

Turning the Tables? Aid, Status and Stability in the International System

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January 30, 2021

Abstract

How does the changing landscape of foreign aid donors and recipients affect perceptions of international status and prestige? In this paper, we build on the “superior” donor and “inferior” recipient narrative to argue that foreign aid provision is status-conferring in an aid-for-policy concessions framework. Foreign aid acceptance is status-denying, as recipients are viewed as surrendering foreign policy sovereignty in exchange for aid. Therefore, changes in aid behavior, what we term “role reversals,” should impact the place of new donors and new recipients in the international hierarchy. We take advantage of the recent COVID-19 crisis and the disruption of typical aid flows to field an online information experiment in the United States. Delineating psychological and strategic approaches to status, along with an original measure of comparative status, we find that foreign aid acceptance affects respondents’ intrinsic, but not instrumental, status rankings. Additionally, while there are nominal status gains for new donors, the comparative — ordinal — rankings of international hierarchy remains preserved. From a positional perspective, new-found donor roles do little to change international standing, while new-found recipient roles have a negative effect on status. Consistent with the psychology literature, respondents assimilate evidence to fit within their existing views by making adjustments to the broader landscape of hierarchy outside of the bilateral aid transaction.

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Introduction

Political scientists dating back to Hobbes and Machiavelli have emphasized the importance of status – or hierarchical ranking – in international politics. While Gilpin (1983, 31) equates status to the “everyday currency of international relations,” contemporary scholarship has evolved to understand status as both a means and an ends to states’ objectives. Politicians are “plainly obsessed with investing in, seizing, and defending” their international reputation (Renshon, 2017, 1) as it provides social, material, and psychological benefits (Paul *et al.*, 2014). Status is not only instrumentally valuable in conferring decision making autonomy and deference (Wohlforth, 1998), but also intrinsically valuable as a psychological benefit to decision makers (Jervis, 1989; Wolf, 2011).

The benefits of status imply that states will take costly actions to change their status. States invest in nuclear weapons, join international organizations, or host the Olympics in order to boost their standing in the eyes of foreign audiences (Levite, 2003; Hafner-Burton & Montgomery, 2006; Larson & Shevchenko, 2010; Pu & Schweller, 2014), sometimes at the expense of other political goals (Barnhart, 2016). While a significant body of scholarship has focused on the role of reputation seeking behavior as a cause of war, states possess multiple strategies – other than war – to augment their international standing (Renshon, 2016; Duque, 2018).¹ To better understand the myriad of ways in which status comparisons are updated in the international system, we focus on the provision of foreign aid as an additional, and underexplored, channel of status change. How are status comparisons made and what role does the provision or acceptance of foreign assistance play?

We argue that donor status provides, and citizens can recognize, both moral and material benefits in the aid-for-policy-concessions framework (Heinrich *et al.*, 2018; Bueno de Mesquita & Smith, 2007). Recipients of foreign aid are subsequently viewed as less developed and less competent, having to surrender foreign policy sovereignty in exchange for aid. Therefore, advancement from a country that receives foreign aid to one that donates foreign aid will

¹See Dafoe *et al.* (2014) for a review of the literature linking status seeking to conflict.

increase a nation’s international standing, whereas regression from the type of country that donates foreign aid to the type of country that receives foreign assistance will threaten a nation’s international standing (Donno *et al.*, 2018). The provision or acceptance of foreign aid is thus a signal of membership – in donor or recipient groupings – and hierarchical position.

We pair the “superior” donor and “inferior” recipient narrative with changes in the foreign aid landscape. The rise of non-Western donor states like China, India, and Brazil has led to heightened competition with traditional OECD aid providers (Kohno *et al.*, 2020). Long-time recipients have also experienced swift economic growth, affording them the opportunity to deny foreign funds and even serve as donors themselves (Nelson, 2010; Carnegie & Dolan, 2019). This points to a role reversal in many aid relationships where a “change in one actors’ status implies a change in at least one other actor’s status” (Renshon *et al.*, 2018, 375), repainting, for example, China’s expansion in the aid realm as a threat to US influence (Dreher & Fuchs, 2015). The stable and structured opinions that citizens have about foreign aid stand to be updated as the landscape of foreign aid, and the power and prestige it implies, shifts away from traditional donors (Milner & Tingley, 2013).

The 2019-2020 COVID-19 pandemic provides a unique opportunity to test our argument about the status conferring role of foreign aid. The United States, the largest provider of foreign aid, leads the world in both COVID-19 cases and associated deaths. This unusual characteristic has led to atypical aid flows, with the United States accepting foreign assistance for the first time since WWII.² Building on this real-world donor-cum-recipient role reversal, we evaluate status effects in an online information experiment. While US citizens are largely supportive of accepting foreign aid, we find that foreign aid acceptance affects respondents’ intrinsic, but not instrumental, status rankings. Specifically, we find that non-Western donors who provide COVID specific foreign aid to the United States are rewarded with increased perceptions of respect, but not international influence. More importantly,

²The OECD notes no instances of the US accepting aid since 1947.

while nominal respect increased for new donors, the comparative – ordinal – rankings of international hierarchy remain preserved. Any nominal status gains made for new donors are offset up nominal status gains in the traditional-donor benchmarks. From a positional perspective, new-found donor roles do little to change international standing, while newfound recipient roles have a negative effect on comparative status.

While there is a strong consensus that status is important, status research in international relations remains in its’ “youth” (Renshon, 2017). Questions of how domestic audiences understand and make inferences about status have been under-explored and our results have several important implications. First, we show that status is not only driven by military considerations but also by economic ones. As international conflict declines, behavioral shifts in other forms of international economic cooperation, like foreign aid, should become more important. This paper bridges work on status with a nascent literature in foreign aid about the rise of non-western states, particularly China, to better understand how their rise affects larger concepts of reputation, status and hierarchy in international relations (Brautigam, 2011; Dreher & Fuchs, 2015; Kilama, 2016; Humphrey & Michaelowa, 2019). Second, we demonstrate that intrinsic and instrumental aspects of status are distinct both conceptually and in practice. Instrumental status, or policy deference, is “sticky” and less responsive to states’ attempts to increase status while intrinsic status, or belonging, is more susceptible to status enhancing behavior. Empirically, the ideational quality of status has made the measurement of status difficult to “pin down” (Heffetz & Frank, 2011, 18) and being able to experimentally adjudicate between theoretical perspectives is a novel advancement. Our work advances our understanding of how status perceptions are formed by pointing to specific cognitive processes by which citizens assimilate new information on status (Mercer, 1996). Our original measurement of status suggests that respondents update their nominal perceptions of status without upsetting status-quo, ordinal rankings. Finally, we point to unintended consequences of foreign aid’s role in status conferral, highlighting how countries may want to accept aid with minimal publicity, counter to democratic initiatives for aid

transparency and to donor incentives to publicize their own generosity.

Status and Foreign Aid

We follow Dafoe *et al.* (2014, 374) and define status as “an attribute of an individual or social role that refers to position vis-à-vis a comparison group.”³ Status is “positional, perceptual, and social” (Renshon, 2017, 4), meaning that status is a second-order belief that can only be understood in reference to a relevant community of social actors. It implies collective agreement, where there is consensus in actors’ beliefs about others’ beliefs. In a globalized world, status must be conferred and echoed by the general international community, consisting of both elite and mass actors.

We focus specifically on how status conveys standing (rank) or identity as a group member. Ordinarily, status describes a deference hierarchy among comparable actors, where actors of lower standing defer to the interests of actors with higher standing (Wolf, 2011). Prior work has typically focused on how material attributes like military capacity or wealth impact states’ standing in this hierarchy (Paul *et al.*, 2014).⁴ Dichotomously, status provides an identity whereby membership in a specific group, such as “major powers”, “nuclear states” or “rogue states” conveys positionality. Whether status is understood as standing or identity, hierarchy is pervasive (Lake, 2009a).⁵

Importantly, states value status and seek to improve their comparative position (Frank, 1985; Huberman *et al.*, 2004). However, there has been theoretical debate about whether the benefits of status are intrinsic – status for status’ sake – or instrumental. Psychological and constructivist perspectives argue that status can provide intrinsic benefits, which inflate

³While reputation, honor and prestige are related, but distinct concepts, we use the terms interchangeably with status for rhetorical effect. Our explicit focus is on status as it refers to international standing.

⁴Status has also been studied as an attribute of fundamental values like ideology or culture (Larson & Shevchenko, 2010). See Duque (2018) for a summary of status attributes that have been pursued in the literature.

⁵Given that status is inherently hierarchical, a discussion of status cannot be entirely divorced from larger conceptions of legitimacy and authority in international relations (Hurd, 1999; Lake, 2009b). States that achieve high status via collective assent are thus viewed as legitimate, giving them the authority to dictate various policy domains of subordinate states. This is consistent with our theoretical argument below.

the self-importance or positive feelings of high-status actors. Status gives governments “a sense of belonging” and “allows them to consider themselves as upright members of the international community” (Kelley, 2017, 39). In rational-strategic and realist theories, status can also provide instrumental benefits, where deference yields material benefits like FDI or trade concessions (Tomz, 2012). Status confers decision-making autonomy and deference (Wohlforth, 1998). Intrinsic and instrumental benefits have proved difficult to separate empirically, yet together provide strong incentives for states to invest in status-enhancing behaviors.

According to social identity theory (SIT), rising powers typically pursue several strategies to maintain or increase their standing in the international community. While some states improve their status by emulating higher-ranked actors, for instance by copying democratic values or joining elite clubs, others seek to compete against high-ranked opponents or creatively re-frame their negative attributes as positive ones (Larson & Shevchenko, 2010). However, if actions to increase status yield uncertainty, conflict between rising and hegemonic states is more likely as high-status actors try to “lock in” their position (Galtung, 1964; Wohlforth, 2009)

How does aid confer or deny status? Donors of foreign aid are viewed with “superiority and power” for several reasons (Kuusik, 2006, 57). First, from a materialistic perspective where status is conferred by physical attributes, donor status indicates an economic surplus. The ability to generate state revenue that exceeds domestic needs has typically been achieved by high-income states at the top of the economic hierarchy. Donors tend to cluster in elite clubs like the OECD, thereby solidifying the positional grouping. Second, vast literatures on foreign aid confirm that aid is given strategically (McKinley & Little, 1977; Dreher *et al.*, 2009; Reynolds & Winters, 2016; Kuziemko & Werker, 2006) and often to manipulate the policy positions of its recipients (Bueno de Mesquita & Smith, 2007; Dreher *et al.*, 2008; Dreher & Sturm, 2012).⁶ Foreign aid thus buys deference for those who can afford it. It can

⁶While status gains may be an explicit motivation for foreign aid donors, it is not required for our theory to hold. There are many alternative explanations for why donors provide aid including benevolence

be understood as a social contract, akin to relational hierarchy, where donors provide necessary funds in order to offset the recipient's required policy concessions (Lake 2009). Third, providing aid can also provide moral superiority. It demonstrates a dedication to helping the world's poor, improving international audiences' perception of the donor (Goldsmith, Koriuchi and Wood 2014).

Comparatively, recipients of foreign aid are viewed with "inferiority and powerlessness" (Kuusik, 2006, 57). Accepting aid thus denies or diminishes status in several ways. First, aid recipientship implies that domestic capacity is lacking, either to build or buy what the domestic population requires. The lack of adequate resources conveys incompetence and a much lower position in the economic hierarchy. It's for this reason that Carnegie & Dolan (2019) demonstrate that states are motivated to refuse disaster assistance in order to convey their competency and increase their standing in the eyes of international observers. Second, in the aid-for-policy-concessions bargain (Bueno de Mesquita & Smith, 2007), recipients of foreign aid are pulled by the strings of their benefactors. By virtue of their social contract, they sacrifice foreign policy autonomy in exchange for the aid they receive.

Third, cultural, historical and racial factors play an important role in maintaining the group identity of aid recipients. Baker (2015) powerfully demonstrates that White Americans prefer to send aid to African versus Eastern European recipients, a finding "not [due] to the greater perceived need of black foreigners but to an underlying racial paternalism that sees them as lacking in human agency." Development scholars have long noted the role of aid in infantilizing recipients; Slim (2020) argues that "racism is at the root of why [the West] can't 'let go' of... international power" and devolve development to local communities. In a study of stigma, Adler-Nissan (2014, 146) notes that historical interactions produce identities and reputations for countries, especially those marked by visible and enduring attributes such as race, "which may remain 'spoiled' even after behavioral change." This paternalism

and quid-pro-quo insurance considerations for an uncertain future. Regardless of donors' intentions, we are interested in the perceptions of their actions by the international audience. Perceptions may or may not accord with donors' motivations and therefore we theorize about the effects of foreign aid transactions rather than justifying their occurrence.

contributes to the pervasive belief that foreign aid recipients are of lower status. Racism, colonialism, and their legacies have developed and entrenched the idea that developing countries, and even formerly developing countries, cannot handle their own affairs and deserve a lower place in the international system.

Many aid transactions perpetuate the status quo as the same donors give aid to the same recipients for prolonged periods of time (Schraeder *et al.*, 1998). Aid flows are relatively resilient, which serves to entrench the hierarchy as it currently stands. However, what happens when the landscape of foreign aid changes? How does the international community update their perceptions of status when states deviate from their traditional aid behavior? Recent decades have witnessed the rise of non-Western donor states like China, India, Brazil and Saudi Arabia (Six, 2009). While many of these states are former recipients of foreign aid, today they have experienced sufficient economic growth to deny foreign funds and transition into the role of donors themselves. China, for instance, provided more than \$350 billion in foreign assistance between 2000-2014, rivaling the approximately \$390 billion spent by the US in the same period. As of the mid-2010s, China outspends the US on an annual basis (Dreher *et al.*, 2017).⁷

The ability and willingness of these new donors to provide international assistance emulates the behavior of high-status countries. A strategy of social mobility according to SIT, mimicking the donation practices of higher-status actors should help rising states gain admission to elite clubs (Larson & Shevchenko, 2010).⁸ As the ability to provide aid is determined by domestic resources, the boundaries of which states can be classified as international donors is permeable and open to accession by new states. We therefore expect that new donors should see their status rise.

H₁: Aid provision will increase the perceived status of new donor countries.

⁷We leave it to other work to theorize China and other new donors' motivations for providing aid.

⁸For example, while it is not a formal member, China signed a series of cooperation agreement with the OECD in 2015.

However, aid transactions are bilateral and the landscape of foreign aid hasn't just changed who provides aid but also who receives it. While examples may be more rare, high income – or high status – countries are not immune from national disasters or financial crises that require emergency assistance from the international community.⁹ While we discuss atypical aid flows during pandemics below, other examples include offers of assistance for Hurricane Katrina in the US, the refugee crisis in Europe, and the Fukushima nuclear disaster in Japan. In these cases, the implications for status point in the negative direction, as an imitation of low-status actors' usual crisis behavior. Regression from the type of country that donates foreign aid to the type of country that receives foreign aid threatens a nation's international standing (Donno *et al.*, 2018).

H₂: Aid acceptance will decrease the perceived status of new recipient countries.

While we have theorized about the status implications of recipient-cum-donors and donor-cum-recipients separately up to this point, status is relational. Therefore, the implications of new aid behaviors should be felt most acutely where both sides of the transaction deviate from their prescribed role in the international hierarchy. The larger the cumulative distortions, the more aid behavior provides new information with which to update perceptions of status. This implies that the status costs of accepting foreign aid for a new recipient state will be larger when aid is provided by non-traditional donors, who may have been previous aid recipients themselves.

H₃: Aid acceptance will decrease the perceived status of new recipient countries more when

⁹We acknowledge that role reversals are more likely for certain types of aid (i.e. disaster or emergency aid) than others (i.e. development aid). Evidence supports the importance of status effects in emergency situations (Carnegie & Dolan, 2019; Nelson, 2010). For example, the US turned down offers of international assistance following Hurricane Katrina stating “this country is going to rise up and take care of it” (Brinkley & Smith, 2005).

the donor is a non-Western or non-traditional donor.

H₄: Aid acceptance will decrease the perceived status of new recipient countries more when the donor was formerly an aid recipient.

Finally, changes in the status of one country can have ripple effects throughout the international system. Because status is inherently relational, “a change in an actor’s status implies a change in *at least* one other actor’s status.” (Renshon *et al.*, 2018, 375). This could occur in two ways. Where status is understood as standing, an increase in the rank of one country requires an automatic decrease in the rank of another country. Where status is more akin to identity, new members in a group can change the group’s meaning and the importance the group confers (Hafner-Burton, 2013; Gray, 2013; Brooks *et al.*, 2015). Therefore, the rise of new donors or presence of new recipients may impact states outside the bilateral aid transaction.

For example, China’s exponential growth in the aid realm has largely been framed as a threat to US influence. While the US does appear to compete for influence in China’s Belt and Road Initiative countries, the US’ strategy of status maintenance has primarily been one of social creativity, (unjustifiably) recasting Chinese aid as “rogue” (Dreher & Fuchs, 2015). Experimental evidence also suggests that Japanese citizens support the provision of aid to unsavory recipients in order to prevent aid competition with China (Kohno *et al.*, 2020).

However, the exact implications for third party states are hard to predict, as we acknowledge that there is cognitive resistance in status rankings. There is a tension between maintaining stable relations and taking into account changes in relative international standing as Duque (2018) notes that states “recognize similar states.” States prefer to make targeted comparisons to groups with similar histories, culture, or interests, slowing or impeding some dimensions of status change (Frank, 1985; Thompson, 2014). This might lead actors to make overly flattering comparisons or opt out of particular hierarchies all together (Larson & Shevchenko, 2010). It may also be present in the form of in-group biases towards

the positional advancement of countries with specific attributes. As a result, it is difficult to predict whether or how third party states will be affected by bilateral role reversals. On one hand, cognitive biases and the “stickiness” of status-conferring attributes may leave the status of third party states unchanged. On the other hand, changing the status of third parties as benchmarks might be part of preserving the larger hierarchy of the ecosystem. We leave the adjudication of these different perspectives to our empirical analysis.

H₅: Aid provision by new donors and aid acceptance by new recipients will not impact the perceived status of countries outside the bilateral aid transaction.

COVID-19 as a Foreign Aid Role Reversals

We test our theoretical argument about broad changes in the foreign aid landscape within the context of the 2019-2020 Coronavirus pandemic. COVID-19 will take its place in history as a global pandemic that killed hundreds of thousands and infected millions. The epidemiological scale of the virus has dwarfed most countries’ abilities to respond individually and foreign assistance has risen rapidly to meet the need for humanitarian relief, medical personnel, and equipment in the most-affected areas. Important for our project, it has also disrupted many of the typical roles and relationships in aid provision. For example, while the US has committed and disbursed virus specific aid, China has played a much larger part in contributing to global eradication, promising a blitz of humanitarian aid to countries as diverse as Iraq, Serbia, Peru and the Philippines. It has even promised aid to longtime rivals like Russia and Japan.

Key for our study is that traditional high-income donor states have also been some of the most affected by the virus. While it is unlikely that states like the US would receive foreign aid under normal circumstances, international emergency assistance has flowed into North America and Europe to help combat the virus’ spread. For the US in particular, the gov-

ernment was sharply criticized for accepting foreign assistance. Offers (and the acceptance) of assistance from the Russian state and Chinese businessmen were highly controversial. Political commentary was quick to point out that “it is an uncomfortable and humbling spot for the U.S. to find itself in – the world’s richest and most powerful country, one that plays an outsize role in global security issues and international affairs, suddenly turned supplicant.” (Shesgreen & Hjelmgaard, 2020). In this instance Russia’s provision of foreign aid was deemed propaganda and the State Department was clear that the optics of aid acceptance were negative, clarifying that the medical equipment was a purchase rather than charity (US Department of State, 2020). Whether and how much Russian medical equipment was provided at below market rates, implying a grant element, makes either claim hard to substantiate. The coronavirus pandemic thus provides a rare example of role reversal with both non-traditional recipient-cum-donors and the US as a donor-cum-recipient.

While our argument does not hinge on disaster or emergency assistance, we do acknowledge that a donor-cum-recipient role reversal is most likely under emergency circumstances – as opposed to longer term relationships like development aid – and therefore focusing on COVID-19 specific aid in the United States has several advantages. First, as noted above, COVID-19 has affected both developed and developing countries. Patterns of global contagion have left developed (and high-status) states, such as the United States, Italy, Spain, and the United Kingdom, more severely and quickly impacted than developing nations, with the US leading the world in cases and associated deaths. While COVID-19 has many unique characteristics, we expect COVID-19 to act similarly to other emergency situations that disrupt typical aid patterns. The external validity of our study hinges on high-status states not being immune from natural and medical emergencies.

Second, like natural disasters, the timing of COVID-19 is essentially random. The unique mutations that are linked to the virus’ creation and early spread were not determined by diplomatic or strategic relationships. The virus’ origination is arguably orthogonal to coun-

tries’ status.¹⁰

Third, the effects of status reversal evolved in real time, bolstering the internal validity of difficult to “pin down” ideational concepts like status. The reversal of traditional aid flows was not a hypothetical, but a highly relevant consideration to the lives of citizens. The coverage of US aid acceptance from Russia mirrors the press coverage in other forms of disaster assistance, which are usually well-publicized and highly salient. Where need is most politicized, the implications for status should be strongest.¹¹

Experimental Design

We are interested in how aid provision and acceptance is perceived by the international community and test our hypotheses with an online information experiment administered by Lucid on 1,532 US respondents on July 1, 2020. Lucid’s sample is nationally representative by age, gender, ethnicity and region and we show balance across treatment and control conditions in Appendix X. The bulk of work on international status, prestige and reputation has relied on observational data; however, we follow experimental approaches like Renshon (2017) to better embody the idea of status as a second-order belief, separate from material capabilities. Status is a result of collective assent, making a nationally-representative sample of the American public appropriate in this context.

Our choice of a US sample is important to consider for several reasons. First, in testing our first and final hypotheses, about status gains for new donors and third party states, the US’ role as a superpower makes the opinion of its citizens important to communities abroad. China for instance, has invested in Confucius institutes, student exchanges, and other forms of public diplomacy to improve its image among Americans (Shambaugh, 2015).

Second, one of the contributions of our status measure, described below, is its comparative

¹⁰How successfully countries deal with outbreaks after their initial spread is likely to vary with economic capabilities; however that is not the focus of this study and our experimental treatment nullifies this concern.

¹¹Or put another way, the results should be strongest among respondents that are highly concerned about the Coronavirus.

nature, whereby the same respondents simultaneously rank the status of several countries. As we ask a US audience to rank the US and other states, status updating about the US, as a donor-cum-recipient, is done by a domestic rather than international audience. While we mimic the international audience indirectly by asking respondents about how they think the US is perceived in *world* politics, this still poses a hard test for our argument as the US domestic public consistently ranks the US favorably in comparison to other countries. As public opinion data shows, countries' own publics have consistent and positive ratings of their own favorability while international audiences may be more likely to shift their opinions over time.¹² As US respondents are more likely to feel attached to the US' high status position, this biases against finding a punishing effect and we would expect sharper status changes if the same experiment was enumerated in another country.¹³

Finally, the US is an interesting case for theoretical reasons. Work on the public opinion of foreign aid has been sparse. Research on the public opinion of donor states in particular has been even more limited and points in different directions. On one hand, US citizens generally believe that the US spends a disproportionate amount of its own budget on foreign aid (Milner & Tingley, 2013), which would suggest that US citizens are amenable to receiving free money to help fight COVID-19. On the other hand, the international status of the US relative to other countries was a major talking point in the 2016 presidential campaign of Donald Trump, who claimed that other countries were "laughing at us." An emphasis on national pride may make citizens less amenable to accepting foreign aid, particularly from non-traditional donors. A US sample, thus provides an opportunity to tease apart the countervailing effects of the economic benefits of foreign aid and the international status costs of its acceptance. It adds not only to our understanding of status change but also to our understanding of how public opinion on foreign aid matters in donor countries.

We design our experimental treatments based on the real delivery of Russian medical supplies to the US and its coverage in the national press. Specifically, we utilize a factorial

¹²Appendix X provides public opinion data from Pew.

¹³We leave this to future research.

design whereby respondents are randomly assigned to read a hypothetical headline about aid acceptance or are directed straight to the outcome measures. For respondents who learn of the US’ aid acceptance, we further randomize the donor country (UK, China and India). Finally, for respondents assigned to the non-western donor treatments (China and India), we randomize the inclusion of an additional sentence about the donor’s former status as a foreign aid recipient. We choose not to vary information about recipient status for our Western donor treatment to accurately capture the UK’s aid behavior. The treatment thus appears as follows:¹⁴

[LONDON/DELHI/BEIJING] – The [British/Indian/Chinese] government announced that it would be sending a cargo plane full of medical supplies to the United States. The [British/Indian/Chinese] aid is intended to help the US in its fight against the growing coronavirus pandemic. [Control/[India/China] has been a long time recipient of US foreign aid, and remains a developing country.]

While the vignette is realistic, the acceptance of a single cargo plane with medical supplies is an admittedly small act. Yet, the single plane that arrived from Russia on April 1st made headlines for days. We thus choose language that approximated how the public was informed about this specific event, but are careful to avoid any political commentary. Actual news coverage from major outlets like the *New York Times* and *USA Today* actually use much stronger rhetoric than our prime, going as far as to portray the act as “turning the table.”¹⁵ If anything, a diplomatic statement about a single aircraft of foreign assistance is a weak signal, making it less likely that we will find a treatment effect.

Precisely because Russian aid provoked so much attention, we choose to manipulate

¹⁴Full treatment wording is provided in Appendix A.

¹⁵The following NYT headline serves as the template for our vignette. “TURNING THE TABLES, RUSSIA SENDS VIRUS AID TO U.S. MOSCOW — In the early 1990s, amid the poverty-ridden collapse of the Soviet Union, American food aid in the form of a flood of cheap chicken thighs — Russians called them “Bush legs” —symbolized the humiliating downfall of a superpower. Three decades later, Moscow got a chance to turn the tables. A giant An-124 Russian military transport plane landed at Kennedy International Airport in New York, bearing cartons of masks and ventilators from Russia for a pandemic-stricken metropolis” (Troianovski, 2020)

hypothetical donor states in our treatment conditions in order to avoid any confounding primes. China has played the largest role in distributing virus specific aid and is an obvious choice of a recipient-cum-donor whose foreign aid activities have been framed as a threat to US interests. However, China’s role as the originator of the virus and the labeling of COVID-19 as the “China virus” by President Donald Trump limits China’s generalizability if aid is perceived as absolving for China’s “fault.” Even in more benign rhetoric, medical supplies from China have been deemed shoddy and inadequate. Therefore, we also include India as another rising donor of foreign aid, who is on better diplomatic terms with the United States and unassociated with the virus’ origin. While referencing specific countries is inherently a bundled treatment, we can be more confident if aid provision elevates status in the same way for both countries.

We theorize about role reversals where aid behavior breaks from traditional patterns. Aid provided by long-time donors is unlikely to provide new information with which to update perceptions of status. We therefore include the United Kingdom as a third treatment country. The UK’s aid provision should act similarly to a placebo, not updating its international standing. Additionally, if respondents perceive US acceptance of aid from this western, allied donor as less of a cumulative deviation, they may be less likely to judge the US harshly.

Measuring ideational variables like status is challenging. This problem is exacerbated by the fact that status has been theorized and substantiated from multiple perspectives. Sociological, psychological and normative perspectives have emphasized an intrinsic understanding of status while realist and strategic account have focused on status’ instrumental qualities. While intrinsic and instrumental aspects may be intertwined in practice, we attempt to empirically distinguish between the two concepts. We therefore, advance the literature by using two separate outcome measures asking respondents to think about both how much respect and how much influence over world politics countries have. We understand respect as an intrinsic “recognition of status” (Dafoe *et al.*, 2014) and influence as an instrumental example

of deference. The wording of both questions is based on Carnegie & Dolan (2019),¹⁶ with the exception of differentiating status as “respect” and “influence.” We ask “How much respect do other countries have for the following countries?” and “How much influence do each of the following countries have over world politics?” We ask respondents to rank each country from 1 (least respected) to 100 (most respected). These questions prompt respondents to think about second-order opinions – not how they personally see the United States or other comparison countries, but how they think the United States and other countries are seen by others.

An additional innovation of our measure captures the positional importance of status. Status isn’t conferred in isolation, but in reference to a relevant comparison group. Therefore, regardless of which treatment respondents receive, they are asked about the respect and influence of five different countries: The United States, the United Kingdom, India, China and Germany. While the former four countries represent the recipient and randomized donors in our vignettes, we include the latter as a high-status anchor, which should mitigate ceiling effects and allow us to better understand if and how the ecosystem of international status is affected.

Results

Does aid provision increase the perceived status of new donor countries? Does aid acceptance decrease the perceived status of new recipient countries? While we find that respondents are generally supportive of accepting COVID specific aid,¹⁷ our initial observations suggest that the answer to questions of status depend whether status is conceptualized intrinsically or instrumentally. Figure 2 plots the distribution of our two outcome measures, respect and influence, aggregated across treatment conditions. The differences are stark, particularly for rising donors India and China. While the mean level of *perceived* respect for China was 40.7,

¹⁶Which relies heavily on the psychology literature. See Pettit & Lount (2010) and Pettit *et al.* (2013).

¹⁷See appendix X.

on a 1-100 scale, the mean *perceived* influence of China was 60.5. India demonstrates the opposite comparison garnering more respect than influence. Appendix X provides summary statistics on our outcome measures and concludes that the difference in means is significant for all five countries, although whether countries are more respected or influential varies. While we do not attempt to explain the psychological origin of this difference, we note that previous work on status has likely conflated its distinct elements. Our larger question remains how respect and/or influence are impacted by changes in the foreign aid landscape.

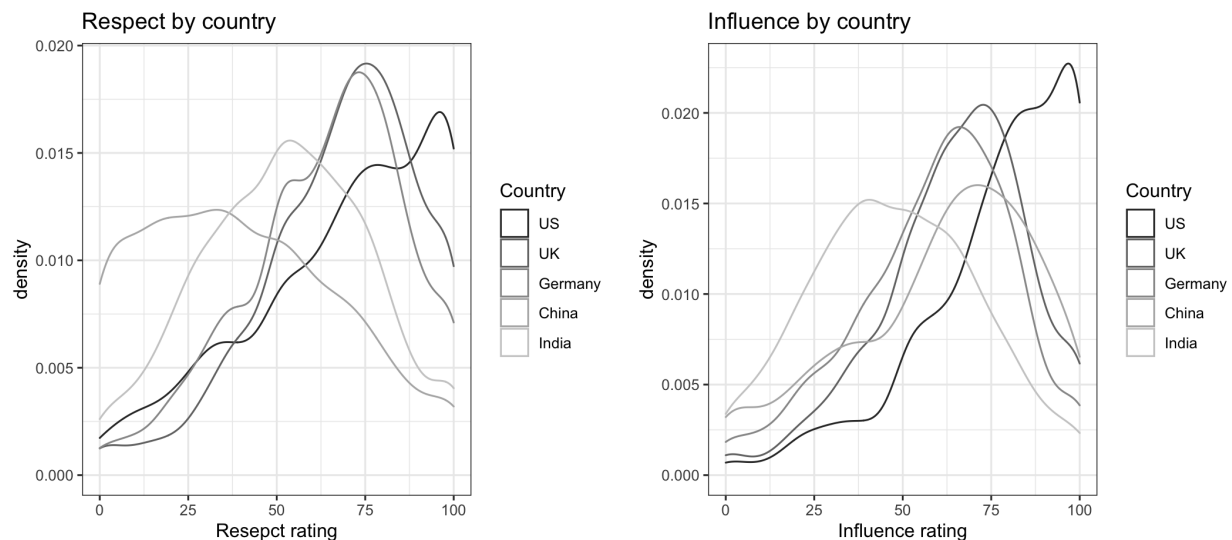


Figure 1: Density distributions of respect and influence by country

We turn first to our nominal results for respect and influence, with respondents' raw rankings, from 1-100, as our dependent variable. The main results are presented in Figure 3, which graphs the effect of each donor treatment (UK, China, India), along with their 95% confidence intervals, on all ranked countries.¹⁸ Results for respect are displayed on the left panel, and results for influence are displayed on the right. To better compare how the landscape of status moves, Figure 4 maps mean respect for all five countries in the control and China conditions. First, changes in aid behavior affect intrinsic conceptions of status more than instrumental conceptions. While the Indian and Chinese treatments produce significant changes in respect, they do not translate to influence. This suggests that not only

¹⁸Treatment only. Results including demographic controls are robust and included in Appendix X.

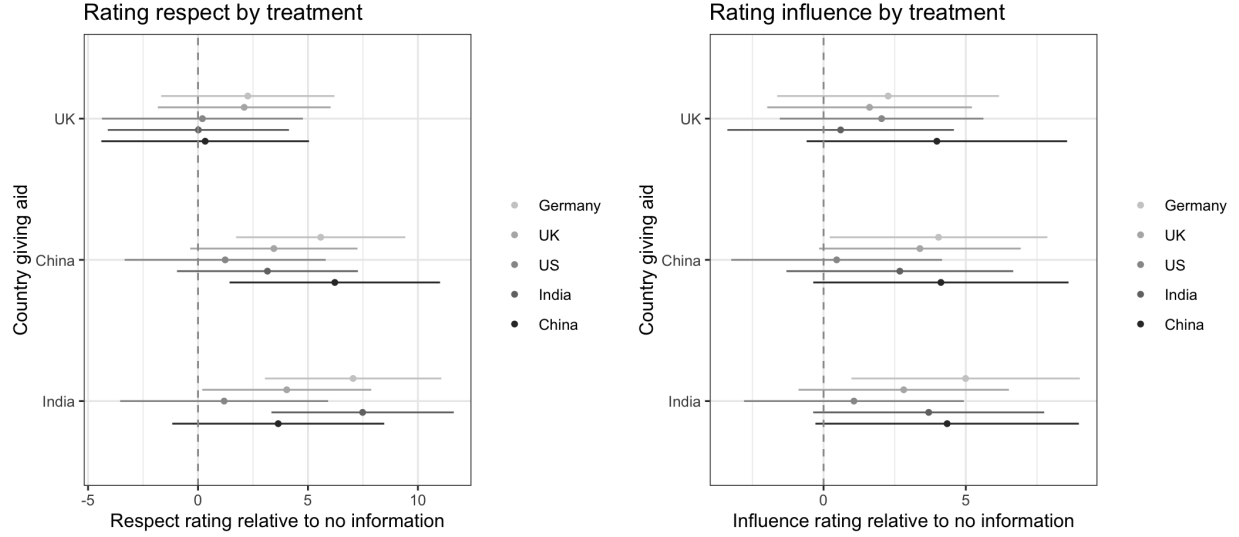


Figure 2: Coefficient with 95% confidence intervals
Estimated with ordinary least squares (OLS) regression and robust standard errors

are the concepts distinct, they are also differentially affected by changes in aid behavior. Psychological understandings are more easily updated, whereas strategic understandings are “sticker”; However, we do not investigate whether instrumental understandings would be affected by stronger treatments (i.e. larger aid packages).

Second, aid provision increases perceived respect for new donor countries. Receiving the Chinese treatment increases respect for China by approximately 6 points, relative to the no information control. Receiving the Indian treatment increases respect for India by more than 7 points. However, in further support of hypothesis 1, aid provided by the UK does not increase respect for the UK, most likely because the UK is not a new donor and this behavior does not deviate from the status quo hierarchy. Given strong nationalist, and particularly anti-China, sentiment in the US, the results are substantively large.

Third, receiving aid does not affect nominal perceptions of respect for the United States. Respect is not meaningfully changed by any of the treatments, although we hypothesized that effects would be more negative for the new and non-western donors like China and India.¹⁹ From a nominal perspective, there does not appear to be status repercussions of

¹⁹Appendix X further shows that there is no meaningful effect of providing additional information on the prior recipient status of China and India.

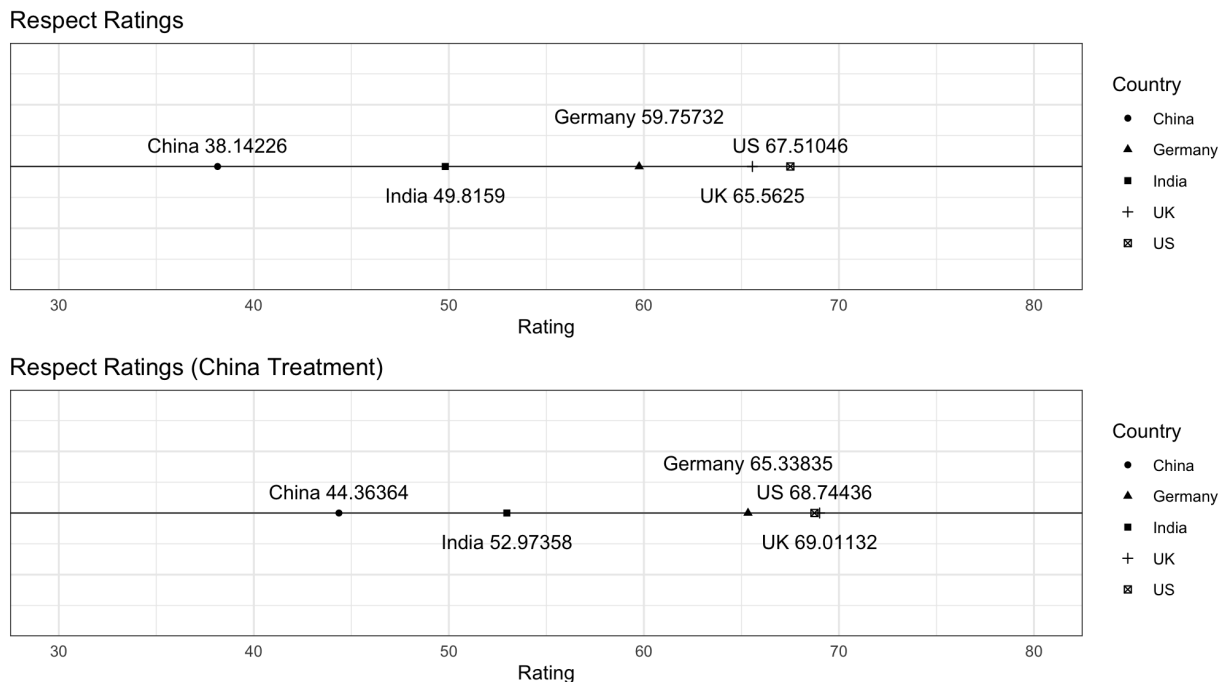


Figure 3: Average respect ratings, control group

accepting aid during a pandemic.

Finally, the German results provide important insights to nuance our expectations for hypothesis 5. If cognitive resistance leaves the status of third parties unchanged, the status of Germany should not change in response to treatment. Instead the *nominal* respect and influence of Germany increased in response to treatment. Aid provided by new donors not only effects their own status ranking, but also the respect and influence of third party countries who are outside the bilateral aid transaction. When China and India provide COVID-specific aid to the United States, American respondents increase their perceived respect for Germany. While the movement of Germany is not as large as the experimentally manipulated countries, the increase in respect is sizable, an increase of 5 in the Chinese condition and 7 in the Indian condition. In the Indian treatment, respondents also significantly increase their respect for the United Kingdom, although the link between the two countries may be tied to India's colonial history.

The results presented so far make clear that changes in aid behavior effect the larger

ecosystem of international hierarchy. If aid behavior that deviates from the status quo impacts third parties, then nominal rankings of respect and influence may obscure more meaningful comparative findings about position. Because status cannot be understood in isolation, the more important question is if nominal changes in respect are enough to upset the rank ordering of international prestige. The illustration in Figure 4 suggests not. Nominal increases in respect for new donors appear to be offset by status increases in third party countries.

To more precisely evaluate the positional relevance of status, we use new measures of comparative respect and influence, where we subtract the nominal ranking of our recipient (US) and manipulated donor countries (UK, India and China) from our high-status benchmark (Germany). None of the vignettes mentioned Germany and each respondent, regardless of treatment, ranked Germany in their responses. Asking respondents to rank a country that was not experimentally manipulated, allowed us to better understand how the treatment conditions move the ecosystem of status rankings. We are able to analyze both nominal perceptions of status, as well as in comparison to the German baseline. If status is indeed a zero-sum game, the treatment should impact the ranking of states outside the donor-recipient relationship. This allows us to determine if the status differential between new donors and long-standing donors diminishes and if the differential between new recipients and long-standing donors widens.

Figure 5 presents our second set of findings, replicating results by respect (left) and influence (right) using respondents' comparative ranking as our dependent variables. While the results are only significant for respect, the positional results differ from the previous findings in several important ways. First, while providing COVID-specific aid may provide a nominal increase in respect for new donors, it does not yield a comparative increase in respect. Relative to a high-status anchor, the Chinese and Indian treatments marginally increase respect for China and India respectively, but the effect is insignificant. Within the small sample of states respondents ranked, aid provision does not help new donors to

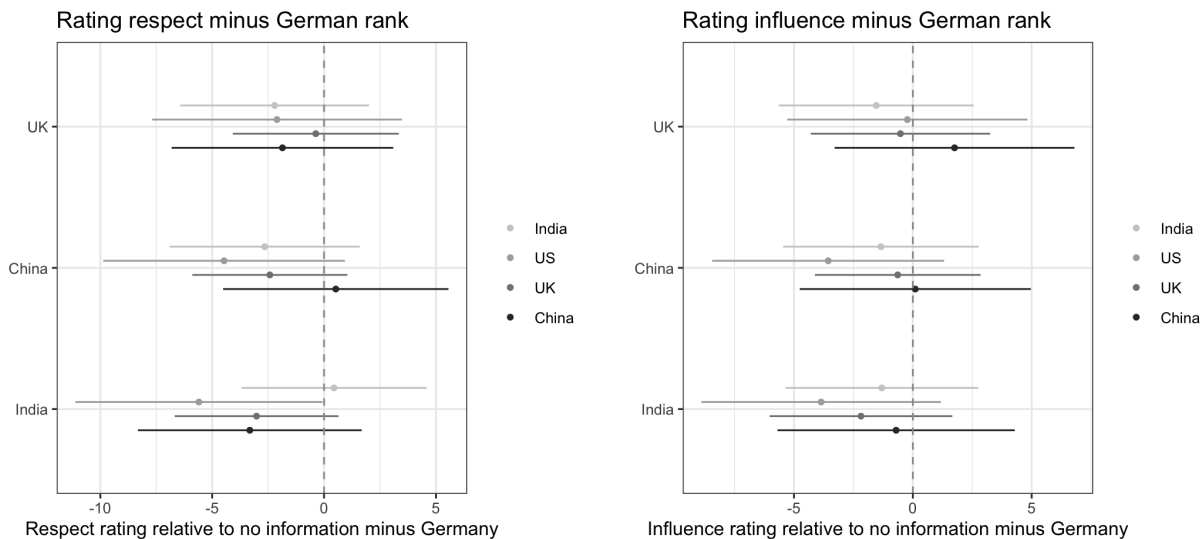


Figure 4: Coefficient with 95% confidence intervals
Estimated with ordinary least squares (OLS) regression and robust standard errors

improve their ordinal position. Instead, the discrepancies discrepancies between the nominal and comparative results support the idea updating status is a biased cognitive processes where in respondents hope to preserve their positional ranking by shifting their high status benchmarks.

Second, from a comparative perspective, receiving pandemic assistance does decrease the international respect of the United States as a donor-cum-recipient. Unlike the nominal results, this provides support for hypothesis 2. More importantly, in support of hypotheses 3 and 4, the United States experiences a significant decline when it accepts aid from India, a non-traditional donor who is itself still largely a recipient of foreign aid.²⁰ When aid is accepted from India, the differential between German and American respect widens by almost 6 points. The decline in respect is also significant at the 10% level when aid is accepted from China. Because the landscape of international status shifts upward, the maintenance of the US' nominal position equates to a comparative decline. As theorized, the acceptance of aid from the United Kingdom breaks fewer hierarchical norms and there is no significant impact on US respect.

²⁰The additional priming of India's former status as a recipient was insignificant.

While we do not report the main results here, we also investigate several heterogeneous treatment effects in Appendix X. As pre-registered, we expected respondents with greater exposure to COVID-19 to be more sensitive to treatment. To proxy for the salience of COVID-19 specific aid, we use respondents’ self-reported perceptions of their likelihood to contract the virus. We find that respondents who perceive themselves as more vulnerable to COVID-19 are more likely to attribute greater influence to China when the country offers aid to the US. Additionally, these respondents drive the increase in respect for Germany when China offers aid, driving the difference between comparative and nominal results. Those who are less concerned about their personal COVID-19 exposure, are less affected by our treatment, speaking to the importance of salience as a conditioning effect.

Given the isolationist rhetoric of Donald Trump, we expected Republicans and respondents with more nationalist tendencies to attribute less credit to India and China when they offer aid; Indeed, there is some evidence that Republicans punish India with less perceived influence when the country offers aid. However, there are no other clear effects. Nationalist respondents also perceive the US’s influence to increase when India offers aid but report no movement for China and India. Overall, there do not appear to be strong partisan or nationalist effects in our sample.

Conclusion

The rich literature on international status has largely remained divorced from political economy phenomenon. While international conflict is on the decline, the field has yet to explicitly theorize how aid behavior is status-conferring or denying. In this paper, we argue that foreign aid impacts status considerations because foreign aid donors are perceived as “superior” while foreign aid recipients are perceived as “inferior.” Donors are viewed as competent, able to convert their economic surplus into foreign policy deference. Recipients are understood to be less competent and less developed, having to surrender their autonomy for financial

assistance. While many aid transactions between long-time donors and long-time recipients perpetuate the status quo, recent decades have witnessed the diversification of the aid field. New non-western donor countries like China, India and Brazil have risen, challenging historical perceptions of what types of states belong to the donor class.

The context of COVID-19 provides a unique opportunity to evaluate the implications of role reversal on status in a real-world setting. The failure of the US to adequately address the pandemic with its domestic resources opened up a chance for non-traditional donors, such as Russia and China, to demonstrate their own generosity and relative strength by offering aid to the US in the form of medical supplies. We find that information about the aid offered to the US from former aid recipients causes individuals to update their intrinsic, or psychological, understanding of status for countries in and outside of the bilateral aid transaction. However, instrumental understandings of status as influence are “stickier.” We further show that foreign aid provision is nominally status boosting for new donors - although nominal gains are offset by the upwards movement of high-status benchmark states. Importantly, the changes in intrinsic measures of US status are only evident in the US’s comparative international standing: nominal respect scores for the US do not change but, as other states are rewarded for status-conferring actions, the *relative* status of the US is diminished.

Our findings advance work on status and suggest several future avenues for future research. First, our paper speaks to the challenges of measuring status and other ideational variables, which have been exacerbated by conflicting theoretical foundations. Our paper is one of few to approach status experimentally (Renshon, 2017; Renshon *et al.*, 2018; Carnegie & Dolan, 2019) and is also the first to our knowledge to separate status’ theoretical elements into distinct intrinsic and instrumental measures (respect and influence, respectively). While it is outside the scope of this paper to explain why and which respondents judge respect and influence differently, we stress the need to treat status as a multidimensional concept. The conflation of status’ psychological and strategic elements is also the most acute for develop-

ing countries (see Figure 1)—precisely those who are most likely to invest in status-changing behavior. While we focus on a single cleavage in the multiple potential interpretations of status we acknowledge that there are a plethora of alternative ways to disentangle the concept. As respondents are sensitive to ontological differences, mapping the landscape of status as a popular concept should be an important avenue of future work.

Our paper also advances the measurement of status in a second way, by explicitly capturing its positional nature. By utilizing both nominal and ordinal measures in a larger ecosystem of states, we highlight that studying questions of status or hierarchy in isolation hides important shifts that occur outside bilateral transactions. International status must be understood in the context of the international system. The comparison between nominal and ordinal measures also allows us to speak to the political psychology of how the mass public understands and updates status, which has remained an important gap in the literature. The fact that respondents adjust for nominal status improvements by shifting their comparative benchmark is supportive of confirmatory attribution bias. People assimilate new evidence to fit with their existing beliefs (Mercer, 1996) and future theoretical and empirical work should take benchmarking seriously (Frank, 1985), especially to the extent that biased cognitive processes help preserve the status quo.

At its heart, foreign aid is a trade-off between additional resources and foreign policy autonomy. The literature has routinely found that recipient incumbents are rewarded for securing foreign resources, whether or not they had a hand in its deliverance (Milner *et al.*, 2016; Findley *et al.*, 2017; Schneider & Cruz, 2017). Nor does accepting foreign aid necessary harm state legitimacy (Dietrich & Winters, 2015). This phenomenon of public approval for foreign aid is not isolated to developing countries; instead we show that even when high-income countries like the United States accept aid in emergency situations, citizens are generally supportive. More novel, citizens simultaneously recognize the tension between domestic reward and international costs. At the same time as they support aid acceptance, citizens view aid acceptance as a comparative downgrade in international status. This is an

important distinction whereby domestic and international legitimacy can pull in different directions. Because our information experiment is akin to the publicity of aid acceptance or provision, it implies that this tension might manifest in conflicts over aid transparency. Donor-cum-recipients might prefer to accept aid without making that information public, or muddle the clarity of aid provision as was the case with Russian medical supplies. Where the recipient of aid is public information, countries might also wish to obscure who the donor is if the donor deviates from status quo aid patterns. Recipients-cum-donors, on the other hand, would prefer to claim credit for their generosity and reap the benefits of status-conferring actions. While we point out this distinction, and how it applies to high-income states, we believe that future work would benefit from theorizing about this strategic interaction more explicitly.

Finally, we offer evidence that states need not wage war to change their status. The established literature on state reputation focuses on military force and prowess as a means to achieve change in the international system. We highlight the role of economic exchange as another indicator of status and demonstrate that even very weak attempts to change traditional status hierarchies can have effects on status relations. In our experiment, a single plane full of medical supplies increased China’s status relative to the US by 5%, without any reference to China’s military strength. Our results support the success of “soft power” initiatives on domestic conceptions of international status. Future research can and should explore the mechanisms through which this door stays open, the longevity of status effects, and circumstances under which initiatives may spark backlash.

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A Vignettes

The format of the treatment, including the description of the aid arriving in a cargo plane, is based on the real delivery of medical supplies to the United States from Russia. The vignette reflects actual foreign aid acceptance by the United States and provides a floor effect of this information on public opinion. Actual news articles from the New York Times and USAToday have much stronger language regarding the acceptance of aid by the US.

1. No information
2. LONDON - The British government announced that it would be sending a cargo plane full of medical supplies to the United States. The British aid is intended to help the US in its fight against the growing coronavirus pandemic.
3. DELHI - The Indian government announced that it would be sending a cargo plane full of medical supplies to the United States. The Indian aid is intended to help the US in its fight against the growing coronavirus pandemic.
4. BEIJING - The Chinese government announced that it would be sending a cargo plane full of medical supplies to the United States. The Chinese aid is intended to help the US in its fight against the growing coronavirus pandemic.
5. DELHI - The Indian government announced that it would be sending a cargo plane full of medical supplies to the United States. The Indian aid is intended to help the US in its fight against the growing coronavirus pandemic. India has been a long time recipient of US foreign aid, and remains a developing country.
6. BEIJING - The Chinese government announced that it would be sending a cargo plane full of medical supplies to the United States. The Chinese aid is intended to help the US in its fight against the growing coronavirus pandemic. China has been a long time recipient of US foreign aid, and remains a developing country.

B Outcome measures

Variable	Question text	Responses
Approval	To what extent do you agree or disagree with the US's decision to accept aid?	1 (strongly disagree) - 7 (strongly agree)
Future Acceptance	To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statement? The US should continue to accept foreign aid in the future.	1 (strongly disagree) - 7 (strongly agree)
Respect	<p>How much respect do other countries have for the following countries? Please rank each country from 1 (least respected) to 100 (most respected).</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • US • UK • China • India • Germany 	0 (least respected) - 100 (most respected)
Influence	<p>How much influence do each of the following countries have over world politics? Please rank each country from 1 (least influence) to 100 (most influence).</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • US • UK • China • India • Germany 	0 (least influence) - 100 (most influence)

C Balance tables

	China (N=363)		Control (N=375)		India (N=369)		UK (N=425)	
	Mean	Std. Dev.	Mean	Std. Dev.	Mean	Std. Dev.	Mean	Std. Dev.
Age	44.6	17.3	44.0	18.4	47.0	18.6	44.7	17.9
Female	0.6	0.5	0.5	0.5	0.5	0.5	0.5	0.5
Education (1-8)	4.0	2.0	4.3	2.0	4.4	2.0	4.3	2.1
Income (1-24)	8.0	7.2	7.6	6.5	7.8	6.6	8.2	6.9
Political Ideology (1-10)	3.9	1.7	4.0	1.6	4.1	1.8	4.0	1.8
Nationalism (1-15)	10.7	2.9	10.5	2.8	11.0	2.8	10.9	2.8
Political attention (1-5)	3.6	1.3	3.6	1.2	3.6	1.2	3.6	1.2

Figure 5: Covariate balance table

D Home Bias

As public opinion data shows, countries' own publics have consistent and positive ratings of their own favorability while international audiences may be more likely to shift their opinions over time. The following is from a Pew research poll that asks respondents in several different countries to rate their favorable perceptions of the US and China.²¹ Notably, the Chinese sample views China as more favorable and the American sample views the US as more favorable.

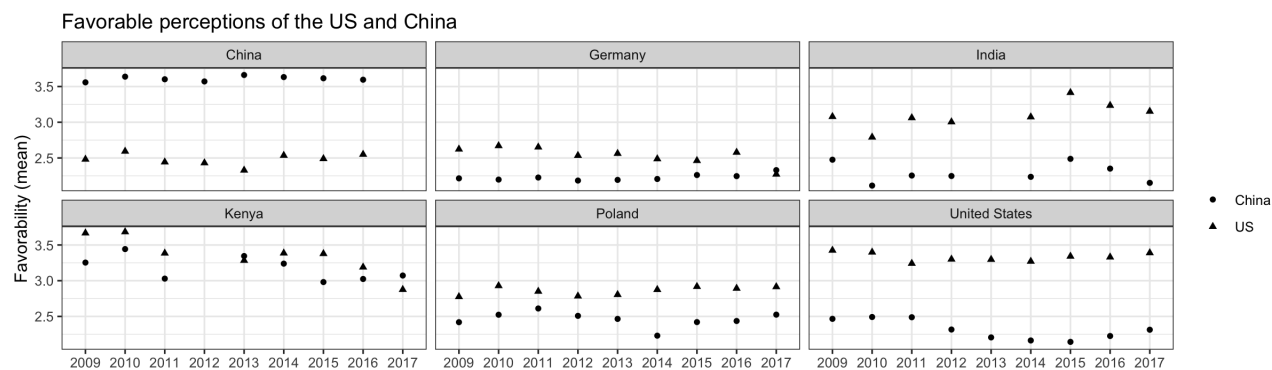


Figure 6: Favorable Perceptions of the US and China

²¹PEW Global Attitudes & Trends Datasets 2009-2017

E Comparing respect and influence

Table 1: Influence, Respect, and Difference between the two by Country

Country	Influence		Respect		Difference	
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
China	60.5	26.3	40.7	27.8	19.7	38.0
Germany	58.9	22.3	63.5	22.9	-4.30	32.4
India	47.5	23.7	52.5	24.2	-4.56	33.7
UK	64.7	20.9	68.0	22.1	-2.99	30.9
US	76.6	21.7	68.2	26.8	8.15	34.1

Difference between Influence and Respect Ratings

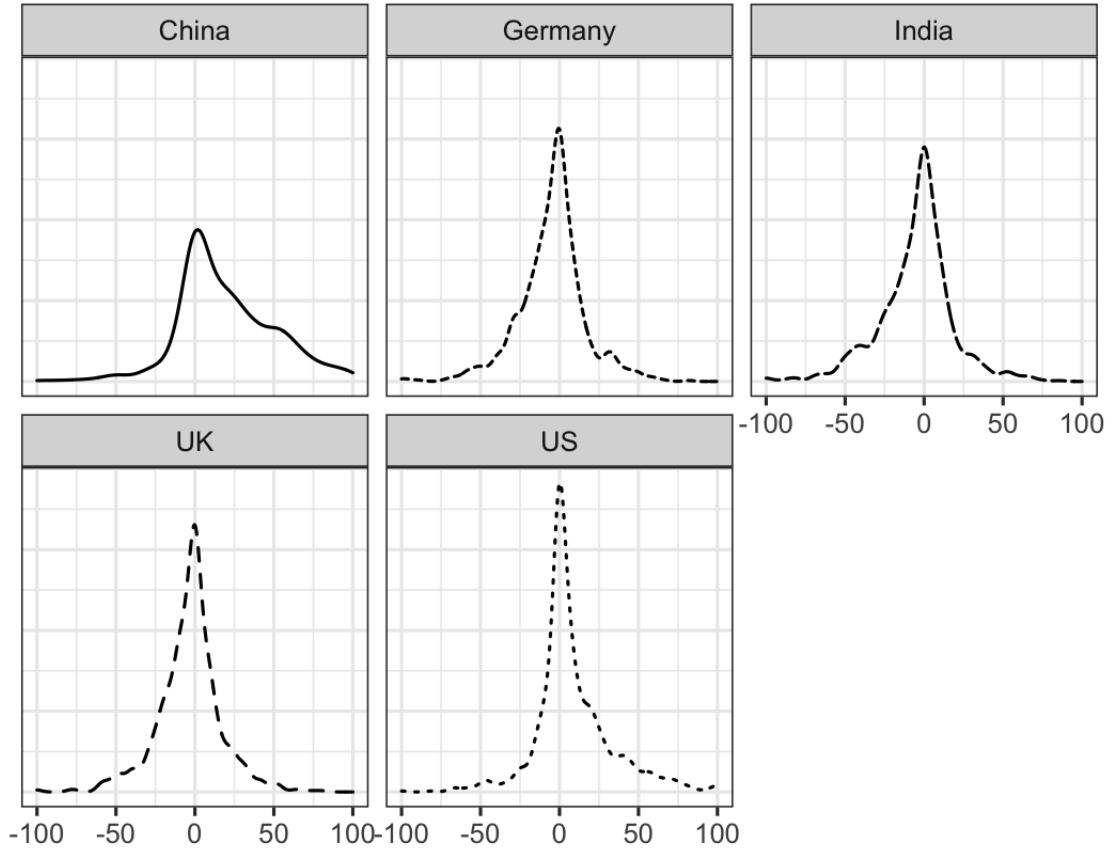


Figure 7: Density of difference between influence and respect rankings, by country

F Support for aid acceptance

We are also interested in citizens' general support for the US' acceptance of COVID-19 specific aid. In our pre-analysis plan we hypothesized that citizens support for aid acceptance would vary with the donors' identity. If US citizens are concerned about aid's status implications, they should be more supportive of aid from traditional donors than from new or non-western donors who are previous recipients. To investigate these alternative implications, we ask to what extent they agree or disagree with the US' decision to accept aid. We also ask whether the US should continue to accept foreign aid in the future. The results are presented below.

Because our outcome measure asks about support for a hypothetical decision, the question was not asked to the control group. Instead the first figure plots the mean level of agreement with the US' decision to accept aid by donor country. Citizens are most likely to support accepting aid from the United Kingdom, followed by India and China. While this matches our expectations, it is important to note that only the difference in support between the UK and China is significant. Even in the Chinese treatment, the mean level of support is positive and consistent with "somewhat agree."

The second figure presents respondents' support for the US' acceptance of future aid, this time relative to the no information control group. Once again, respondents are most willing to accept future aid from the United Kingdom; However, the differences between the country treatments are not significant. Additionally, all three treatments, including China, are significantly more supportive of aid than the control group. This implies that when the US accepts aid for COVID-19, from both traditional and new donors, citizens are more likely to support continued aid acceptance in the future.

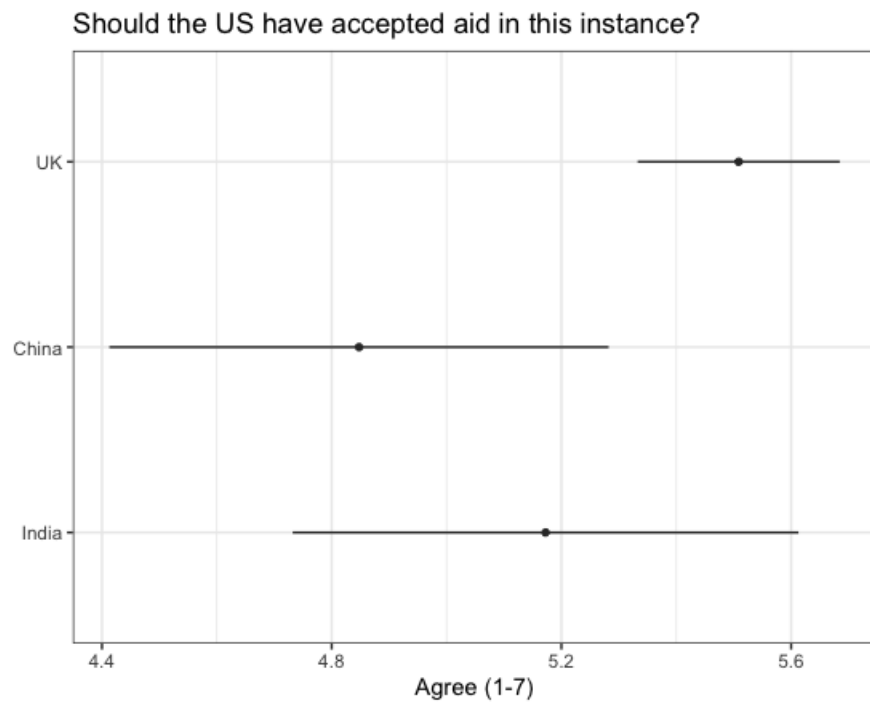


Figure 8: Aid acceptance by treatment condition

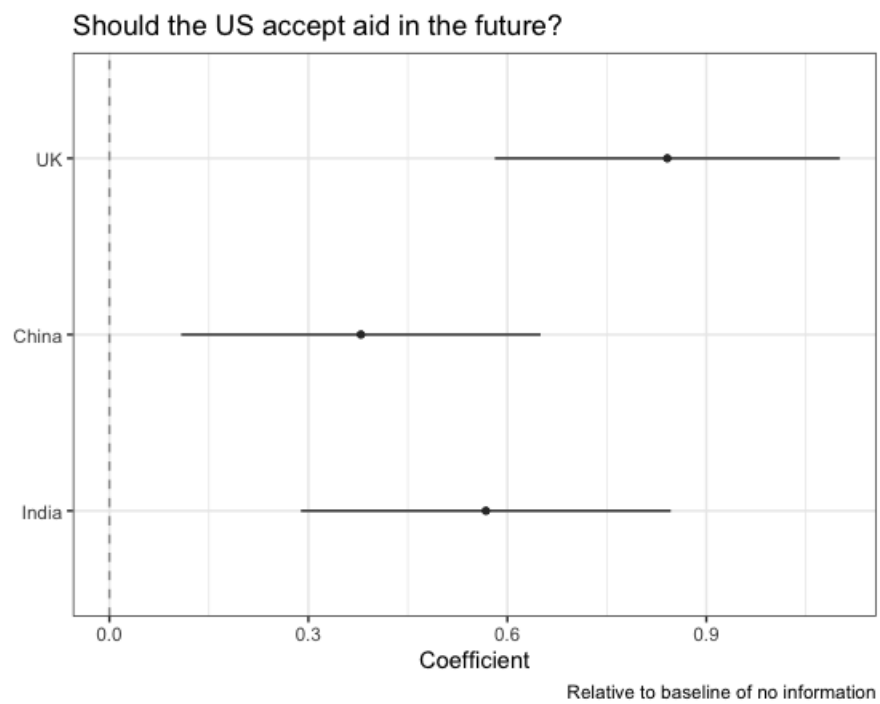


Figure 9: Aid acceptance in the future by treatment condition

G Treatment effects

All treatment effects of accepting aid

Model	Control		India			China			UK		
	Mean	SD	Coef	SE	P-val	Coef	SE	P-val	Coef	SE	P-val
India China UK Accept Aid (1-5) Accept Aid Future (1-5)	4.643	0.099	0.3248	0.139	0.020	4.847	0.096		0.324	0.139	0.000
China Influence (1 -100)	57.320	1.674	4.3432	2.362	0.065	4.124	2.288	0.071	4.343	2.362	0.081
India Influence (1 -100)	45.750	1.408	3.6953	2.071	0.074	2.680	2.033	0.187	3.695	2.071	0.767
US Influence (1 -100)	75.637	1.329	1.0679	1.970	0.587	0.460	1.889	0.807	1.067	1.970	0.263
UK Influence (1 -100)	62.737	1.311	2.8171	1.885	0.135	3.387	1.807	0.061	2.817	1.885	0.378
Germany Influence (1 -100)	56.000	1.463	4.9922	2.047	0.148	4.041	1.951	0.038	4.992	2.047	0.253
China Respect (1 -100)	38.142	1.728	3.6476	2.458	0.137	6.221	2.441	0.010	3.647	2.458	0.892
India Respect (1 -100)	49.815	1.482	7.4860	2.115	0.000	3.157	2.098	0.132	7.486	2.115	0.994
US Respect (1 -100)	67.510	1.684	1.1872	2.412	0.622	1.233	2.332	0.596	1.187	2.412	0.931
UK Respect (1 -100)	65.562	1.434	4.0351	1.960	0.039	3.448	1.940	0.075	4.035	1.960	0.294
Germany Respect (1 -100)	59.757	1.437	7.0527	2.046	0.000	5.581	1.962	0.004	7.052	2.046	0.259

All treatment effects of accepting aid with background covariates*

Model	Control		India			China			UK		
	Mean	SD	Coef	SE	P-val	Coef	SE	P-val	Coef	SE	P-val
Accept Aid (1-5)			0.304	0.138	0.028	4.844	0.295	0.000	0.651	0.129	0.000
Accept Aid Future (1-5)	5.431	0.259	0.626	0.138	0.000	0.447	0.135	0.000	0.865	0.131	0.000
China Influence (1 -100)	61.109	4.577	4.354	2.346	0.063	4.270	2.234	0.055	3.766	2.317	0.104
India Influence (1 -100)	55.744	3.995	3.802	2.071	0.066	2.997	2.005	0.134	0.210	2.004	0.916
US Influence (1 -100)	69.449	3.621	0.407	1.948	0.834	0.439	1.864	0.813	1.736	1.805	0.335
UK Influence (1 -100)	59.174	3.538	2.745	1.852	0.138	3.528	1.759	0.044	1.410	1.795	0.431
Germany Influence (1 -100)	53.356	3.793	4.979	1.987	0.012	4.255	1.905	0.025	2.218	1.951	0.255
China Respect (1 -100)	60.154	4.525	4.541	2.415	0.060	6.392	2.423	0.008	0.266	2.367	0.910
India Respect (1 -100)	53.715	4.011	7.661	2.117	0.000	3.522	2.092	0.092	-0.252	2.103	0.904
US Respect (1 -100)	61.856	4.315	0.159	2.315	0.945	1.039	2.280	0.648	-0.844	2.274	0.710
UK Respect (1 -100)	58.456	3.830	4.002	1.901	0.035	3.866	1.921	0.044	2.338	1.968	0.234
Germany Respect (1 -100)	59.148	3.889	7.341	2.021	0.000	5.894	1.929	0.002	2.165	1.978	0.273

*Background covariates: age, education, income, gender, ethnicity, political party, and political attention.

H Former recipient prime

Our experiment was designed to test public support for accepting aid and perceptions of the respect and influence of other countries. Hypotheses 3 theorized that when citizens are made aware that the donor state is a longtime recipient of foreign aid, the negative effects of aid acceptance for a donor-cum-recipient should be heightened. While previous donor or recipient status behavior might be bundled with specific country references, we included an additional experimental treatment, informing respondents of donors' past actions. We thus add the following phrase: "[Control/India/China] has been a long time recipient of US foreign aid, and remains a developing country." with half of the respondents in the Indian and Chinese conditions randomly receiving the prime. We chose not to add a former behavior prime for the United Kingdom in order to preserve external validity.

The following tables present our results.²² Priming respondents that India and China were former recipients had null effects on all of our outcome measures. We believe that the information that these countries are former aid recipients must be baked into respondents' understanding of the countries. The status prime, then, does not effect outcomes because the information is likely already present in respondents' conceptions of India and China. Unfortunately, we do not ask respondents about their preconceptions of India or China to further adjudicate these results.

	China	US	UK	India	Germany
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
Prime	0.828 (2.457)	0.149 (2.360)	1.518 (1.867)	2.874 (2.124)	0.756 (1.975)
N	521	524	521	520	524
R ²	0.0002	0.00001	0.001	0.004	0.0003

*p < .1; **p < .05; ***p < .01

OLS estimates with robust standard errors in parentheses.

Table 2: Respect rating by country and status prime

²²Treatment only. Results are robust to including demographic controls. Results available from the authors upon request.

	China	US	UK	India	Germany
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
Prime	2.915 (2.272)	-2.338 (1.970)	0.138 (1.837)	0.855 (2.106)	-0.374 (1.917)
N	521	523	521	521	523
R ²	0.003	0.003	0.00001	0.0003	0.0001

*p < .1; **p < .05; ***p < .01

OLS estimates with robust standard errors in parentheses.

Table 3: Influence rating by country and status prime

Table 4: Influence Rating by Country Treatment Minus German Benchmark

	China	US	UK	India
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Prime	3.257 (2.351)	-2.017 (2.303)	0.536 (1.773)	1.253 (2.104)
Observations	521	522	521	521
R ²	0.004	0.001	0.0002	0.001

*p < .1; **p < .05; ***p < .01

Note: *p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01

Table 5: Respect Rating by Country Treatment Minus German Benchmark

	China	US	UK	India
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
prime_treatprime	1.296 (2.592)	0.421 (2.763)	1.949 (2.033)	3.158 (2.356)
Observations	521	522	521	520
R ²	0.0005	0.00004	0.002	0.003

*p < .1; **p < .05; ***p < .01

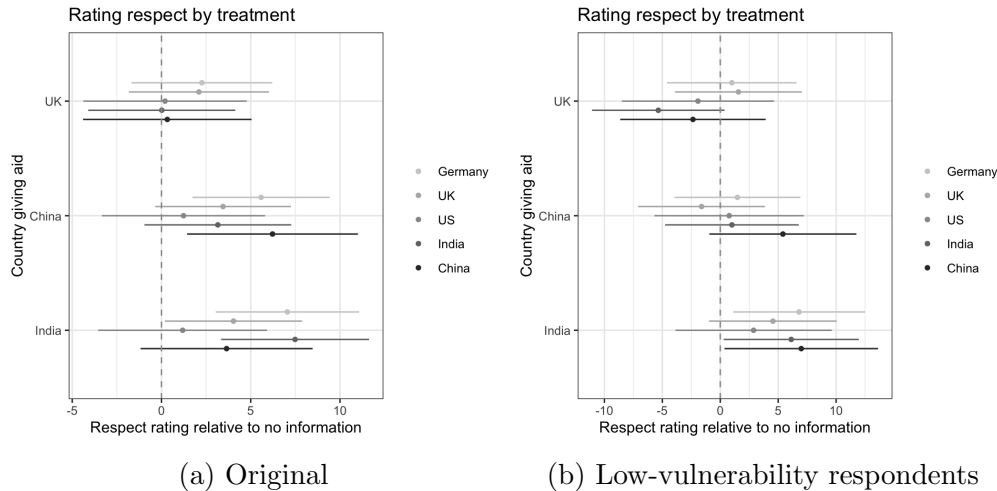
Note: *p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01

I Heterogeneous effects

We also pre-registered several heterogeneous treatment effects, which we investigate here. First, we hypothesized that Republicans would be less accepting of foreign aid from new, non-western donors, and would be less willing to elevate their international status. While the isolationist and anti-China rhetoric from the Republican party, and particularly from President Trump, would support our theoretical intuition, we do not find strong support for partisan effects. Republicans are less willing than democrats to increase India’s influence when they provide COVID-specific aid, but there are no underlying partisan patterns.

Second, we also investigate the role of nationalism, using a three item index.²³ While we expect that more nationalistic individuals will have a stronger preference for the status quo hierarchy, even in light of new information about COVID-19 aid acceptance, we fail to find systematic support. There is some evidence of a heterogeneous effect when the US accepts aid from India, but no additional patterns appear.

Finally, we are interested in the importance of political salience as a conditioning effect of aid on status. The acceptance of foreign aid should be highly salient where need is high, and less salient – and less likely to elicit status effects – where need for international assistance is low. We originally hypothesized that respondents in communities with higher COVID-19 cases and deaths would be more supportive of aid and more likely to update their perceptions of status; However, at the same time that US cases have risen, the Trump administration has increasingly downplayed the virus’ impact and the news media has decreased coverage. We therefore believe that the importance of the Coronavirus is best assessed at the individual level. We test for conditional effects of salience using respondents’ self reported likelihood of contact with COVID-19.



We find that respondents with lower perceptions of their personal vulnerability to the virus show lower support for aid, and particularly future aid, acceptance. Low vulnerability individuals are also less likely to reward new donors with a higher status. While we cannot

²³Respondents were asked whether they agreed or disagreed with the following statements: 1) The US is a better country than most, 2) You should support your country even when it is wrong, 3) I prefer to be an American citizen. Responses ranged from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (5).

speak specifically to the longevity of status effects, these results highlight the importance of salience, which has previously played an important role in the disaster aid literature. In a follow up study conducted approximately a month after our original sample, support for aid acceptance had already decreased, approximating that of low exposure (low salience) individuals in the main study.²⁴ The resurgence of the Black Lives Matter movement and citizens' general wariness to continue COVID-19 precautions in the long term, may suggest that the receipt of foreign assistance had only a small window of political salience.

²⁴Results available from the authors upon request.

Party

	Respect				Influence					
	China	India	US	UK	Germany	China	India	US	UK	Germany
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)	(10)
China	8.257** (4.143)	6.224* (3.585)	1.379 (4.125)	5.923* (3.365)	9.507*** (3.384)	6.817* (3.863)	5.369 (3.408)	2.639 (3.376)	4.197 (3.216)	6.477* (3.450)
India	5.711 (4.238)	12.074*** (3.859)	-0.453 (4.500)	8.806** (3.434)	10.032*** (3.667)	2.631 (4.138)	11.504*** (3.704)	1.500 (3.791)	5.217 (3.446)	8.574** (3.686)
UK	7.649* (4.284)	4.695 (3.725)	2.160 (4.133)	9.654*** (3.447)	8.284** (3.467)	2.132 (3.920)	5.180 (3.538)	3.782 (3.326)	3.717 (3.228)	4.044 (3.508)
Republican	-0.558 (0.528)	0.392 (0.460)	1.721*** (0.449)	0.506 (0.416)	0.086 (0.416)	-0.406 (0.487)	0.731* (0.442)	1.433*** (0.355)	0.171 (0.362)	-0.079 (0.434)
China*Republican	-0.368 (0.711)	-0.617 (0.612)	-0.130 (0.621)	-0.509 (0.541)	-0.766 (0.550)	-0.501 (0.653)	-0.563 (0.593)	-0.502 (0.498)	-0.167 (0.490)	-0.469 (0.561)
India*Republican	-0.306 (0.706)	-0.877 (0.621)	0.092 (0.658)	-0.923* (0.551)	-0.548 (0.576)	0.358 (0.674)	-1.503** (0.617)	-0.247 (0.535)	-0.456 (0.523)	-0.639 (0.589)
UK*Republican	-1.383* (0.706)	-0.927 (0.628)	-0.490 (0.615)	-1.487** (0.584)	-1.167** (0.575)	0.382 (0.674)	-0.930 (0.613)	-0.429 (0.496)	-0.417 (0.509)	-0.336 (0.577)
N	1,040	1,038	1,046	1,043	1,044	1,042	1,041	1,045	1,041	1,045
R ²	0.033	0.020	0.046	0.014	0.026	0.009	0.010	0.037	0.005	0.013

*p < .1; **p < .05; ***p < .01

OLS estimates with robust standard errors in parentheses.

Nationalism

	Respect				Influence					
	China	India	US	UK	Germany	China	India	US	UK	Germany
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)	(10)
China	4.332 (10.380)	7.506 (8.829)	7.055 (9.783)	9.228 (8.419)	7.608 (8.041)	-0.931 (8.663)	5.807 (8.853)	1.024 (8.108)	4.979 (8.135)	17.803** (8.248)
India	8.463 (10.585)	15.330* (8.877)	-0.883 (10.902)	7.246 (8.875)	5.180 (8.944)	1.326 (9.768)	7.057 (9.333)	-17.255** (8.599)	-6.966 (8.791)	2.257 (9.265)
UK	-8.905 (9.929)	-0.431 (8.752)	-12.053 (9.623)	2.199 (8.625)	-3.688 (8.759)	-9.321 (8.965)	0.015 (8.583)	-3.067 (7.624)	0.299 (8.151)	3.024 (8.560)
Nationalist	-1.176* (0.661)	0.694 (0.564)	3.293*** (0.629)	1.687*** (0.547)	0.012 (0.581)	-0.817 (0.549)	0.770 (0.538)	1.659*** (0.469)	0.533 (0.534)	0.688 (0.570)
China*Nationalist	0.175 (0.954)	-0.401 (0.808)	-0.564 (0.859)	-0.541 (0.747)	-0.202 (0.736)	0.480 (0.787)	-0.289 (0.795)	-0.088 (0.696)	-0.147 (0.724)	-1.311* (0.738)
India*Nationalist	-0.391 (0.955)	-0.726 (0.801)	0.052 (0.933)	-0.351 (0.776)	0.156 (0.796)	0.309 (0.866)	-0.328 (0.825)	1.557** (0.717)	0.864 (0.765)	0.197 (0.819)
UK*Nationalist	0.868 (0.904)	0.036 (0.790)	1.067 (0.825)	-0.036 (0.765)	0.535 (0.783)	1.244 (0.815)	0.044 (0.771)	0.412 (0.641)	0.114 (0.726)	-0.104 (0.764)
N	1,039	1,037	1,045	1,042	1,043	1,041	1,040	1,044	1,040	1,044
R ²	0.020	0.020	0.133	0.039	0.015	0.008	0.010	0.083	0.016	0.014

*p < .1; **p < .05; ***p < .01

OLS estimates with robust standard errors in parentheses.

COVID-19 Exposure

	Respect				Influence					
	China	India	US	UK	Germany	China	India	US	UK	Germany
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)	(10)
China	5.405* (3.230)	1.005 (2.935)	0.765 (3.283)	-1.614 (2.794)	1.479 (2.769)	-1.192 (3.236)	-2.023 (2.758)	-1.854 (2.596)	3.565 (2.621)	3.967 (2.706)
India	6.991** (3.375)	6.126** (2.972)	2.876 (3.434)	4.544 (2.803)	6.804** (2.896)	6.289* (3.317)	1.555 (2.866)	0.113 (2.695)	5.684** (2.599)	6.401** (2.878)
UK	-2.357 (3.195)	-5.349* (2.913)	-1.925 (3.344)	1.567 (2.790)	1.001 (2.847)	-2.524 (3.403)	-4.824* (2.787)	1.529 (2.408)	3.408 (2.660)	2.238 (2.800)
COVID19	8.349** (3.421)	-0.426 (2.969)	-1.326 (3.385)	0.197 (2.847)	-0.632 (2.888)	0.435 (3.358)	0.464 (2.826)	-3.867 (2.641)	3.743 (2.629)	2.947 (2.920)
China*COVID19	1.820 (4.830)	3.890 (4.206)	0.515 (4.684)	9.550** (3.820)	7.965** (3.917)	10.457** (4.543)	9.409** (4.044)	4.568 (3.777)	-0.202 (3.625)	-0.164 (3.915)
India*COVID19	-6.227 (4.897)	2.561 (4.244)	-3.461 (4.838)	-1.398 (3.911)	0.472 (4.112)	-3.749 (4.722)	4.270 (4.141)	1.867 (3.936)	-5.617 (3.781)	-3.026 (4.100)
UK*COVID19	5.779 (4.729)	11.235*** (4.166)	4.401 (4.690)	1.073 (3.978)	3.021 (4.027)	13.412*** (4.594)	11.643*** (4.009)	1.212 (3.645)	-2.766 (3.656)	0.236 (3.958)
N	1,034	1,032	1,039	1,037	1,038	1,036	1,036	1,039	1,036	1,038
R ²	0.040	0.030	0.003	0.017	0.021	0.035	0.035	0.005	0.008	0.010

*p < .1; **p < .05; ***p < .01

OLS estimates with robust standard errors in parentheses.

J Heterogenous effects by respondent race

We draw attention to the heterogenous treatment effects for respondents of different ethnicities. Our sample include roughly 1100 white respondents, 200 Black respondents, and 1-20 respondents of all other ethnicities (roughly 150 respondents declined to answer the question). The relationship between race and status in the United States, especially the connection between threat of status reversal and white supremacist beliefs and violence, is worth exploring in more detail at the international level.

We find, with our limited sample, that white respondents are much less likely to change the order in which states are ranked as a result of treatment than Black respondents. First, white respondents do not decrease their respect for the US in response to hearing that the country received aid. Black respondents lower their opinion of the US in response to information that the US receives aid from India.

Second, both Black and white respondents artificially inflate the status ratings of states uninvolved in status-changing activities, but white respondents do so within the bounds of the exiting status quo. In other words, white respondents increase the amount of respect attributed to European countries as well as India or China when India or China gives aid to the US, maintaining the same relative position of each country despite the status-altering actions of India and China. In contrast, Black respondents demonstrate willingness to change the status quo in response to information about status-altering activities.

We should note that attributing additional respect to nations uninvolved with the interaction is not necessarily irrational. For example, an interaction in which the US receives aid from China could boost China's levels of respect. Absent information about, say, Germany, it is unclear whether the absolute relationship (difference in respect rating) between Germany and China should be changed by this interaction. Therefore, a respondent may not be updating their beliefs about Germany when Germany is attributed a higher ranking in this scenario. Rather, the respondent may have changed the value of respect for Germany precisely because they received no additional information about Germany's role in the status-altering event.

What we want to draw attention to here, instead, is how this attribution of additional respect varies by ethnicity. Black respondents, for example, increase the amount of respect attributed to Germany in response to the information that India gave aid to the US, though Germany played no role in the transaction. This group of respondents also decreased the respect attributed to the US in this treatment condition. These two actions reversed the relative standing of the US and Germany. White respondents given the same information actually increase the respect rating of the US and do not make any changes to the ordered ranking of states.

As Figure 11 demonstrates, Black respondents are willing to reverse states' positions in the international hierarchy as a result of information about status-altering events. White respondents are not.

Table 6: International respect ratings

<i>Dependent variable:</i>					
How respected are each of the following countries? (0-100)					
	US	Germany	UK	India	China
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
China	-6.051 (7.012)	5.854 (6.195)	4.221 (5.868)	6.069 (6.547)	12.526* (6.840)
India	-15.509* (8.477)	15.240** (7.605)	7.960 (7.009)	4.922 (7.327)	9.000 (8.248)
UK	5.903 (7.104)	1.200 (6.792)	2.339 (6.875)	7.405 (6.895)	3.490 (7.238)
White	2.970 (6.031)	9.038* (5.642)	9.312* (5.295)	2.250 (5.433)	-8.772 (5.908)
China*White	7.968 (7.518)	0.180 (6.578)	-1.724 (6.266)	-3.916 (6.984)	-8.988 (7.400)
India*White	18.017** (8.910)	-9.509 (7.940)	-4.976 (7.341)	2.334 (7.700)	-8.088 (8.686)
UK*White	-6.541 (7.592)	1.642 (7.150)	-0.846 (7.226)	-9.640 (7.284)	-6.018 (7.737)
Constant	65.240*** (5.713)	52.200*** (5.420)	58.320*** (5.052)	48.120*** (5.179)	45.960*** (5.388)
Observations	899	896	896	892	893
R ²	0.022	0.032	0.019	0.020	0.045
Adjusted R ²	0.015	0.024	0.011	0.012	0.038

Note:

*p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01

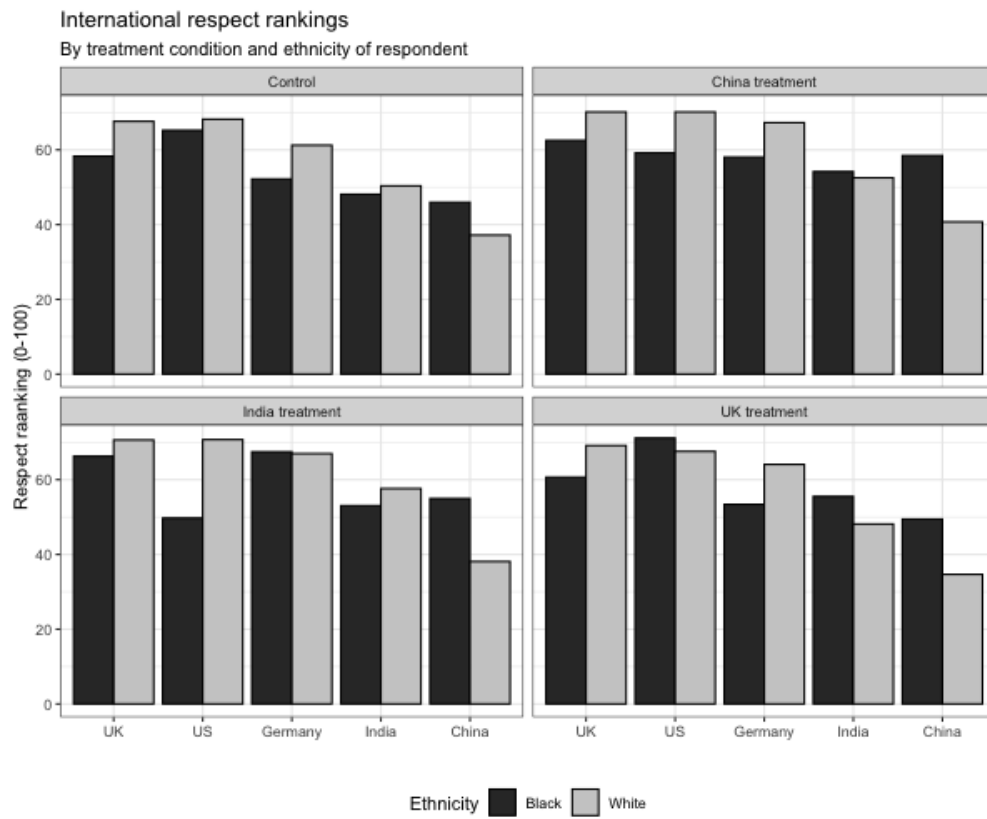


Figure 11