our argument using observational methods. To that end, we design a new survey scale that allows us to measure respondents' need for national status—or the extent to which they value the status of their country. Using this scale, we examine the association between a respondent's need for national status and their support for foreign aid spending. This enables us to test our first hypothesis:

H1: Respondents with a high need for national status will be more supportive of foreign aid spending than respondents with a low need for national status.

Second, we assess our argument that status motivates support for foreign aid using experimental methods. Our survey experiment tests two pre-registered hypotheses about the relationship between status motivations and public attitudes toward foreign aid spending. To begin, we expect that respondents will be more supportive of foreign aid when cued to consider that a reduction in foreign aid spending would hurt U.S. international status. The second hypothesis thus captures the main effects of our experimental manipulation (a situational cue):

H2: Respondents will be more supportive of foreign aid when cued to consider that a reduction in foreign aid spending would hurt U.S. international status than when not cued to consider the impact of foreign aid cuts.

Finally, we expect that, when cued to consider that a reduction in foreign aid spending would hurt U.S. status, respondents who report a higher need for national status will be more supportive of foreign aid than those respondents who report a lower need for national status. In other words, the third hypothesis captures an interaction between our experimental manipulation (a situational cue) and the respondent's need for national status (a psychological predisposition):

H3: When cued to consider that a reduction in foreign aid spending would hurt U.S. international status, respondents who report a higher need for national status will be more supportive of foreign aid.

Dependent Variable

We rely on three questions to create an *index of foreign aid support*. These questions measure respondents' preferences, respectively, on (1) the amount the U.S. government should spend on foreign aid; (2) how much the U.S. government should spend per American on foreign aid; and (3) role that the U.S. should take in helping poor countries. The first question asks: "Do you think that the U.S. government should spend more, less, or about the same on foreign aid?" The answer categories range

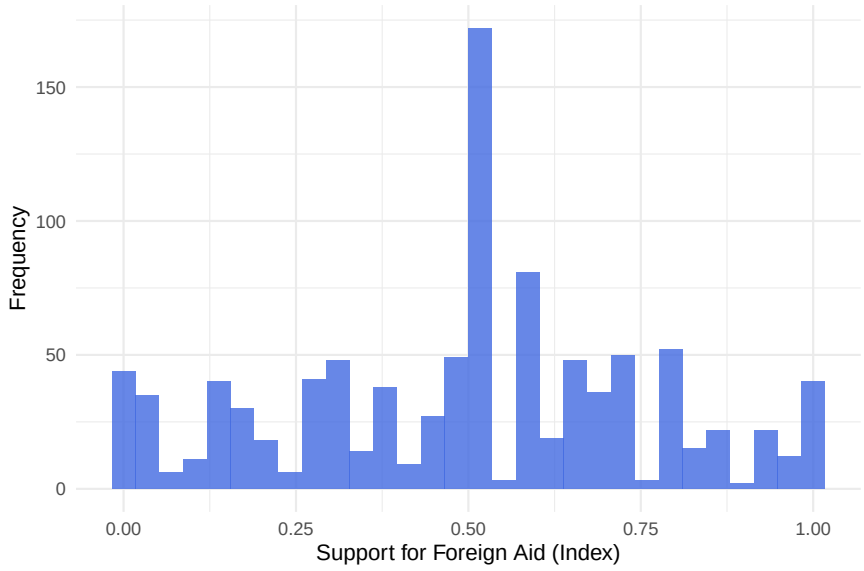

Figure 2. Distribution of support for foreign aid (index)

from 1 ("Significantly more") to 5 ("Significantly less"). While this item measures general attitudes towards foreign aid spending, we also include a measure that gauges how much per American the respondent thinks the U.S. should spend (Baker, 2015). The second question asks: "Overall, each year the U.S government gives about $40 of each American's income to foreign countries. Many people think this is too low, others think it is too high, and still others think it is about right. How much per American do you think our government should spend on foreign aid each year?" The answer categories range from 1 ("$60 to $79. The U.S. should raise the amount by a lot") to 5 ("$1 to $19. The U.S. should lower the amount by a lot"). Finally, we measure general attitudes toward the role the U.S. should take in aiding those in need abroad. The third question asks: "What role do you think the U.S. should take in aiding poor countries?" The answer categories range from 1 ("The U.S. should take the leading role") to 4 ("The U.S. should take no role at all").

Our dependent variable captures the shared variation in respondents' answers to the three questions above. By using multiple items to measure the underlying outcome of interest, we increase the internal reliability of our dependent variable and reduce the amount of error variance (Mutz, 2011, 100-101).[2] We use principal-axis factoring to generate scores for our dependent variable, whose

[2]The three items have a Cronbach's alpha of 0.83.

Table 1. Question Items in the Need for National Status Scale

1. It is important to me that the U.S. is a highly valued member of the international community.
2. I care about whether people in other countries view the U.S. positively.
3. It would please me for the U.S. to have a position of prestige and international standing.
4. I would like people in other countries to admire the U.S.
5. I want other countries to respect the U.S. and hold it in high esteem.
6. I would like other countries to follow the U.S.'s example.

Note: Respondents are asked "how well each of the following statements describes them" on a scale from 1 ("extremely well") to 4 ("Not well at all").

distribution is shown in Figure 2.

Independent Variable

Our primary variable of interest measures the respondent's *need for national status*. To measure this, we design an original survey scale shown in Table 1. Our six-item scale is an adaptation of the Need for Social Status measure created and validated by Flynn et al. (2006). While the original scale is designed to measure how much a respondent values status at the individual level, we adapt the questions to measure instead how much the respondent values the status of their country (in this case, the United States). We use principal-axis factoring to generate scores for the respondents' need for national status, whose distribution is shown in Figure 3. By using multiple items to measure the underlying construct of interest, we increase the internal reliability of our independent variable.[3] Additionally, as a robustness check, we create a categorical variable that relies on these scores to divide respondents into three categories: low, medium, and high need for national status.

Control Variables

We use several measures to capture the factors that may correlate with support for foreign aid provision among members of the U.S. public (Baker, 2015). To measure internationalism, we ask respondents how strongly they agree or disagree (5-point scale) with the following statement: "the

[3]The six items have a Cronbach's alpha of 0.88.

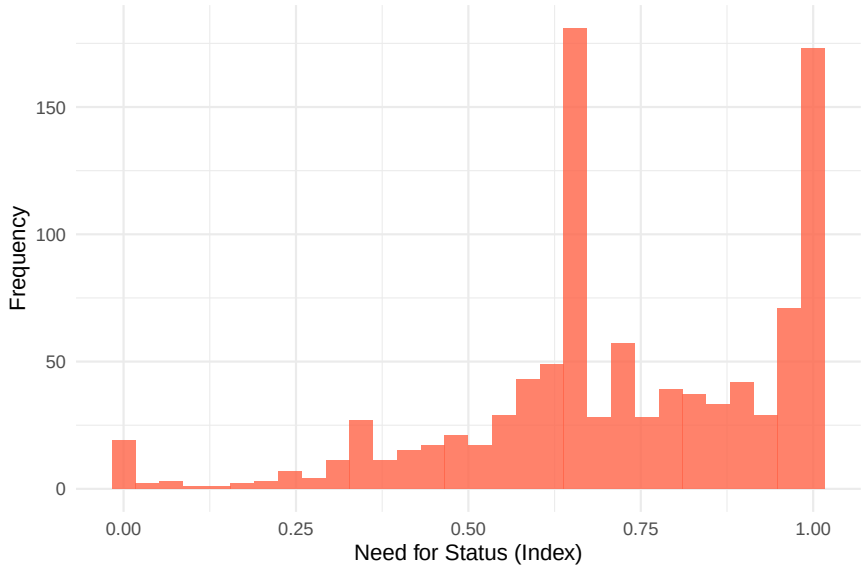

Figure 3. Distribution of need for national status (index)

U.S. would be better off if we just stayed home and did not concern ourselves with problems in other parts of the world." *Internationalism* is an ordinal variable that rescales the 5-point Likert scale to range from 0 to 1, such that higher values denote a more internationalist foreign policy orientation. We code answers as 0 if the respondent strongly agrees that the U.S. should stay out of world affairs; as 0.25 if they agree with this statement; as 0.5 if they neither agree nor disagree; as 0.75 if they strongly disagree; and as 1 if they strongly disagree (or believe that the U.S. should instead take an active role in world affairs).

To measure altruism, we ask respondents how strongly they agree or disagree (5-point scale) with the following statement: "people should always be willing to help a stranger, even if it means having to give up something." The *Altruism* variable is an ordinal variable that rescales the 5-point Likert scale to range from 0 to 1, such that higher values denote a higher level of altruism. Answers are coded as 1 if the respondent strongly agrees with the statement and as 0 if they strongly disagree. Finally, we include a battery of sociodemographic variables that measure respondents' age, gender, education level, party identification, and political ideology. *Ideology* is operationalized as placement along the left-right ideological scale. This variable has three categories and is coded 1 for those who identify as moderates, 2 for liberals, and 3 for conservatives. *Party identification* is coded 1 for those

who identify as independents, 2 for Democrats, and 3 for Republicans.

Test 1: Observational Analysis

Using data from the 2020 Cooperative Congressional Election Study (N = 993 respondents), we estimate an OLS regression with robust heteroskedasticity-consistent standard errors to test our first hypothesis—according to which respondents with a high need for national status will be more supportive of foreign aid spending than respondents with a low need for national status. To facilitate the interpretation of results, we rescale all non-dichotomous variables (other than age) to range from 0 to 1. Moderates serve as the reference category for ideology, while independents serve as the reference category for party identification. Results are weighted so that age, race, Hispanic origin, education level, and gender margins match the U.S. population.

Results

In line with our first hypothesis, the results show that a respondent's need for national status has a positive and statistically significant association with their support for foreign aid provision. And importantly, this effect is also substantively significant. As Table 2 shows, the effect magnitude for the need for national status (0.272) is larger than the effect magnitude for other individual-level dispositions traditionally considered in foreign aid research—internationalism (0.184) and altruism (0.100). In particular, a one standard deviation increase in need for national status is associated with an increase of 6.2 percentage points in support for foreign aid. This effect size is larger than the effect of a one standard deviation increase in altruism, which is associated with an increase of 2.5 percentage points in support for foreign aid; and similar to the effect of a one standard deviation increase in internationalism, which is associated with an increase of 5.9 percentage points in support for foreign aid. As such, the results indicate that status motivations are more relevant for public attitudes toward foreign aid than previously assumed.

Most of our control variables are statistically significant and in the expected direction, except

Table 2. Observational analysis: Need for national status and support for foreign aid

	Unweighted		Weighted	
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Need for Status	0.364***	0.227***	0.400***	0.272***
	(0.037)	(0.038)	(0.041)	(0.046)
Internationalism		0.225***		0.184***
		(0.027)		(0.041)
Altruism		0.097***		0.100***
		(0.030)		(0.033)
Democrat		0.037*		0.039
		(0.020)		(0.029)
Republican		-0.032		-0.053**
		(0.022)		(0.026)
Liberal		0.074***		0.070**
		(0.019)		(0.031)
Conservative		-0.037*		-0.034
		(0.022)		(0.025)
College		0.009		0.002
		(0.015)		(0.018)
Age		-0.003***		-0.002***
		(0.000)		(0.001)
Female		-0.010		-0.007
		(0.014)		(0.018)
Constant	0.236***	0.263***	0.204***	0.234***
	(0.028)	(0.034)	(0.031)	(0.040)
Num.Obs.	993	993	993	993
R2	0.101	0.313	0.120	0.300

Ordinary least squares coefficients shown with heteroskedasticity-robust standard errors in parentheses. Weighted results are weighted on age, race, Hispanic origin, education level, and gender to match the U.S. population.

* $p < 0.1$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$

for education. On average, Democrats are 3.9 percentage points more supportive of foreign aid than independents, while Republicans are 5.3 percentage points less supportive than independents. And while liberals are on average 7 percentage points more supportive of foreign aid than moderates, conservatives are 3.4 percentage points less supportive than moderates. Finally, older respondents and women are on average less supportive of foreign aid than, respectively, younger respondents and men.

Overall, the results provide strong preliminary support for our argument that status considerations increase support for foreign aid. Respondents are more supportive of foreign aid the higher their reported need for national status—whose substantive impact is comparable to that of other variables traditionally considered in foreign aid research. Our observational analysis thus provides foundational and promising evidence for our experimental analysis. Despite its relative absence in the existing literature, an individual's need for national status is an important determinant of their attitude toward foreign aid provision.

Test 2: Foreign Aid Experiment

We test our second and third hypotheses using a pre-registered experiment embedded in the Cooperative Congressional Election Study in 2020 (N = 993 respondents). Our survey experiment has a between-subjects design with one factor (status cue) that has two levels (no cue; reduced U.S. status cue). We establish the U.S. status cue manipulation by informing respondents that, according to experts, a reduction in foreign aid spending would hurt U.S. international status and would allow other countries, like China, to fill America's role as a global leader. All respondents read the following statement: "U.S. officials may cut foreign aid spending as part of a plan to reduce the national debt. Foreign aid is money and supplies that the U.S. government sends to poor countries to help them fight poverty. The U.S. government spends $41 billion (less than 1% of the federal budget) in foreign aid each year." In addition, respondents randomly assigned to the status cue treatment group (reduced U.S. status) read the following information: "Experts warn that a reduction in for-

eign aid would hurt America's image, since other countries expect global leaders like the U.S. to help those in need. This would create a leadership vacuum that countries like China will seek to fill." The control group does not receive information about the experts' warning.

We chose this prompt for several reasons. First, we inform all respondents about the amount the U.S. currently spends on foreign aid, including the percentage of the federal budget allocated to it, because the general public tends to grossly overestimate the percentage of the budget that the U.S. spends on foreign aid (Gilens, 2001; Van Heerde and Hudson, 2010). Even though foreign aid accounts for less than 1% of the federal budget, the average American believes that foreign aid accounts for about 25% of the federal budget and would ideally prefer foreign aid to account for around 10% of the budget. In other words, many Americans simultaneously believe (1) that the U.S. spends too much on foreign aid; and (2) that the U.S. should spend much more on foreign aid than it actually spends. These misconceptions can make it difficult to draw conclusions about public support for foreign aid spending. By providing respondents with information about the amount the U.S. actually spends on aid, we establish a common baseline for all respondents.

In addition, to make the decision at hand more realistic, we inform respondents that officials are considering cuts to foreign aid spending so as to reduce the national debt. In doing so, we ask citizens to evaluate a decision they may encounter in the real world. In fact, as recently as 2019, the Trump administration attempted to cut the U.S. foreign aid budget in an effort to reduce the national debt.[4] Moreover, we introduce a trade-off between foreign aid and the national debt to minimize potential social desirability issues. Without a plausible reason to oppose aid, respondents may be hesitant to support reducing assistance to those in need abroad due to social desirability. By reminding respondents that the funds spent on foreign aid cannot be spent at home, we remind them that foreign aid entails costs. As previous research indicates, developed countries tend to cut back on their foreign aid commitments during economic crises because voters prioritize spending at home under these circumstances (Heinrich et al., 2016).

Finally, to induce respondents in the treatment group to engage in status considerations, we use

[4] *New York Times*, "Trump Administration Drops Proposal to Cut Foreign Aid After Intense Debate," August 22, 2019, https://www.nytimes.com/2019/08/22/us/politics/trump-foreign-aid.html.

language that directly evokes status—such as "America's image," "global leaders like the U.S.," and "leadership vacuum." The status treatment does not mention any specific benefits to be accrued by the donor country as a result of providing aid, as one would expect based on the strategic model. Neither does the treatment, on the other hand, evoke the needs of the recipient, as one would expect based on the altruistic model. Rather, the treatment focuses on the impact of foreign aid cuts on U.S. leadership and image, in line with our status model. In addition, since status involves a positional aspect, we mention that China stands to gain if the U.S. loses prestige abroad. In including this language, we ask citizens to evaluate a decision they may encounter in the real world. In 2018, for example, the Trump administration created a new foreign aid agency (the United States International Development Finance Corporation), whose purpose is to counter China's growing global influence as a result of the Belt and Road Initiative.[5]

In our experimental analysis, we include the same control variables used in the observational analysis above. Although control variables are not necessary in a randomized experiment—since random assignment assures that the treatment variables will not be correlated with any omitted variables—including control variables can help improve overall efficiency (Haselswerdt and Bartels, 2015; Franklin, 1991). Controlling for other variables that predict foreign aid support thus allows us to explain some of the systematic variation in our dependent variable. By accounting for these other sources of variation, we are better able to isolate the variation in the dependent variable that is due to our treatment condition. As in the observational analysis, we rescale all non-dichotomous variables (other than age) to range from 0 to 1.

Results

Our experimental results are consistent with the findings from our observational analysis and in line with our second hypothesis, according to which respondents cued to consider that a reduction in foreign aid spending would hurt U.S. status will be more supportive of foreign aid than respondents

[5] *New York Times*, "Trump Embraces Foreign Aid to Counter China's Global Influence," October 14, 2018, https://www.nytimes.com/2018/10/14/world/asia/donald-trump-foreign-aid-bill.html.

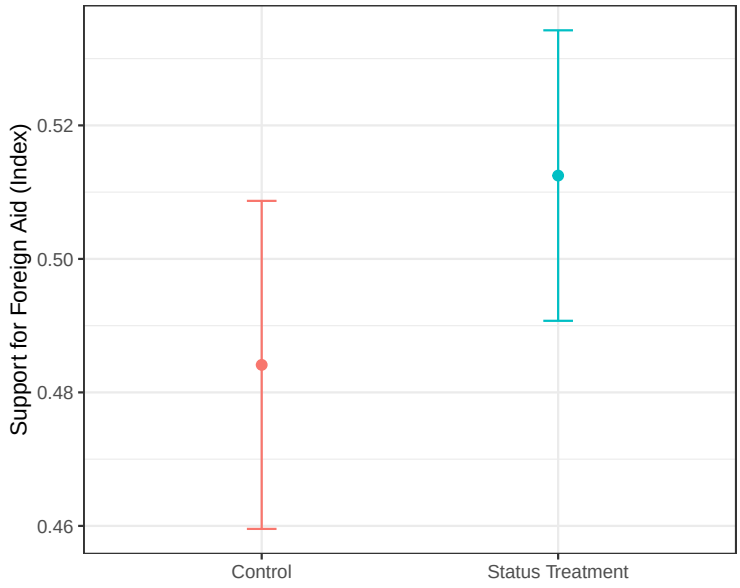

Figure 4. Effect of status treatment in support for foreign aid

not cued to consider such an impact. In Table 3, we report the relationship between our status cue treatment and support for foreign aid. Model 1 reports the bivariate regression results, while Model 2 reports results when control variables are included in the analysis. In our bivariate analysis, we find that our status treatment increases support for foreign aid by 2.8 percentage points. This relationship is significant at the 0.1 level. However, once we incorporate our control variables, the effect of our status treatment becomes significant at the 0.01 level. In our full model, our status treatment increases support for foreign aid by 4.0 percentage points, as shown in Figure 4. The size of this effect is substantial when one considers that there is strong preference for the status quo among our respondents: Almost half of the respondents reported that they preferred to keep foreign aid allocations at the current level. In line with our observational analysis above, the need for national status variable maintains a positive and statistically significant association with foreign aid support, while the magnitude of its effect continues to match or exceed that of individual-level dispositions traditionally considered in foreign aid research.

On the other hand, we do not find support for our third hypothesis, according to which respondents who report a higher need for national status will be more supportive of foreign aid when cued

Table 3. Experimental analysis: Status treatment and public support for foreign aid

	(1)	(2)	(3)
Status Treatment	0.028*	0.040***	0.071
	(0.017)	(0.014)	(0.050)
Need for Status		0.228***	0.251***
		(0.039)	(0.053)
Status Treatment × Need for Status			-0.043
			(0.066)
Internationalism		0.226***	0.225***
		(0.027)	(0.027)
Altruism		0.094***	0.093***
		(0.030)	(0.030)
Democrat		0.036*	0.036*
		(0.020)	(0.020)
Republican		-0.032	-0.032
		(0.022)	(0.022)
Liberal		0.075***	0.076***
		(0.019)	(0.019)
Conservative		-0.040*	-0.040*
		(0.022)	(0.022)
College		0.010	0.010
		(0.015)	(0.015)
Age		-0.003***	-0.003***
		(0.000)	(0.000)
Female		-0.009	-0.009
		(0.014)	(0.014)
Constant	0.484***	0.243***	0.226***
	(0.013)	(0.035)	(0.041)
Num.Obs.	993	993	993
R2	0.003	0.319	0.320

Ordinary least squares coefficients shown with heteroskedasticity-robust standard errors in parentheses. Results are unweighted.

* $p < 0.1$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$

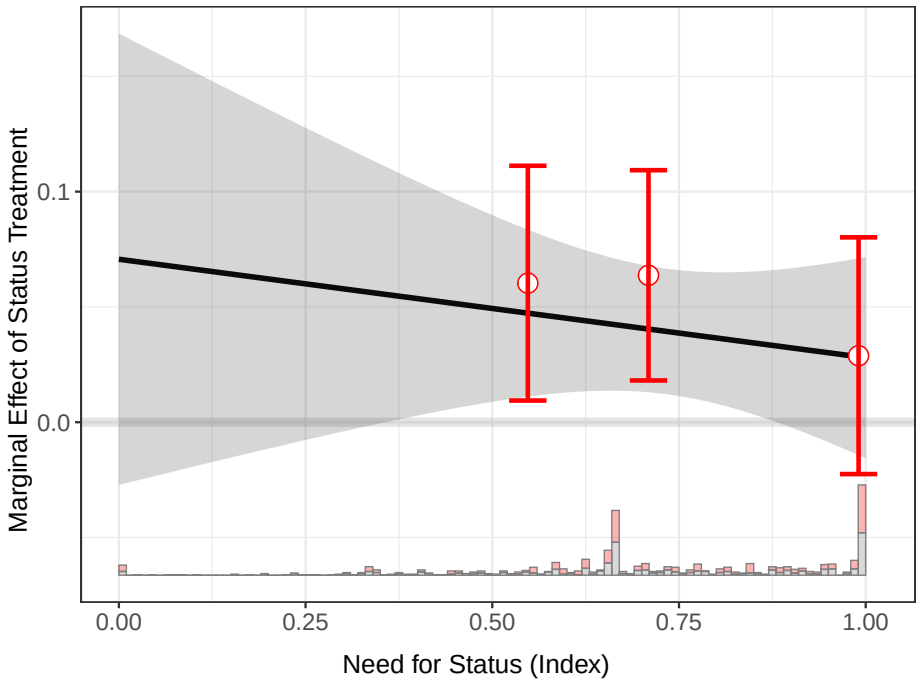

Figure 5. Marginal effect of the status treatment on support for foreign aid, conditional on need for national status

to consider that a reduction in foreign aid spending would hurt U.S. international status. As Model 3 in Table 3 shows, the interaction between our status treatment and the need for status variable is not statistically significant. Figure 5 shows the marginal effect of the status treatment conditional on need for national status. As the figure shows, our status treatment increased support for foreign aid among those respondents with a low or medium need for national status. But when it comes to respondents with a high need for national status, the experimental treatment did not have a significant effect. This may be due to a ceiling effect: As Figure 6 shows, those respondents with a high need for national status (whom we expected to be the most responsive to the status cue treatment) are already the strongest supporters of foreign aid. As a result, our status treatment could only increase their support for foreign aid by so much. In other words, our results suggest that the connection between status and foreign aid provision resonates with a broad swath of the American public, rather than being restricted only to those individuals with a high need for national status.

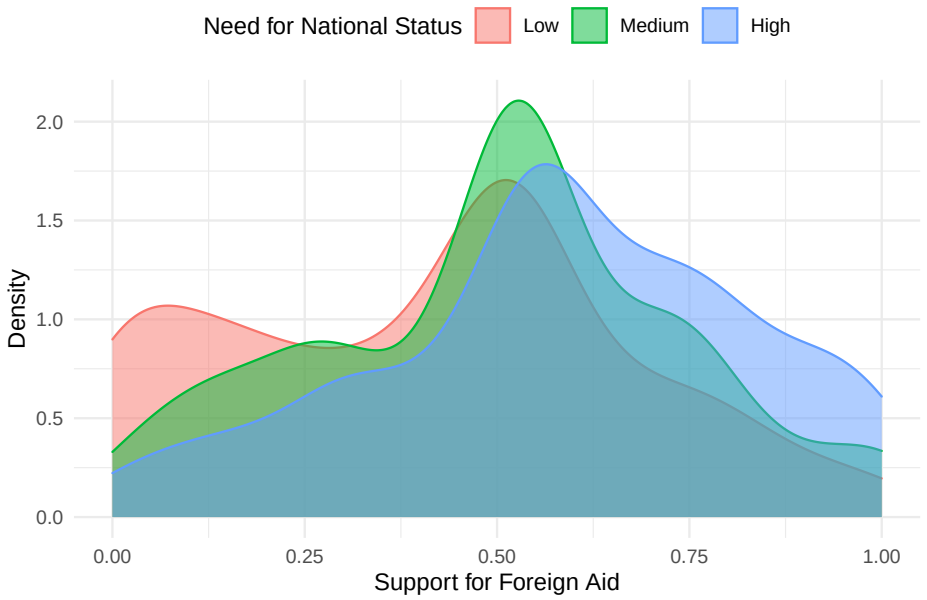

Figure 6. Distribution of support for foreign aid by need for national status

Conclusion

In this paper, we propose a model of foreign aid provision that focuses on the relationship between donor and recipient, rather than on the interests of the donor or the needs of the recipient. Drawing on an interdisciplinary body of research, we argue that status can also motivate the provision of foreign aid. Hierarchical relationships typically involve a sense of noblesse oblige, as privileged actors are expected to behave charitably towards the less privileged. As such, foreign aid establishes or maintains an asymmetrical relationship between donor and recipient. We build on existing research by proposing a model that directly links status motivations and foreign aid provision. Importantly, our model applies not only to status-seeking countries like emerging powers, but also to high-status countries like established great powers. Finally, our model applies not only to the state level but also to the public. Based on our theoretical framework, we expect that citizens will be more likely to support foreign aid provision the more they value the status of their country.

We assess the observable implications of our argument using a pre-registered survey experiment conducted in the United States. Our analysis involves an observational and an experimental components, both of which produce similar results. We argue that status considerations increase public

support for foreign aid. In line with this argument, Test 1 demonstrates that a respondent's reported need for national status is positively associated with support for foreign aid provision. The higher a respondent's need for national status, the more supportive they are of foreign aid. Moreover, our results show that need for national status outperforms other variables traditionally considered in foreign aid research: Status motivations are more strongly associated with foreign aid support than either internationalism or altruism. Likewise, Test 2 shows that respondents cued to consider that a reduction in foreign aid spending would hurt U.S. status are more supportive of foreign aid than respondents not cued to consider such an impact. In other words, status considerations lead Americans to become more supportive of foreign aid provision.

This study contributes to existing scholarship on the determinants of foreign aid provision, as well as to existing research on status-motivated behavior in international politics. On the one hand, our analysis reveals that status considerations constitute an important yet neglected determinant of public attitudes toward foreign aid. In particular, framing foreign aid in terms of donor status can encourage richer states to help more those in need. As such, research on foreign aid provision should take status motivations into account. On the other hand, we provide one of the first empirical examinations of the role that status plays in shaping foreign policy attitudes at the public level. Our results demonstrate that status considerations influence how members of the public evaluate foreign policy. Finally, our analysis demonstrates that the role of status in international politics is broader and more pervasive than previously assumed. While previous research on status-motivated behavior focuses on international conflict, our results show that status can also motivate international cooperation. And while previous research on status-motivated behavior focuses on emerging powers or status-dissatisfied countries, we demonstrate that status can motivate foreign policy even within an established great power like the United States.

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