Noblesse Oblige

Status Motivations and Public Support for Foreign Aid

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Abstract. What drives public support for foreign aid? Drawing from multidisciplinary research, we argue that international status is a powerful yet neglected factor driving public attitudes toward aid-giving. Using an original survey experiment in the U.S., we show that the more Americans value their country's standing abroad, the more they support the provision of foreign aid. To begin, 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. Moreover, respondents cued to consider that a reduction in foreign aid spending would hurt U.S. international status are more supportive of foreign aid than respondents not cued to consider such an impact. Our 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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1 Introduction

In democracies, public opinion influences the supply of foreign aid. Within the major aid donors, leaders are responsive to the public's preferences. In the United States, for example, 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; Tomz et al. 2020), members of Congress take into account the views of their constituents when determining the aid budget: 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 (Milner and Tingley 2010, 2011). Since legislators anticipate that challengers will attack them if they support unpopular policies, they are mindful of how policies impact their constituencies. Policy outputs are especially likely to reflect the preferences of citizens when news coverage of foreign aid policy is high (Heinrich et al. 2018). Given that public opinion helps explain how legislators vote on foreign aid policy, research on the determinants of foreign aid pays increasing attention to the public.

But what drives public support for foreign aid provision? International Relations (IR) scholars traditionally use two theoretical models to explain aid-giving. Most studies rely either (1) on what we call a *transactional model*, whereby leaders of donor countries use foreign aid as a tool to achieve specific goals; or (2) on what we call an *altruistic model*, whereby donors provide foreign aid to help those who need it abroad. However, existing research indicates that citizens in donor countries are far more supportive of foreign aid given altruistically than they are of foreign aid given transactionally (Bayram 2017; Lumsdaine 1993; Heinrich et al. 2016). In addition, a couple of studies suggest that status motivates the provision of foreign aid (Gilady 2018, 90-120; Lancaster 2007). But because this kind of explanation still receives little attention, two important questions remain unaddressed. First, why do status-motivated actors choose foreign aid rather than other policies? Second, what are the domestic sources of status-motivated behavior? In particular, do status considerations sway public opinion toward foreign aid policy?

In this paper, we address these questions by developing an argument that directly links status motivations and public support for foreign aid. We argue that international status is a powerful yet neglected factor driving public opinion toward aid-giving. Drawing on multidisciplinary research, we propose a *status model* of foreign aid. To begin, we argue that foreign aid is appealing to status-motivated actors because of its distinctive feature: it serves to legitimate the hierarchical relationship between donor and recipient. In particular, foreign aid reflects a specific feature of hierarchical relationships: *noblesse oblige*, or the expectation that privileged actors should behave charitably towards the less privileged. In addition, we argue that, because social identity extends the self beyond the individual, people care about the status of the social groups to which they belong, including their nation. We thus expect that, the more a citizen values their country's international standing, the more likely they will be to support the provision of foreign aid.

Empirically, we provide direct evidence of a causal relationship between status motivations and public support for foreign aid. Using a pre-registered survey experiment embedded in the 2020 Cooperative Congressional Election Survey (CCES), we show that Americans are more prone to support foreign aid the more they value the status of their country.[1] Our analysis involves observational and experimental components, both of which entail methodological innovations. Using a new survey scale, we first show that respondents are more supportive of aid the higher their reported need for national status—that is, the more they care about U.S. standing abroad. In fact, the substantive impact of the need for national status is comparable to that of important factors traditionally considered in foreign aid research, such as internationalism and altruism. Using experimental methods, we then 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. While existing studies suggest that status motivates foreign aid at the elite level, within

[1]This study was pre-registered with the Center for Open Science (OSF) at https://osf.io/vujdf/?view_only=d4cfd48bde3d4c6ba84bc162be889835. It was conducted in compliance with relevant laws on the use of human subjects and deemed exempt by the appropriate institutional research ethics committee.

middle powers like Denmark or Japan, we provide direct evidence of status motivations at the public level, within a 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 emphasizes the connection between status motivations and international conflict (Barnhart 2020; Dafoe et al. 2014; Murray 2018; Renshon 2017), our results demonstrate that status also motivates international cooperation. Second, while research on status-motivated behavior typically focuses on emerging powers (Larson and Shevchenko 2010; Paul et al. 2014; Pu and Schweller 2014), we show that status motivates foreign policy even within a great power like the United States. Third, while status research typically focuses on the state or elite levels (Gilady 2018; Musgrave and Nexon 2018), we show that status considerations influence public opinion—thus providing direct evidence of the domestic sources of status-motivated behavior in international politics. Finally, our analysis highlights a powerful yet neglected motivation behind aid-giving. While existing studies indicate that leaders are responsive to the public's preferences regarding foreign aid, 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.

2 Existing Models of Foreign Aid

IR scholars traditionally use two theoretical models to explain the provision of foreign aid. To begin, many studies rely on what we call the *transactional model*, whereby donors use aid as a means to achieve specific goals (Alesina and Dollar 2000; McKinlay and Little 1977). According to the transactional model, donors provide aid to get something in return from the recipient state—following the maxim from Morgenthau (1962, 303) that foreign aid is, more often than not, "bribery disguised." In particular, donors may use aid to help domestic

industries (Milner and Tingley 2010, 2011), for example by mandating that part of the aid provided be used to buy products from the donor country, or to ensure access to natural resources (Lancaster 2007, 14-15, 78). Likewise, policymakers who wish to limit immigration to their country may use aid to promote development in migrant-sending countries, thereby decreasing the demand for migration (Bermeo and Leblang 2015).

Explanations based on the transactional model focus on the elite level, arguing that leaders of donor countries use foreign aid to obtain policy concessions from the recipient country. To de Mesquita and Smith (2007), leaders of donor countries engage in aid-for-policy deals to improve their chances of remaining in office. Early and Jadoon (2019) add that, after using aid to extract policy concessions from a recipient state, leaders of donor countries can further coerce the recipient by threatening to cancel the promised aid. Finally, some studies argue that donors use aid to influence the recipient country's voting behavior in the United Nations General Assembly (Dreher et al. 2008; Wang 1999) or the Security Council (UNSC). As Vreeland and Dreher (2014) note, UNSC resolutions increase domestic support for a given action by signaling its international legitimacy. As such, leaders of donor countries recognize that they can achieve their foreign policy goals more easily by putting a UNSC member in their debt. Accordingly, there is a sharp increase in aid received when a country becomes a UNSC nonpermanent member, especially during years when the Council votes on issues prioritized by the U.S. (Kuziemko and Werker 2006).

In addition, some studies of foreign aid rely on what we call the *altruistic model*, whereby donors provide foreign aid to help those who need it abroad—that is, 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; Noël and Thérien 1995). As Dietrich (2013) notes, donor countries often bypass recipient governments to deliver aid through non-state actors in poorly-governed countries, but not in countries with a higher quality of governance. In bypassing recipient governments, donors deny themselves the ability to extract policy concessions from the recipient country,

against expectations from the transactional model; but increase the expected probability that foreign aid will be successfully implemented, in line with the altruistic model. While explanations based on the transactional model focus on the elite level, explanations based on the altruistic model often involve mechanisms at the public level. As early studies in this tradition suggest, countries tend to give more aid the higher the levels of public support for foreign aid, as well as the more their societies embrace welfare principles or have social-democratic traditions (Lumsdaine 1993; Noël and Thérien 1995).

Accordingly, existing research indicates that citizens in donor countries are far more supportive of foreign aid given for altruistic reasons—that is, to meet the needs of the recipient country—than they are of foreign aid given transactionally, to achieve the goals of the donor country. As Heinrich et al. (2016, 68) note: "Taken together, the prevailing survey evidence suggests that from voters' perspective, foreign aid is largely a selfless, charitable policy and much less a tool to obtain sought-after policy concessions." As Bayram (2017) demonstrates, for example, citizens from developed countries are more likely to support foreign development assistance when they hold prosocial or altruistic values. Likewise, other studies suggest that public support for foreign aid in donor countries increases with religiosity (Paxton and Knack 2012) and cosmopolitan values (Prather 2020).

3 A Status Model of Foreign Aid

In this paper, we argue that international status is a powerful yet neglected factor driving public attitudes toward foreign aid. Next, we begin by discussing two questions that remain relatively unexplored in existing research: (1) Why do status-motivated actors choose foreign aid rather than other policies? and (2) Do status considerations sway public opinion toward foreign aid policy? Drawing on multidisciplinary research, we then develop our status model of foreign aid in two steps. First, we argue that foreign aid is appealing to status-motivated actors because it serves to legitimate a hierarchical relationship between donor and recipient.

Second, we argue that, because social identity extends the self beyond the individual, people care about the status of the social groups to which they belong—including their nation. We thus expect that, the more a citizen values the status of their country, the more likely they will be to support the provision of foreign aid.

3.1 What We (Don't) Know

Drawing on diverse traditions, numerous studies show that status is a fundamental motivation behind foreign policy behavior. As Morgenthau (2006, 83) notes, prestige "is as intrinsic an element of the relations between nations as the desire for prestige is of the relations between individuals." Overwhelming evidence indicates that leaders value status, sometimes to the point of fighting wars for the sake of recognition. In fact, actors care so deeply about status that they may be willing to sacrifice blood and treasure for the sake of status. Following the humiliating loss of Alsace and Lorraine to Prussia in the nineteenth century, for example, France initiated a scramble for colonial territory in Africa at the expense of its continental security, even though its colonial exploits offered little material benefit (Barnhart 2020). Motivated by a desire for recognition as a great power, Germany pursued naval ambitions while risking a security dilemma with Britain in the lead-up to the First World War (Murray 2018, 87-140). More broadly, existing research reveals a persistent association between status dissatisfaction and war, as states are more prone to conflict when they receive less recognition than expected (Dafoe et al. 2014; Renshon 2017).

While most status research focuses on international conflict, a few studies indicate that status motivates international cooperation. In her study of status-motivated behavior, Gilady (2018, 100) treats foreign aid as a case of conspicuous consumption, whereby a country seeks prestige by demonstrating that it can afford to make donations to other countries. As Gilady (2018, 116, 182) notes, two patterns of state behavior denote status motivations. First, donors often make their donations visible and identifiable. In fact, one of the core functions of the Development Aid Committee (DAC)—an exclusive club of donors created

by the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD)—is to compile and distribute information about the aid policies of its members, thereby ensuring that their generosity does not go unnoticed. Second, most countries stake their position as donors by providing just enough aid to ensure membership in the donors' club—that is, right above the DAC's arbitrary threshold of 0.7 percent of each country's GDP.[2]

In addition, a landmark study of foreign aid reveals status motivations among 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. As Lancaster (2007, 204) notes, development cooperation addressed precisely this concern, by providing Denmark with a foreign policy 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, 135). In relatively small states, decision-makers thus perceive foreign aid as a marker of their country's international presence and prestige.

But while previous research suggests that status motivates foreign aid, this kind of explanation still receives little attention. As a result, two important questions remain unaddressed. First, why do status-motivated actors choose foreign aid rather than other policies? As existing research shows, status-seekers adopt a variety of policies—from buying advanced military equipment like aircraft carriers or fighter jets to participating in peacekeeping missions and developing space programs (Gilady 2018; Musgrave and Nexon 2018; Paul et al.

[2]The DAC has 32 members, including 31 countries that are OECD members and the European Union; as well as seven participant countries that are not OECD members. Only seven OECD member countries are not DAC members: those from Latin America (Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, and Mexico) and the Middle East (Israel and Turkey), as well as Latvia. See "Development Assistance Committee (DAC)," OECD, accessed July 4, 2023, https://www.oecd.org/dac/development-assistance-committee/.

2014). However, it is still not clear why status-motivated actors would choose foreign aid over other types of policies. Second, what are the domestic sources of status-motivated behavior? Existing research shows that status motivations at the state or the leader levels influence foreign policy behavior. But even though leaders are electorally-motivated actors, we still know little about how status considerations shape public opinion toward foreign policy. Next, we address both of these questions by developing an argument that directly links status motivations and public support for foreign aid.

3.2 Why Foreign Aid?

We argue that foreign aid is appealing to status-motivated actors because it serves to legitimate the hierarchical relationship between donor and recipient. As Hattori (2001) observes, foreign aid constitutes a form of giving that 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. 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. In other words, foreign aid constitutes a form of symbolic domination, "or a practice that signals and euphemizes social hierarchies" (Hattori 2001, 639). As Gouldner (1973) notes, 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, dominant actors legitimate their leadership by giving "something for nothing"—that is, by making donations to the less privileged without the expectation of repayment. The beneficence of leaders elicits deference and respect.

In particular, foreign aid reflects a specific feature of hierarchical relationships: *noblesse oblige*. As Fiske (1991, 42-43) points out, hierarchical relationships typically involve a sense of noblesse oblige, as privileged actors are expected to behave charitably towards the less privileged. According to Fiske, social relations are governed by distinct models, which imply unique expectations about the respective contributions of actors. In communal relations,

for example, actors are bound by commonalities and regarded as kin. As such, actors are expected to give what they have, without keeping track of individual contributions. By contrast, egalitarian relations are characterized by a concern for balance and reciprocity. As such, actors are expected to match each other's contributions in kind. But because hierarchical relations necessarily involve asymmetry, they entail a different set of expectations altogether. In hierarchical relations, the less privileged do not reciprocate donations in kind, and neither do privileged actors give what they have without keeping track of individual contributions. Rather, privileged actors publicly demonstrate their nobility and largesse by giving beneficently to the less privileged.

Importantly, noblesse oblige concerns primarily occupying a social position, such as great power, rather than obtaining specific benefits such as increased exports. While status involves privileges, its benefits derive first and foremost from a social position—or more precisely, from external recognition based on social esteem (Duque 2018, 580). Status refers to "an effective claim to social esteem in terms of privileges" (Weber 1978, 305). As a concept at the intersection of identity and power, status involves two necessary dimensions. First, status requires *recognition*: for an actor to achieve status, other actors have to recognize it. Status does not automatically result from status-motivated behavior; on the contrary, the historical record offers prominent examples of countries that adopted status-seeking policies but failed to evoke the desired international recognition—such as Wilhelmine Germany or Russia since the time of Peter the Great (Murray 2018; Neumann 2008; Renshon 2017). Second, status involves *hierarchy*: depending on their standing, actors obtain access to certain privileges. In the international system, for example, great powers enjoy exclusive access to privileges such as the legitimate possession of nuclear weapons or veto power in the UNSC. In particular, status involves a specific type of hierarchy, based on social esteem rather than material resources (Keene 2014; Schulz 2019; Weber 1978).

Noblesse oblige has two new implications for the relationship between status motivations and aid-giving. First, we should think of foreign aid as one of the policies of choice for

status-motivated actors in international relations—alongside other policies such as military acquisition, which have received relatively more attention in previous research. Compared to other policies, foreign aid involves a distinctive advantage: it legitimates (and therefore stabilizes) international hierarchies by recasting dominant states as noble and generous. In particular, foreign aid has both inward and outward consequences. Internally, the act of helping those in need makes members of the dominant group feel good about themselves. As Mavelli (2017, 811) notes in the context of the European refugee crisis, humanitarian action promotes a self-understanding of the dominant country as "just, moral and compassionate", thereby "enhancing the emotional life of its population." In relations with other states, moreover, foreign aid serves as propaganda, improving the image of the donor country (Morgenthau 1962, 304, 309). As Goldsmith et al. (2014) show, for example, aid-giving fosters positive perceptions of the U.S. among the public in recipient countries.[3]

Second, we should think of foreign aid as a policy of choice not only for emerging powers who wish to attain international recognition, but also for great powers who wish to maintain their superior position. Because privileged actors are expected to provide for those in need, foreign aid may simply reflect the "natural" way of doing things, rather than necessarily constituting an attempt to achieve a higher international standing. While previous research on status-motivated behavior focuses on emerging powers, our argument also applies to a great power like the United States. In fact, we find evidence of status motivations in U.S. government discourse about foreign aid. For example, the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), responsible for administrating the country's foreign aid programs, affirms on its website that its work "demonstrates American generosity" and "America's good will around the world." As Table 1 shows, the U.S. government uses language related not

[3]Conversely, receiving aid reduces a country's perceived status. As Carnegie and Dolan (2021) show, Americans rank India's status more lowly after learning that New Delhi accepted (rather than rejected) aid. It is therefore no coincidence that countries often refuse aid, even when they need it: out of the 66 natural disasters observed between 2004 and 2012, countries declined aid about half the time. India is a case in point. Located in a disaster-prone area, India would greatly benefit from international assistance after natural disasters, given its limited resources. And yet, New Delhi stopped accepting aid in 2004, claiming to no longer need it (Carnegie and Dolan 2021, 500-503). Crucially, India's rejection of aid is consistent with its position as an emerging power that seeks international recognition (Gilady 2018; Paul et al. 2014).

Table 1. Language used by USAID to describe its work

Model	Example Language
Status Model	"USAID is the world's premier international development agency" "USAID's work (...) demonstrates American generosity" "USAID demonstrates America's good will around the world"
Transactional Model	"USAID's work advances U.S. national security and economic prosperity" "USAID (...) increases global stability by addressing the root causes of violence; opens new markets and generates opportunity for trade"
Altruistic Model	"USAID's work (...) promotes a path to recipient self-reliance and resilience" "USAID (...) creates innovative solutions for once unsolvable development challenges; saves lives; and advances democracy, governance, and peace."

Source: "What we do", United States Agency for International Development, accessed April 17, 2023, https://www.usaid.gov/what-we-do.

only to the transactional and altruistic models, but also the status model, to describe its foreign aid policy to a broader audience.

3.3 Why Do Citizens Care about National Status?

Finally, we argue that citizens care about the status of their country because, as social psychologists have long noted, people derive status from their group memberships (Brown 2000; Tajfel and Turner 1979). As Brewer (1991) observes, social identity extends the self beyond the individual—such that people experience whatever happens to the group as if it had happened to them. As such, people care about the status of the social groups to which they belong, including their nation. Putting both parts of our argument together, we therefore expect that the more a citizen values their country's international standing, the more likely they will be to support the provision of foreign aid.

Our argument builds on a rich tradition of research in related fields, which places status as a fundamental human motivation with important implications at the social or group levels. As Ridgeway (2014, 2) notes, "people care about status quite as intensely as they do about money and power." In the field of psychology, numerous studies using experi-

mental methods demonstrate that people value status (or social esteem) independently of material gain (Fiske 2011; Huberman et al. 2016; Tajfel and Turner 1979). Likewise, recent studies across subfields in political science show that status motivates political attitudes and behavior—shaping public preferences toward important issues such as redistribution in domestic societies (McClendon 2018; Thal 2020), driving support for right-wing populism in developed democracies (Gidron and Hall 2017; Mutz 2018), and influencing presidential approval during foreign policy crises (Powers and Renshon 2023).

4 Empirical Strategy

Based on our theoretical framework, we expect that, the more citizens value their country's international status, the more they should support the provision of foreign aid. 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 in the United States. We chose to use a U.S. sample for two reasons. To begin, the U.S. is a democracy where public opinion influences foreign aid policy (Heinrich et al. 2018; Milner and Tingley 2010, 2011). But even though the U.S. is one of the major donors of foreign aid worldwide in absolute terms, it still lags behind other rich countries in terms of aid as a share of national income. As such, a better understanding of how Americans form opinions toward aid has important implications for aid-giving around the world. Second, a U.S. sample increases our empirical contribution to existing knowledge about status-motivated behavior. While existing research focuses on how status motivates foreign aid among middle powers like Denmark or Japan, there is little research on status motivations within a great power like the United States.

Our analysis uses an original online survey (N = 993 respondents) conducted during the pre-election wave of the CCES in October 2020. Our survey experiment follows the steps shown in Figure 1. First, we measure participants' need for national status using a new

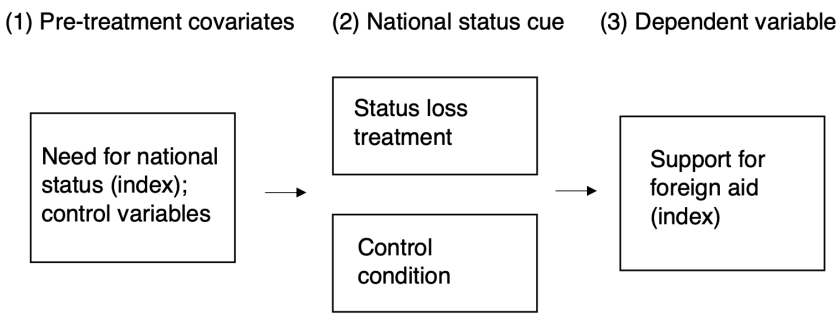

Figure 1. Survey experiment flow

six-item scale. Next, respondents answer other questions from the CCES pre-election wave (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 observational and experimental components, both of which entail methodological innovations. Based on our argument, we expect that citizens will be more prone to support foreign aid the more they value the international status of their country. First, we assess our argument using observational methods. To that end, we develop a new survey scale that allows us to measure respondents' need for national status—or the extent to which they value the international standing 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 use experimental methods to assess our argument that status motivates for-

eign aid. In particular, our survey experiment tests two pre-registered hypotheses about the relationship between status motivations and public support for foreign aid. 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. Our second hypothesis thus captures the effect of our experimental manipulation:

> 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, our third hypothesis captures an interaction between our experimental manipulation and the respondent's baseline need for national status:

> 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.

4.1 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 aid; and (3) the role 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 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 spending preferences per American (Baker 2015). The second question

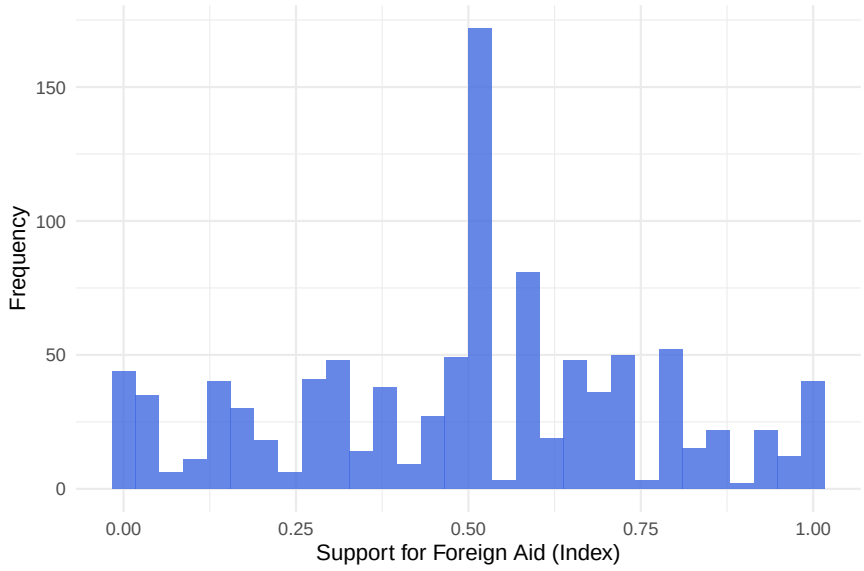

Figure 2. Distribution of support for foreign aid (index)

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 low-income countries. 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 (Cronbach's alpha = 0.83).[4] 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). We use principal-axis factoring to generate scores for our dependent variable. As a robustness check, we also conduct analyses using each of the questions separately. As shown in the appendix, the

[4]As Figure A2 shows, the distributions of answers by question are very similar to the index's distribution.

pattern of results based on these alternative measures is consistent with those of our main specification, increasing our confidence in the results.[5]

As Figure 2 shows, our index of foreign aid support captures considerable variation in respondents' attitudes toward aid (mean = 0.50, SD = 0.26). At the same time, respondents' answers reveal a strong preference for the status quo: almost half of respondents report a preference for keeping aid allocations at the current level. This pattern is consistent with previous research on public opinion toward federal spending in the U.S., which reveals a general preference for maintaining existing levels of spending.[6] Moreover, this pattern is likewise consistent with previous observations that, in the U.S., potential cuts to foreign aid spending tend to evoke backlash at both the public and the elite levels. During the Republican Revolution in the 1990s, for example, when the U.S. foreign aid budget saw massive cuts as voters elected a wave of isolationist legislators to Washington, such cuts 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 the 2019 fiscal year put forward a significant cut in foreign aid funding for the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), it elicited widespread bipartisan rejection even in the polarized political climate of contemporary American politics.[7]

4.2 Independent Variable

Our primary variable of interest measures respondents' *need for national status*. To measure this, we employ a new survey scale shown in Table 2. We design this six-item scale to measure how much a respondent values the status of their country (in this case, the United States).

[5] See Tables A2 and A3.

[6] See Dimock, M., Doherty, C., Kiley, J., "As Sequester Deadline Looms, Little Support for Cutting Most Programs," February 22, 2013, https://www.pewresearch.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/4/legacy-pdf/02-22-13-Spending-Release.pdf; and Pew Research Center, "Little public support for reductions in federal spending," April 11, 2019, https://www.pewresearch.org/politics/2019/04/11/little-public-support-for-reductions-in-federal-spending/.

[7] *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.

Table 2. 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").

Our scale is an adaptation of the Need for Social Status scale created and validated by Flynn et al. (2006), which measures how much an individual values social status. We adapt this scale to better capture our argument, which concerns status motivations at the national level more specifically, rather than the social level more broadly. Whereas the original scale asks respondents, for example, how important it is to them to be a highly valued member of their community, our scale asks respondents how important it is *that the U.S. is* a highly valued member of *the international* community. In adapting our scale to capture status motivations at the national level, we make the assumption (widely supported by existing research) that individuals derive status from the groups to which they belong, including their nation. Much like Flynn et al. (2006) observe variation in individuals' reported need for social status, we thus expect to observe variation in individuals' reported need for national status.

Our independent variable captures the shared variation in respondents' answers to the six questions in Table 2 (Cronbach's alpha = 0.88).[8] We use principal-axis factoring to generate scores for the respondents' need for national status, which ranges from 0 to 1. As a robustness check, we also create a categorical variable that divides respondents into tertiles corresponding respectively to low, medium, and high need for national status.[9] As shown in the appendix, the pattern of results based on this alternative measure is consistent with

[8] As Figure A3 shows, the distributions of answers by question are very similar to the index's distribution.
[9] See Figure A4.

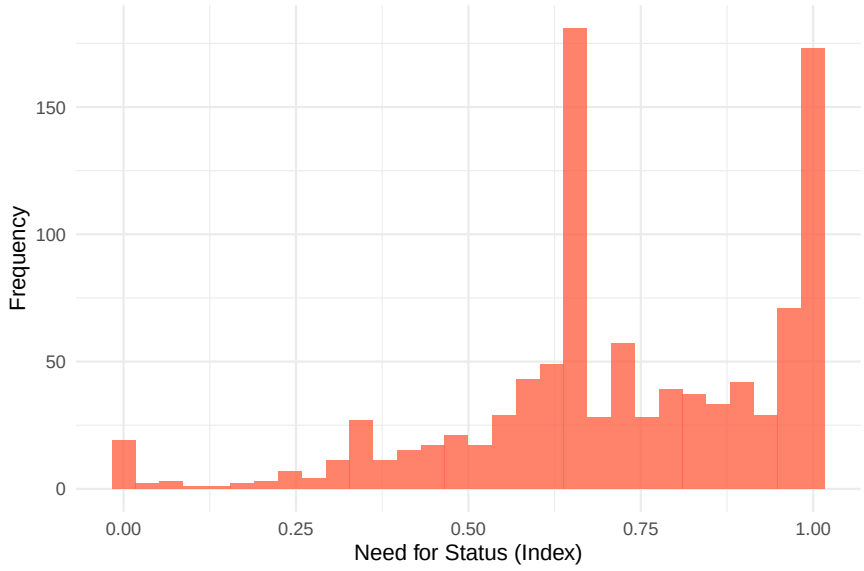

Figure 3. Distribution of need for national status (index)

those of our main specification of the independent variable.[10]

As Figure 3 shows, the distribution of respondents' need for national status is left skewed (mean = 0.72, SD = 0.23). In addition, the need for national status correlates with party identification and ideology: as Figure 4 shows, Democrats report higher levels of need for national status than do Independents or Republicans. Likewise, liberals report higher levels of need for national status than do moderates or conservatives.[11] Finally, respondents' need for national status correlates positively with other predispositions associated with public attitudes toward foreign policy—internationalism (0.33) and altruism (0.21)—as well as with age (0.22) and having a college education (0.08).[12]

4.3 Control Variables

We use several measures to capture the factors that correlate with support for foreign aid provision among members of the U.S. public (Baker 2015; Brewer et al. 2004; Heinrich et al. 2018). To measure internationalism, we ask respondents how strongly they agree or

[10]See Tables A4 and A5.
[11]See Figure A5.
[12]See Figure A1.

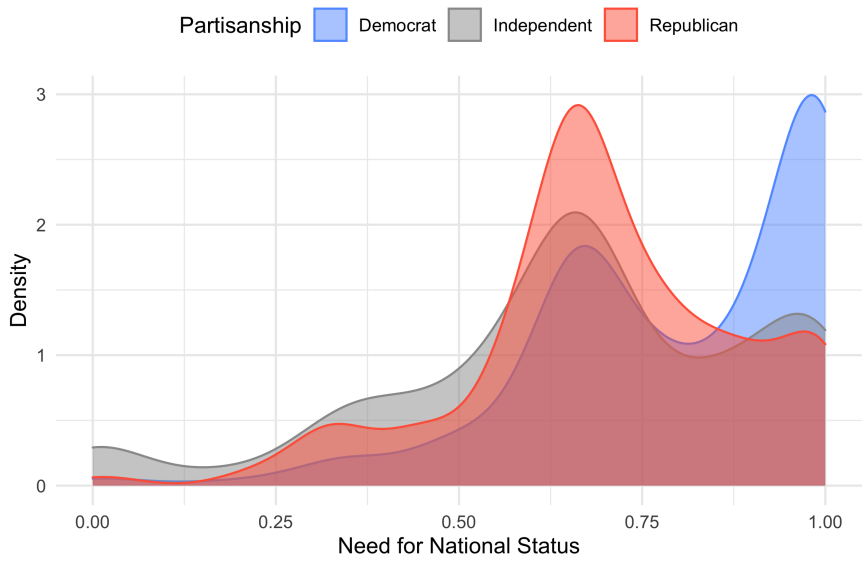

Figure 4. Distribution of need for national status (index) by partisanship

disagree (5-point scale) with the following statement: "the 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

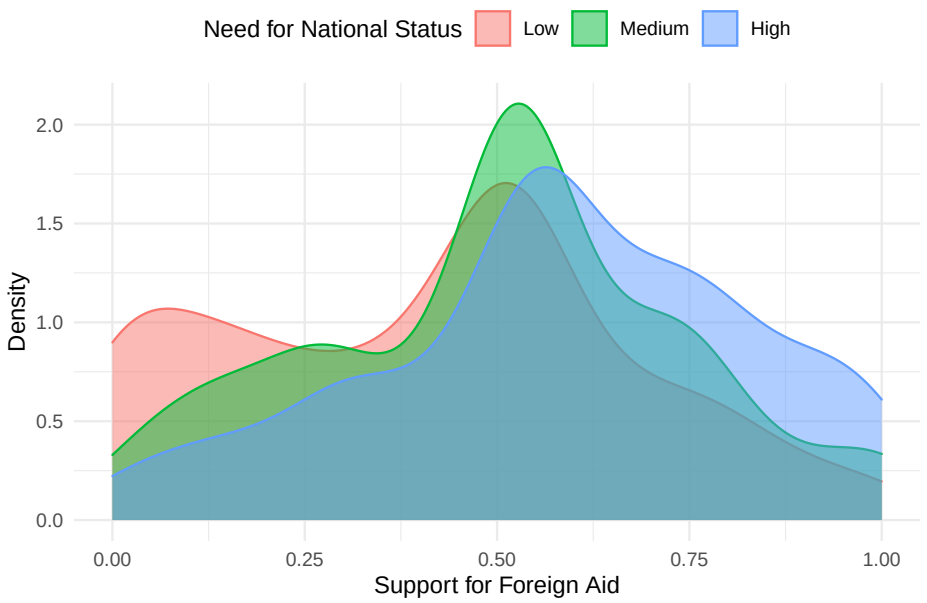

Figure 5. Distribution of support for foreign aid by need for national status

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.

5 Test 1: Observational Analysis

We first assess the relationship between a respondent's need for national status and their support for foreign aid using data from the 2020 Cooperative Congressional Election Study (N = 993 respondents). Figure 5 shows support for foreign aid in the CCES sample for respondents with a low, medium, or high need for national status. As the figure shows, support for foreign aid increases with the need for national status.

We test our first hypothesis—that respondents with a high need for national status will be more supportive of foreign aid than those with a low need for national status—by estimating an OLS regression with robust heteroskedasticity-consistent standard errors. 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.

5.1 Results

Table 3 shows the results from our observational analysis. In line with our first hypothesis, the analysis shows that a respondent's need for national status has a positive and statistically significant association with their support for aid-giving. And importantly, this relationship is substantively significant. A one standard deviation increase in need for national status is associated with an increase of 6.3 percentage points in support for foreign aid, which corresponds to a one-fourth standard deviation increase in support. In fact, the association between need for national status and support for foreign aid is as least as strong as that of two other individual-level dispositions traditionally considered in foreign aid research—internationalism and altruism. For example, a one standard deviation increase in internationalism is associated with an increase of 5.9 percentage points in support for foreign aid, while a one standard deviation increase in altruism is associated with an increase of 2.5 percentage points in support for foreign aid.

Overall, the results provide strong preliminary support for our argument that status motivates public support for foreign aid. Respondents are more supportive of foreign aid the higher their need for national status—whose association with foreign aid support is comparable to that of other factors traditionally considered in foreign aid research. Our observational analysis thus provides foundational and promising evidence for our experimental analysis. In addition, the observational analysis indicates that status motivations are more relevant for public attitudes toward foreign aid than previously assumed. Despite its relative absence in existing research on foreign aid support, an individual's need for national status is an important determinant of their attitude toward aid-giving.

Table 3. 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.

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

6 Test 2: Foreign Aid Experiment

We test our second and third hypotheses using a pre-registered experiment embedded in the 2020 CCES. 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 foreign 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. To begin, we inform all respondents about the amount the U.S. currently spends on foreign aid, including the percentage of the federal budget allocated to aid, because members of the public tend to grossly overestimate U.S. government spending 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 expresses a preference for foreign aid to account for around 10% of the federal budget.[13] In other words, many Americans simultaneously believe that the U.S. (1) spends too much on foreign aid; and (2) should spend much more on foreign aid than it actually does. These misconceptions can

[13]Bianca DiJulio, Mira Norton, and Mollyann Brodie, "Americans' views on the U.S. role in Global Health," Kaiser Family Foundation, January 20, 2016, https://www.kff.org/global-health-policy/poll-finding/americans-views-on-the-u-s-role-in-global-health/.

make it difficult to draw conclusions about public support for foreign aid spending. As Scotto et al. (2017) show, for example, measurement of public preferences toward aid spending is sensitive to how aid spending is presented: Americans who only receive information about aid spending in absolute terms are more likely to support aid cuts, while those who only receive information about aid spending as a percentage of the federal budget are less likely to support aid cuts. By providing respondents with information about the amount the U.S. actually spends on aid, including the percentage of the federal budget allocated to aid, we establish a common baseline for all respondents.

In addition, we inform respondents that U.S. officials are considering cuts to foreign aid spending so as to reduce the national debt—introducing a trade-off between foreign aid and the national debt—for three reasons. First, by introducing such a trade-off, we provide respondents with a reason to support aid cuts. As previous research indicates, members of the public have a general preference for maintaining existing levels of federal spending. At the same time, developed countries tend to cut back on their foreign aid commitments during economic crises, when voters prioritize spending at home (Heinrich et al. 2016). Second, this trade-off minimizes potential social desirability issues. Without a plausible reason to oppose aid, respondents may be hesitant to support reducing assistance to disadvantaged groups abroad due to social desirability concerns. By reminding respondents that the funds spent on foreign aid cannot be spent at home, we remind them that foreign aid entails opportunity costs. Third, this trade-off makes the decision at hand more realistic: As recently as 2019, the Trump administration attempted to cut the U.S. foreign aid budget in an effort to reduce the national debt.[14] By asking citizens to evaluate a decision they may encounter in the real world, we increase the external validity of our experimental design.

Finally, to induce respondents in the treatment group to engage in status considerations, we use language that directly evokes status—such as "America's image," "global leaders like the U.S.," and "leadership vacuum." As discussed above, status refers primarily to an

[14] *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.

actor's position in social relations. Accordingly, our status treatment focuses on the potential impact of aid cuts on the international position of the U.S., rather than on material benefits to be accrued by the U.S. in return for providing aid, as one would expect based on a transactional model. And since status involves a positional aspect, we remind participants that the international position of the U.S. is threatened by the emergence of China. By mentioning China in our treatment, we ask citizens to evaluate a decision they may encounter in the real world. As recently as 2018, for example, the Trump administration created a new foreign aid agency (the United States International Development Finance Corporation), whose purpose was to counter China's growing global influence as a result of the Belt and Road Initiative.[15] Moreover, as Brutger et al. (nd) show, naming specific countries in an experimental treatment only biases the results if the country identity's is inconsistent with the treatment. In our case, the opposite is true, as China is commonly perceived as threatening Washington's international leadership.

6.1 Results

Our experimental results provide support to our second hypothesis, whereby respondents cued to consider that a reduction in foreign aid spending would hurt U.S. status abroad will be more supportive of foreign aid than respondents not cued to consider such an impact. Table 4 shows the effect of our status cue treatment on foreign aid support. Model 1 reports the results from our bivariate analysis, while Model 2 reports results from our multivariate analysis including pre-treatment covariates. In our bivariate analysis, the status treatment increases support for foreign aid by 2.8 percentage points; this relationship is significant at the 0.1 level. By incorporating pre-treatment covariates, we obtain more precise effect estimates. In our multivariate analysis, the status treatment increases support for foreign aid by 4.0 percentage points (significant at the 0.01 level), which represents 15% of the standard deviation in support. The size of this effect is substantial when one considers the strong

[15] *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.

Table 4. 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.

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

preference for the status quo among our respondents: As shown in Figure 2, almost half of the respondents reported a preference for maintaining current levels of foreign aid.

On the other hand, we do not find clear support for our third hypothesis, whereby respondents with a higher need for national status will be more supportive of foreign aid when cued to consider that a reduction in foreign aid spending would hurt U.S. status abroad. As Model 3 in Table 4 shows, the interaction between respondents' need for national status

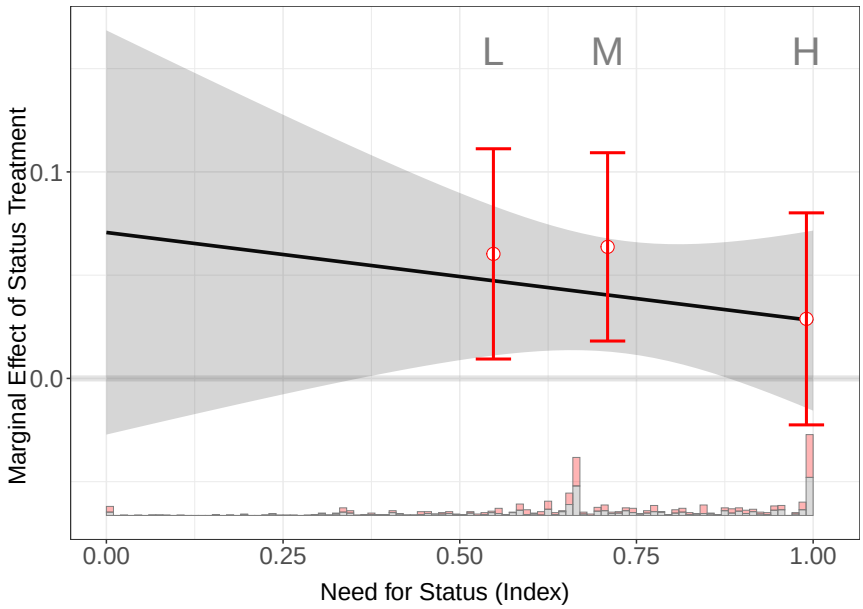

Figure 6. Marginal effect of the status treatment on support for foreign aid, conditional on need for national status. *Note:* Estimates in red show the marginal effect for respondents with low, medium, and high levels of need for status, with 95% CIs.

and our status treatment is not statistically significant. To explore why, Figure 6 shows the marginal effect of the status treatment conditional on need for national status. As the figure shows, our 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 treatment did not have a significant effect. This may be due to a ceiling effect: As Figure 5 shows, those respondents with a high need for national status—whom we initially expected to be the most responsive to the status cue treatment—are already the strongest supporters of foreign aid to begin with. As a result, our treatment could only increase support for foreign aid among these respondents by so much.

In addition, heterogenous effects by partisanship and ideology further suggest the existence of a ceiling effect. As discussed above, Democrats/liberals in our sample reported higher levels of need for national status than did either Independents/moderates or Republicans/conservatives.[16] And as shown in Figure 7, our status cue treatment did not have a

[16]See Figures 4 and A5.

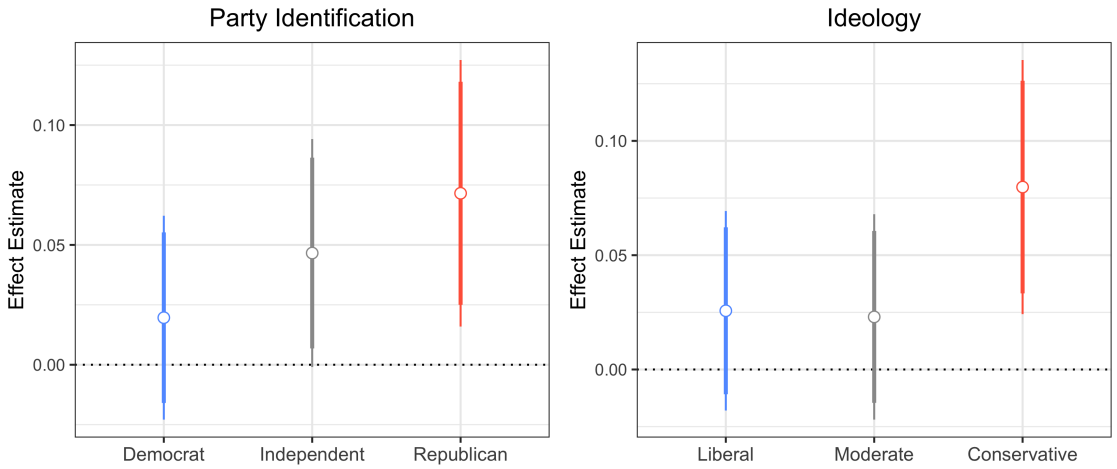

Figure 7. Marginal effect of the status treatment on support for foreign aid, conditional on party identification and ideology. *Note:* Horizontal bars show 90% and 95% CIs.

significant effect among either Democrats/liberals or Independents/moderates, but it had a significant effect among Republicans/conservatives. In other words, those groups that initially reported lower levels of the need for national status were more responsive to the status cue treatment, increasing their support for foreign aid.

Taken together, our observational and experimental analyses indicate that the connection between international status and aid-giving resonates with a broad swath of the American public—rather than being a phenomenon restricted only to those individuals who report a high need for national status or who identify with a given political party or ideology. On the one hand, respondents with a high need for national status (as well as liberals and Democrats) are more likely to support foreign aid to begin with. On the other hand, respondents with a low or medium need for national status (as well as conservatives and Republicans) increase their support for foreign aid when cued to consider that a reduction in foreign aid spending would hurt U.S. international status. Whether respondents are cued to engage in status considerations or predisposed to do so, such considerations lead them to become more supportive of aid-giving. Our analyses thus provide consistent support for our argument that status motivates public support for foreign aid.

7 Conclusion

In this paper, we build on existing research on the determinants of foreign aid by proposing a model that directly links status motivations and public support for aid-giving. Drawing on multidisciplinary research, we develop a status model of foreign aid. We argue that foreign aid is appealing to status-motivated actors because it serves to legitimate a hierarchical relationship between donor and recipient. Importantly, our model applies not only to status-seeking countries but also to high-status countries. Because hierarchical relationships typically involve a sense of noblesse oblige—as privileged actors are expected to provide for those in need—foreign aid may simply reflect the "natural" way of doing things, rather than necessarily constituting an attempt to achieve a higher standing. In addition, our model applies not only to the state level but also to the public. Because social identity extends the self beyond the individual, people care about the status of the social groups to which they belong, including their nation. Based on our argument, we thus expect that citizens will be more likely to support aid-giving the more they value their country's standing.

Empirically, we assess the observable implications of our argument using a pre-registered survey experiment conducted in the United States. Our analysis involves observational and 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 the need for national status is at least as important as other variables traditionally considered in foreign aid research: The association between a respondent's need for national status and foreign aid support is as least as strong as that of either internationalism or altruism. Using experimental methods, Test 2 then 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—providing direct evidence of a causal relationship between

status motivations and public support for foreign aid. Overall, status considerations lead Americans to become more supportive of giving foreign aid.

This study contributes to existing research on (1) the determinants of foreign aid; and (2) on status-motivated behavior in international relations. On the one hand, our analysis reveals that status considerations constitute an important yet neglected determinant of public attitudes toward foreign aid. Our results indicate that framing foreign aid in terms of donor status can encourage richer states to donate to low income states. As such, foreign aid research should take status motivations into account. On the other hand, we provide one of the first empirical examinations of the role played by status motivations in shaping public attitudes toward foreign policy. While previous research reveals status motivations at the elite level, our results demonstrate that status considerations also influence public opinion. This finding opens new avenues of research on the domestic sources of status-motivated behavior in IR. Finally, our analysis expands existing knowledge in two additional ways. While existing research focuses on the connection between status motivations and international conflict, we show that status can also motivate international cooperation. And while previous research focuses on emerging powers, we demonstrate that status motivates foreign policy even within a superpower like the United States. As such, our analysis suggests that the role of status in international politics is broader than previously assumed.

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