

International status: Concept meets measurement

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Abstract

The study of international status has focused on how status motivates state behavior; status-seeking states may be more prone to conflict, may invest in greater innovation, or promote humanitarian values across the globe. However, we posit that observed variation in the empirical status literature may be a function of divergent definitions of international status and imprecisely-operationalized theoretical status concepts. We propose several changes that both clarify the existing literature and expand our understanding of international status dynamics. First, we develop a theory of relational status changes between states that incorporates status' social and positional qualities. We then explore the implications of relational status for international hierarchies. Status is not conferred in a vacuum and the status of third-party states may change when other states engage in status-changing activities. We test these methodological and theoretical innovations using two original survey experiments and three reanalyses of existing survey experiments across multiple issue areas. Our results demonstrate how focusing on any single definition of status may blind observers to changes along other dimensions and fundamentally alter the conclusions drawn about status-changing activity.

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1 Introduction

Political scientists agree that status is a key feature of international politics, serving as both a means and an end to states' political objectives. As such, politicians and their citizens are “plainly obsessed with investing in, seizing, and defending” their international status because it provides social, material, and psychological benefits (Renshon, 2017, 1). The desire for states to elevate their status in the eyes of domestic and foreign publics constrains key foreign policy decisions (Goldsmith & Horiuchi, 2012; Powers & Renshon, 2021; Viskupić, 2020). Status drives states to invest in status-enhancing actions like acquiring nuclear weapons, joining international organizations, and hosting the Olympics (Hafner-Burton & Montgomery, 2006; Larson & Shevchenko, 2010).

While status matters, its precise definition is contested. One common feature among competing definitions is that status is relational. States maintain a position within an international hierarchy that is comprised of multiple actors. Therefore, a change in one actor's status can lead to a change in “at least one other actor's status” (Renshon *et al.*, 2018, 375). If an event destabilizes perceptions of status for one party in an international transaction, it should also impact the status of the second party by comparison. The same transaction might also have ripple effects across third-parties in the larger international ecosystem when the identity or meaning of groups change (Brooks *et al.*, 2015; Gray, 2013). Yet, experimental work to date has only tested status as an attribute of single states, finding that when states engage in status-enhancing activities, their individual status *might* rise (Carnegie & Dolan, 2020; Dreher *et al.*, 2020; Powers & Renshon, 2021). We argue that discrepancies in the definition and operationalization of international status may affect the conclusions we draw about the role of international status in motivating state behavior. The current literature examines states' international status in isolation; this obscures crucial bilateral and multilateral status relations between states that affect their willingness and ability to engage in status-seeking activities.

We demonstrate the importance of matching concept to measurement in several ways. First, in a survey of the experimental status literature, we highlight how different definitions

of status lead to different measurement choices which, in turn, drive mixed results for the effects of status-changing activities. We follow by clarifying the concepts of *individual* and *relational* status and extend existing theory to explain how status-changing events can affect the status of acting, transacting, and third-party states simultaneously. We then propose methodological innovations in status measurement that are better attuned to capturing status as a multidimensional concept with individual and relational implications. We offer a final theoretical and methodological contribution by analyzing relational status for multiple actors in the international arena.

In line with recent literature, and given the socially-constructed nature of status, we focus on public understandings of international status. We theorize and test cases where we are most likely to simultaneously witness the public updating their beliefs about states in isolation, in relation to each other, and in relation to third-parties. Specifically, we demonstrate the tension between status as an individual-level attribute and a relational-level attribute using the case of foreign aid. While most aid relationships tend to reinforce existing hierarchies, a burgeoning literature has demonstrated the use of foreign aid as a tool to disrupt these hierarchies and increase status, particularly for rising powers (Asmus *et al.*, 2021; Dreher *et al.*, 2020; Eichenauer *et al.*, 2021; Jones, 2018; Mattingly & Sundquist, 2021). Donor states are viewed with “superiority and power” (Kuusik, 2006, 57), whereas recipients of foreign aid are perceived as less developed and less powerful (Carnegie & Dolan, 2020). Therefore, advancement (regression) from a country that receives (donates) foreign aid to one that donates (receives) foreign aid increases (decreases) a nation’s international standing. Serbian president Aleksandar Vučić illustrates this point in a recent statement that “China moved from a developing country receiving international aid to a superpower” (N1 Belgrade, 2021).

Building on a real-world example of changing aid activity, we evaluate the effects of aid relationships on international status in an online information experiment that accounts for the multidimensional nature of status perceptions. We find that aid activity affects respondents’ perceptions of international respect; however, it does not affect their evaluation

of international influence. In line with our expectations, we also establish that individual and relational status are empirically distinct. Donors are rewarded with *individual* gains in respect while the *individual* respect of recipients is unchanged. Aid recipients do lose standing *in relation* to the aid donor, but their status does not decrease substantially enough to reverse the ranks of the two states. Strikingly, third-party states (outside the aid transaction) also experience an increase in their *individual* and *relational* status in comparison to recipients. These shifts affect the distance between states but are too small to upset status rankings in our facsimile of an international system. Despite interval-level changes in individual and relational status, hierarchical ordering does not change for donors, recipients, or third-parties. To our knowledge, this is the first empirical test of how and if status-changing actions affect other states in the international community.

To conclude, we test the bounds of our methodological contribution by replicating our results in a separate sample and in a second issue area – election monitoring. We also reanalyze three existing studies on status and foreign aid (Carnegie & Dolan, 2020; Dietrich *et al.*, 2018; Mattingly & Sundquist, 2021) to further validate our measurements in non-US samples. These replications and reanalyses demonstrate that our framework provides analytically-useful distinctions between individual and relational status. They also provide additional evidence of the ripple effects of status-changing events in third-party states.

Our results have several implications for how we understand status change. First, we address an important disjuncture in the literature by theoretically developing the distinction between individual and relational status. While these attributes have long been a part of status definitions, this paper is the first, to our knowledge, to explicitly enumerate how we can observe status changes in multiple ways. We also broaden the scope of status implications to theorize about how third-parties might be affected at both the individual and relational level. We pair these theoretical innovations with a methodological one. By measuring status as simultaneously individual and relational, we match status concepts to appropriate empirical measurements. Our findings suggest that status-changing events affect status for states across the international ecosystem. Second, we disaggregate the common dimensions

of status into two broad component parts: intrinsic and instrumental (proxied by the terms *respect* and *influence*). By measuring status along these two dimensions, we test how different popular conceptions of status may respond differentially to the same status-changing events. We find evidence that status is not a monolithic concept; respect is more easily manipulated by symbolic status-altering events than influence. Finally, this paper contributes to a growing body of literature that shows status is not only driven by security considerations (Brutger & Rathbun, Forthcoming; Carnegie & Dolan, 2020; Duque & Houser, 2021; Powers & Renshon, 2021). By fielding the study in the issue area of foreign aid and replicating it in election-monitoring, we further demonstrate the broad range of status-changing venues available to states.

2 Status (In)stability in the International System

Status matters for states; however, political scientists disagree on how to define the concept. A universal definition remains elusive in part due to status' conflation with other ideas like honor, reputation and credibility. While all of these concepts are related to the perception of actors in the international system, status is separated by its positional and social qualities. For example, reputation is a belief about an actor's traits, such as their resolve, informed by their past behavior (Dafoe *et al.*, 2014; Jervis, 1989; Schelling, 1960). Reputations are essential to assessing credibility (Renshon *et al.*, 2018). Similarly, honor refers to beliefs about the virtue of another actor (Renshon, 2017). None of these concepts imply a pecking order.

Status, on the other hand, is a function of mutual recognition. We consider status a second-order belief about what others believe the standing of a state is in relation to a comparison group (Dafoe *et al.*, 2014). Therefore, status must be granted by an external audience. In a globalized world, it comes from the general international community of elite and mass actors, who often share foreign policy preferences (Kertzer, 2020). As Carnegie & Dolan (2020, 498) state, "a country cannot improve its status only by earning heads of states'

approval;” rather, it is a “consensus concept” that must be echoed by the broader international public. Previous research finds that the mass public both values status and is capable of evaluating the implications of status-enhancing actions (Huberman *et al.*, 2004; Frank, 1985).¹ Therefore, the second-order nature of status implies that the status perceptions of domestic and foreign publics are integral in conferring status at the state-level.

There is broad agreement that status conveys a state’s position vis-a-vis a comparison group. It can be defined as “standing, or rank, in a status community” (Renshon, 2017, 4). Based on this definition, status can imply identity (i.e. membership in a group like major powers) and can be rank-based (i.e. position in a hierarchy), in which actors of lower standing defer to the interests of actors with higher standing (Pratt, 2018). Where status is conceptualized as identity-based, granted through membership in high-status organizations, states may be satisfied sharing the same status value as others so long as the relevant comparison is between members and nonmembers (Murray, 2019; Larson & Shevchenko, 2010). Where status is conceptualized as comparative standing, it has a zero-sum quality. If the status value of a group is fixed, additional members can dilute or change the value associated with it (Renshon, 2017).²

Finally, both publics and political scientists recognize status as a multi-dimensional concept (Larson & Shevchenko, 2010; Powers & Renshon, 2021). While there is agreement that states value status, the benefits of status can be intrinsic (status for status’ sake), instrumental, or a combination of both. Psychological and constructivist perspectives argue that status can provide intrinsic benefits which inflate self-importance and give governments “a sense of belonging” (Kelley, 2017, 39). In rational-strategic theories, status provides instrumental benefits where deference yields material benefits such as FDI or trade concessions (Tomz, 2012).³

¹Even when the public is ill-informed about foreign policy, Powers & Renshon (2021) argue that status is visible to voters because status competition is innate to social life and high-profile when it occurs between states.

²According to Rathbun *et al.* (2021), pure status-seeking is about the quest for exclusivity and may imply jockeying for higher ranks within membership communities.

³Wolf (2021) recognizes a similar distinction between his definition of prestige (i.e. social esteem that comes from collective recognition) and role status (i.e. patterns of deference). Stereotype-content models,

Given definitional disagreements, we conduct a survey of the experimental status literature to better understand how scholars have previously conceptualized and measured status as an outcome variable. A description of the survey, based on 15 different treatments across seven papers with 25 different measures of status, is available in Appendix A.1 . We present a visual representation of the literature by outcome category (Figure 1) and emphasize three points. First, while many scholars define status relationally, experimental designs only capture changes in status for a single state. Only three designs, Mattingly & Sundquist (2021), Carnegie & Dolan (2020), and Dietrich *et al.* (2018), measure outcomes for two or more states.⁴ However, even these works do not integrate the relative difference *between* state status, which we show in Section 6.3 leads to systematic misestimation of the overall effects of status-changing activity. Second, outcome measures reference different dimensions of status. While some invoke status directly, others ask about influence, power, prestige, or approval (see Appendix A.1 for examples of outcome questions in these categories). For simplicity, we group these into two broad categories, respect and influence, which map onto the theoretical dimensions of intrinsic and instrumental status respectively. Finally, we find that 44% of the studies in our meta-analysis report significant results; this proportion rises to 54% when considering only respect-related status outcomes.

Together, this suggests that there is a lack of both consensus in and congruence among status definitions and measurements. The variety of status outcome questions in the existing literature suggest that authors may not be measuring the same concept when contributing to discussions on status (Slough & Tyson, n.d.). How we define status is likely to affect the answers we get (Kramon & Posner, 2013) and if previous work is talking past each other, this makes it difficult to ascertain whether mixed results are the result of theoretical shortcomings or divergence in measurement. The strong prevalence of null effects across status experiments points to the need for a better understanding of when, for whom, and on

common in the psychology literature, similarly find that the most critical dimensions in evaluating an actor (individual or state) are warmth and competence (Fiske *et al.*, 2002). Warmth maps onto the intrinsic value of status while competence aligns more with status' instrumental value.

⁴Figure 1 depicts only the results reported in the main papers; additional reanalyses of results excluded from main texts are reported in Section 6.3.

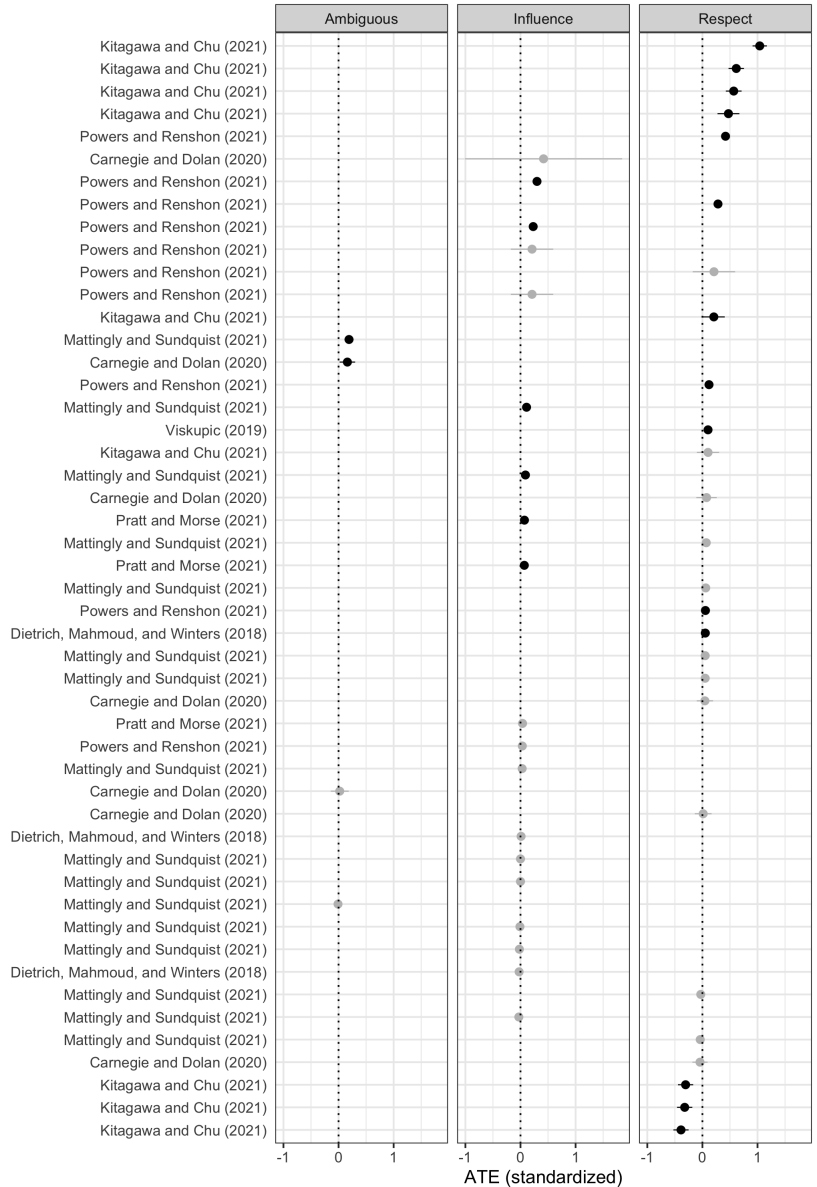


Figure 1: *Survey of experimental status literature by status concept*: Standardized ATEs with 95% confidence intervals displayed. Rows refer to treatment-outcome-paper pairs; panels the status concept measured by the outcome. Black indicates a statistically significant effect; grey insignificant.

what dimensions status updates.

Lastly, the multiple treatments in our survey of the literature, ranging from foreign aid transactions to the use of torture, also suggest that states possess multiple strategies to augment their status. While some states improve their status by emulating higher-ranked actors, for instance by copying democratic values (Bush, 2011) 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). While we do not investigate why or which status-conferring events occur, this paper addresses the identified gap between concept and measurement. We focus on *how* status changes can be observed in the international system. In particular, we highlight that status can be conceptualized as individual or relational. Relational status can further be understood as rank (ordinal) or closeness (interval) and each conceptualization needs to be matched to more precise measurement. Finally, we address the question of *for whom* does status change by arguing that limited status-changing actions can have ripple effects on the larger international ecosystem.

2.1 Conceptualizing Status

2.1.1 Individual

The empirical status literature has primarily focused on individual-level status changes despite defining status primarily as positional concept. When states engage in status-enhancing activities, their individual status value increases. For example, Carnegie & Dolan (2020) find that Americans perceive an increase in India’s status when India refuses foreign aid. Similarly, Powers & Renshon (2021) note that when a high-status (low-status) state behaves in a way consistent with holding high (low) status, their status remains high (low). However, when a high-status (low-status) state behaves in a manner consistent with low (high) status, their status decreases (increases). This conception of status as an individual attribute is depicted in Figure 2, which shows how status changes before and after a status-conferring event. A state’s individual status increases if $\mathbf{A}_2 - \mathbf{A}_1 > 0$.

As we highlight in the previous section, states have incentives to pursue individual status for instrumental and psychological purposes. Increasing one’s individual status through economic growth, for example, improves the lives of citizens in the state, provides greater leverage in international interactions, and may contribute to higher levels of national pride in addition to other benefits. Undirected actions to increase status, such as hosting interna-

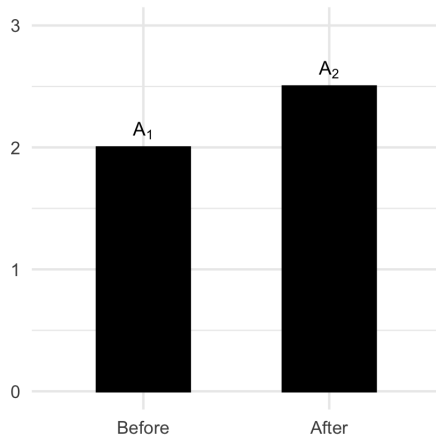


Figure 2: *Individual status change*

tional sporting events or developing new technologies, can benefit states by increasing their sense of prestige and providing material benefits.

2.1.2 Relative

Status is also relative. A status change in one state may change the status of another state by comparison. As previous work suggests, a high-status act should *increase* the state's status and a low-status act should *decrease* its status. However, in a bilateral transaction, a change in status for one state should affect the status of the other. In other words, if status is understood as zero-sum, a gain in Country A's status will come at the expense of Country B. Even if status is understood as positive-sum and Country A's status-enhancing actions do not result in a change in the individual value of status for Country B, the *relative* status, or closeness, between the two countries' status will still change. For example, Brutger & Rathbun (Forthcoming) show that Americans are concerned about trade outcomes that leave the US relatively behind in comparison to its trading partner, despite a gain in absolute trade.

We argue that relative status changes should be observed in clear bilateral relationships. Relational change could manifest as either a change in the **rank** ordering of two countries

or a change in the perceived **closeness** of two countries. The direction of relational change, whether the status gap increases or decreases, will also depend on the starting position of both countries.⁵ Empirically, one can test for both, as we show in Figures 3.I - 3.III.

In Figure 3.I, A's status increases ($\mathbf{A}_2 - \mathbf{A}_1 = 0.5$) while B's status remains the same ($\mathbf{B}_2 - \mathbf{B}_1 = 0$). The *individual* status of B is unchanged, but the *relative* status of B has decreased in comparison to A ($\mathbf{A}_1 - \mathbf{B}_1 = 1$; $\mathbf{A}_2 - \mathbf{B}_2 = 1.5$). Here, the public updates their perception of A's status individually and relatively, but only updates their perception of B's status relatively. If we were to only examine individual changes in state status, we would miss the difference between these two concepts. In Figure 3.II, A and B both experience an increase in status ($\mathbf{A}_2 - \mathbf{A}_1 = 0.5$; $\mathbf{B}_2 - \mathbf{B}_1 = 0.5$). If both states increase their *individual* status by the same magnitude, their *relative* closeness remains the same. B's individual status gains actually maintain relative status.

In both Figures 3.I and 3.II, the *rank* of the two countries has remained the same. Country A has greater status than country B even if the relative closeness of the two countries has changed. Figure 3.III demonstrates one potential route through which states change rank. Country A's status remains the same while country B increases in status dramatically ($\mathbf{A}_2 - \mathbf{A}_1 = 0$; $\mathbf{B}_2 - \mathbf{B}_1 = 1.5$). The same change in rank could occur from a substantial decrease in A's status, or moderate decreases in A's status paired with moderate increases in B's. While the "closeness" of the relationship between A and B has increased, ($\mathbf{A}_2 - \mathbf{B}_2 = -0.5$; $\mathbf{A}_1 - \mathbf{B}_1 = 1$) the signs have flipped due to a change in rank.

States frequently pursue changes in their status in direct relation to other countries, such as investing in technological arms races and sports programs, bargaining for advantages in trade deals, and issuing or following through on military threats. For example, the US win over the Soviet Union in ice hockey in the 1980 Olympics did not provide immediate strategic value to the US but was a symbolic victory. Beating the Soviets at ice hockey, a sport the state had traditionally been dominant in, helped support the US narrative of its own superiority during the Cold War (Leichtová & Zákřavský, 2021).

⁵We model State A as higher status and discuss changes that increase the gap between A and B. If we modeled State A as lower status, the same changes would lessen the status gap.

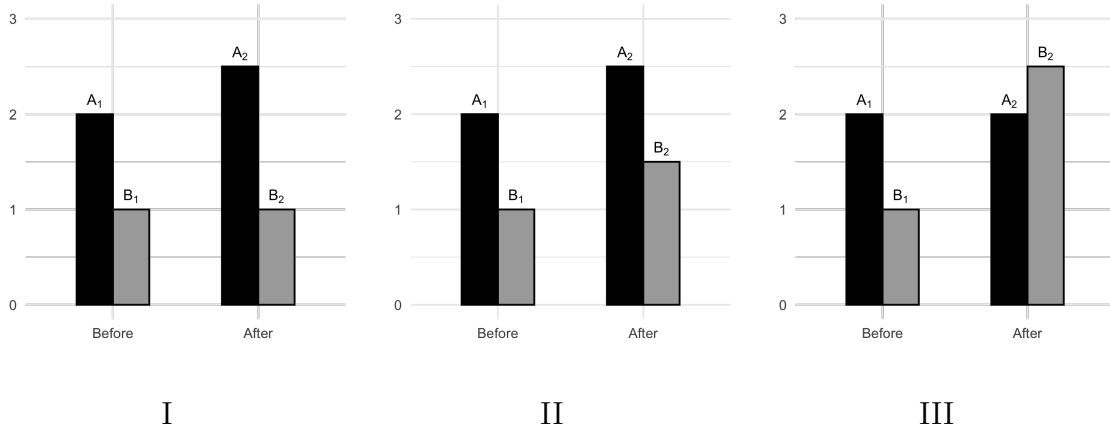


Figure 3: *Relational status change*

While the incentives for states to “win” in a bilateral interaction are clear (changing the ranks between two countries), states also aspire to decrease the distance between the status of their country and other countries. In the wake of the January 6th right-wing attack on the US capitol, pundits and experts alike lamented the US’s loss of status, with one official noting “It is a very sad day in America when an official from corrupt and authoritarian Venezuela expresses ‘concern for the violent events’ at the U.S. Capitol and ‘hopes that the American people will open a new path toward stability and social justice’” (Arnson *et al.*, 2021). While the US was not rendered less democratic than Venezuela by the attack, the quoted official implicitly sees the US’ status decline in relation to Venezuela. Other officials noted that the events of January 6th posed a threat to the relative standing of the US in comparison to China, India, Pakistan, and Russia, even if none of these states was perceived to have superseded the US’s rank.

2.1.3 Third-parties

Finally, the status of states uninvolved in a status-changing event could also change. The straightforward claim that states engaged in bilateral transactions should see their status change when those transactions disrupt expectations of state behavior can be expanded to a system-level analysis. On one hand, states do not act, and status is not evaluated, in a vacuum. On the other hand, status changes to the international system may or may not

result in updating about the status of third-party states because no additional information is provided about these states. If, and how, third-party status updates has been neglected in previous conceptualizations.

Figure 4 represents several variations of how systemic changes in status could look for multiple states, including those uninvolved in the status-changing event (C). In Figure 4.I, A's status increases ($\mathbf{A}_2 - \mathbf{A}_1 = 0.5$) while the status of B and C remain the same ($\mathbf{B}_2 - \mathbf{B}_1 = 0$; $\mathbf{C}_2 - \mathbf{C}_1 = 0$). The *relative* status, specifically *closeness*, of B and C has decreased in comparison to A, but the *individual* status and *rank* of B and C has remained the same. In Figure 4.II, A sees an increase in individual status ($\mathbf{A}_2 - \mathbf{A}_1 = 0.5$) and B a decrease ($\mathbf{B}_2 - \mathbf{B}_1 = -0.5$). The third-party (C) sees no change in individual status ($\mathbf{C}_2 - \mathbf{C}_1 = 0$). Even though it was uninvolved in the transaction, its status *relative* to A decreases and *relative* to B increases. Additionally, despite seeing no change in its *individual* status, C is now the second-ranked state in this facsimile of an international system. In Figure 4.III, the status of A and C both increase by an increment of 0.5 ($\mathbf{A}_2 - \mathbf{A}_1 = 0.5$; $\mathbf{C}_2 - \mathbf{C}_1 = 0.5$) while the second state's individual status remains the same ($\mathbf{B}_2 - \mathbf{B}_1 = 0$). The *closeness* of A and C, then, remains unchanged despite an increase in the *individual* status of both states. However, due to the decrease in *relative* status for B, C has managed to change its *rank* despite retaining the same *closeness* to A.

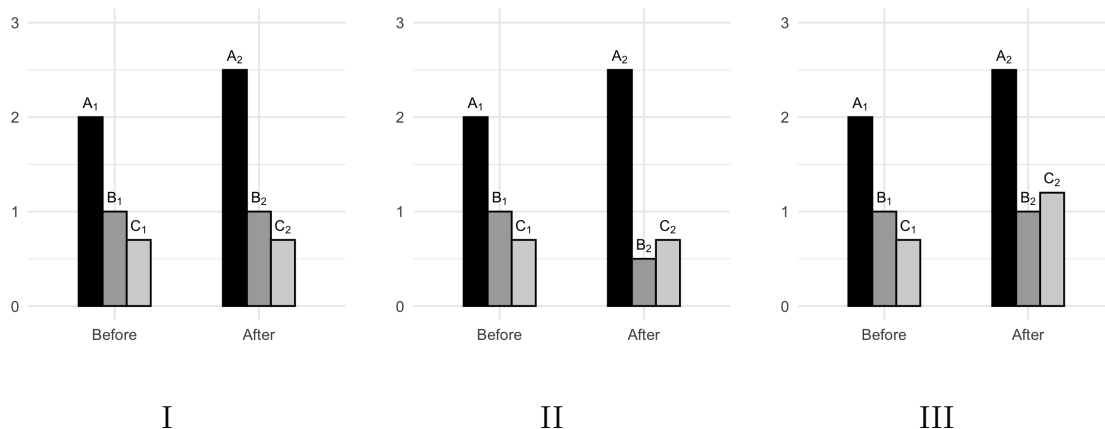


Figure 4: *Third-party status change*

In reality, states may intentionally or unintentionally use their status-enhancing actions

to affect the status of other states. For example, third-party changes in status may occur when states attempt to increase their status by behaving like the type of state that already has high status. This form of playing-against-type may affect third-party states by changing what “high-status” implies. Specifically, when a state changes their status, the group to which they belong may also change or sub-hierarchies may be formed to differentiate between types of members (i.e. founding members vs. new members). For example, Ukraine gave up its nuclear weapons in part to become a member of the nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) in order to clearly distinguish itself from the Soviet Union and “enhance the state’s international prestige” (Sagan, 1996, 81). However, in making the transition from Soviet satellite state to member of the Western-led NPT, Ukraine’s new status as a member of a Western organization may have changed the meaning of the group. The public could perceive the NPT as more or less status enhancing for states other than Ukraine *because* Ukraine now participated in the program. In the words of Groucho Marx, “I wouldn’t want to belong to a club that would have me as a member.”

Forming new groups may also implicitly threaten the status of non-members. The exclusion of France from the US-UK-Australia submarine trade deal in 2021 caused massive backlash from the French due to lost income and the perceived insult from not being consulted for the negotiations (Vazquez, 2021). Though the deal was not made with the purpose of threatening France’s status, the French president responded strongly in order to “resist subordination to other nations” (Kupchan, 2021). Implicit exclusion of states from groups, treaties, and other status-conferring spaces may result in lower perceived status for those states.

Thus, in a system-wide study of status, the signal sent by status-altering behavior by one state could be informative about the status of other states in the international system. However, it could also result in no updating about the relative status of other actors because these other actors’ actions have not changed. For example, Chinese aid efforts in Africa increase approval of China in the eyes of African aid recipients. However, Dreher *et al.* (2020) find that other countries outside the transaction do not see their individual approval

decline as a result of Chinese aid. The prevalence and implications of third-party status changes remain an open and under-explored question.

3 Status and Foreign Aid

We use the case of foreign aid to explore the multi-dimensional nature of status changes. In this section, we outline how foreign aid confers high and low status, the scope conditions under which individuals update their perceptions of status and foreign aid, and how we operationalize the concept in our empirical tests of the theory.

Foreign aid donors are typically attributed the characteristics of “superiority and power” (Kuusik, 2006, 57) across multiple dimensions. First, if 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, high-status states. Second, vast literatures on foreign aid confirm that aid is given strategically (McKinley & Little, 1977; Kuziemko & Werker, 2006) and often to manipulate the policy positions of its recipients (Bueno de Mesquita & Smith, 2007; Dreher *et al.*, 2008). Foreign aid is 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 enhance moral superiority. Aid demonstrates a dedication to helping the world’s poor, improving international audiences’ perception of the donor (Goldsmith *et al.*, 2014). While these reasons are neither mutually-exclusive nor empirically-distinguishable in the context of this paper, it’s clear that aid has status implications which donor countries care about. Information about donors has been shown to increase their individual status. For example, Dietrich *et al.* (2018) find that Bangladeshis improve their perceptions of the US when they are informed about US aid projects; Blair *et al.* (2019) find this same effect with USAID in Africa. A growing literature also traces changes in approval of China in response to Chinese aid giving in sub-Saharan Africa (Blair *et al.*, 2019; Dreher *et al.*, 2020; Jones, 2018), Latin America (Eichenauer *et al.*, 2021), and Southeast Asia (Custer *et al.*, 2018; Mattingly &

Sundquist, 2021). In a direct example of status competition, Asmus *et al.* (2021) find that India increases its aid allocations to locations where China has recently experienced public opinion gains.

In contrast, recipients of foreign aid are viewed with “inferiority and powerlessness” (Kuusik, 2006, 57). Receiving aid implies that a given state lacks the capacity to provide what its domestic population requires. Not accepting foreign aid boosts perceptions of the competence of potential recipient governments (Carnegie & Dolan, 2020). Additionally, in the aid-for-policy-concessions framework, recipients of foreign aid are pulled by the strings of their benefactors (Bueno de Mesquita & Smith, 2007). By virtue of this contract, they sacrifice policy autonomy in exchange for the aid they receive. Finally, cultural and historical factors play an important role in maintaining the lower group identity of aid recipients. Developing countries, and even formerly developing countries, are subject to paternalistic arguments from donor states that they cannot handle their own affairs and deserve a lower place in the international system (Baker, 2015).⁶

If aid is status-enhancing, why wouldn’t all states use foreign aid to enhance their status? Government resources are finite and there is an important tradeoff between foreign and domestic allocations. Publics are aware of this tradeoff and both overestimate how much the average government spends on foreign aid and prefer domestic over foreign spending (Cheng & Smyth, 2016; Milner & Tingley, 2013). This implies a political budget constraint that impedes potential new donors, even those who have the resources, from using foreign aid as a status-enhancing strategy. For example, while India is eager to reframe itself as a donor, domestic poverty means that “the transfer of resources to other countries... would be unpopular” (Price, 2004, 10).

Here, we build on established literatures that have previously demonstrated aid’s connection to status; we do not adjudicate between potential mechanisms. For our purposes,

⁶We note that additional aid may be status-enhancing for aid-dependent countries. Conditional on already receiving aid, more and higher-quality aid can confer status to recipient governments by signaling recipient’s strategic value, higher-quality institutions, and greater ability to procure additional funding (Bermeo, 2018; Dolan, 2020). However, in this project, we focus on the stylized dichotomy between being an aid recipient and being an aid donor rather than intra-aid-recipient status conferral.

foreign aid is a useful tool to examine international status because it confers information about the status of at least two parties. The correlation between foreign aid donors and high status and between foreign aid recipients and low status serves two purposes. First, it generates an explicit hierarchy between at least two states. While other status-enhancing behaviors, such as developing new technologies, do not necessarily generate comparisons between countries, foreign aid is a transaction in which the donor party is presumed to be superior to the recipient party. This allows us to design aid information treatments that will affect both individual and relative status (including closeness and rank). In line with the existing literature, we expect that foreign aid should *increase* the individual status of donors, *decrease* individual status for recipients, and *increase* the status of donors relative to recipients. Depending on the magnitude of these changes, a foreign aid transaction could alter the relative ranking of the two states.

Second, stability in the groups that give and receive aid creates strong membership communities with clear meaning. Most 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). Foreign aid's inclination towards stability party explains our findings in Appendix A.1 that experimental work often finds null effects of aid information on individual status. Here, the stability of foreign aid group membership provides a useful test of whether status-changing information for some states affects the status of other, uninvolved states. As third-party states also fall into the stable categories of donor or recipient, does information about changes to these groups affect the status of their other members? In other words, does the meaning of donor and recipient categories change?

Notably, the presence or absence of status change for third-parties looks different whether we are considering individual or relative status. If the *relative* status of third-party states is unaffected by the aid transaction, we should actually see a change in their *individual* status in order to maintain equal closeness between themselves and the donor state. Conversely, for the *relative* status of third-party states to change based on an aid transaction, we're likely to witness no change in their *individual* status if the *individual* status of the donor or recipient

in the aid transaction has changed. The change in closeness will stem from the movement of the transacting parties. The direction of relative change will also depend on where the third-party's status initially stands in relation to the donor; a low (high) status donor's increase in status will result in an increase (decrease) in closeness between third-party and donor. We also leave open the possibility that, depending on the magnitude of status changes, the international hierarchy (or rank ordering) of states could change.

We expect that changes in status for any actor will be most pronounced when they are unexpected. Therefore, we should be more likely to detect effects when an aid transaction provides new information about both sides of a transaction. Transactions that change who gives aid *and* who receives aid are a most-likely case to witness updating about status-changing events.

However, the circumstances under which foreign aid donors become recipients and vis-a-versa are limited. It is unusual for states that do not already receive aid to credibly accept aid under most circumstances. For example, the US doesn't accept development aid. High-income, high-status states primarily accept aid in the wake of natural disasters or financial crises. Thus, changes in category from donor to recipient will be more rare and most likely to occur in emergency conditions. For example, foreign aid poured into Greece during the Eurozone crisis, Japan following the Fukushima nuclear disaster, and France following the fire at Notre Dame. Importantly, the United States turned down foreign aid following Hurricane Katrina because it was worried about how that action would be perceived. The US government refused aid offers from both frequent (i.e. Canada) and infrequent (i.e. Cuba) aid donors to hide its "ineptitude" and "incompetence" (LA Times, 2007).

As in Churchill's adage, "never let a good crisis go to waste," crisis situations are an opportunity for states to attempt status increases (Katzenstein & Seybert, 2018). We work to identify status changes during COVID-19, where foreign aid was one of many status-seeking activities states pursued during the pandemic. The disproportionate impact of the COVID-19 crisis on traditional Western donors in early 2020 led many of these countries to roll back their aid programs. Non-Western donors took this opportunity to offer humanitarian

assistance to a diverse pool of recipients, including to traditional high-income, high-status states. The US government was sharply criticized for accepting foreign assistance from the Kremlin in April 2020, with weeks of headlines such as “Putin Sends Military Plane with Coronavirus Aid to Help US” and “Russia sends Virus Aid to the US” (Rudnitsky, 2020; Troianovski, 2020). The acceptance of this aid was highly controversial, and political commentary highlighted 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). This real-life example motivates our experimental design.

4 Experimental Design

We test our hypotheses with an online information experiment, preregistered at EGAP, administered by the online survey firm Lucid on 1176 US respondents on June 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 A.1 .3.⁷

Our choice of a US sample offers external validity, advantages to measurement, and a population for whom the treatment is likely to be salient. First, the US’ role as a superpower makes the opinion of its citizens important to atypical donors seeking to improve their status (Goldsmith & Horiuchi, 2012). China, for instance, has invested in Confucius institutes, student exchanges, and other forms of public diplomacy to improve its image among Americans (Custer *et al.*, 2018; Shambaugh, 2015).⁸ States routinely target status-enhancing activities to the American mass public.⁹

Second, the US sample offers analytical leverage for our theoretical expectations about

⁷The survey was fielded on a sample of 1,532 US respondents; however, only 1176 passed attention checks. We demonstrate that our results are robust to additional forms of attention checks in Appendix A.2 in line with recent findings by Aronow *et al.* (2020) on Lucid’s decline in sample quality in 2020. We also discuss a failed replication fielded by Lucid in July 2020, with a noticeable decline in sample quality, in Section 6.1 and Appendix A.4 .

⁸India has also sought to “improve India’s image in American minds” (Blarel, 2012, 13).

⁹Kertzer (2020) also notes that elites and the mass public share foreign policy preferences and update their opinions in the same way in response to information.

atypical recipients because Americans consistently rate the US as a high-status country. As we ask a US audience to rate the US and four other states, perceptions of US status are measured by a domestic rather than international audience. As public opinion data in Appendix A5 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. High attachment to US status by Americans biases against finding a decrease in status for the recipient state. Importantly, if said decrease occurs, high US status at baseline leaves significant room for respondents to update status negatively.

Finally, US citizens generally believe that the US spends a disproportionate amount of its own budget on foreign aid (Milner & Tingley, 2013). Respondents in the US also believe that aid increases status (Carnegie & Dolan, 2020). In our status-reversal treatment, the US moves from an overgenerous donor to an aid recipient. This substantial role reversal allows us to sidestep potential issues of respondent numerical-illiteracy and provides ample space for updating status beliefs. Status beliefs are particularly important to the US public; restoring America's place in the world has been a theme of Obama's 2008, Trump's 2016, and Biden's 2020 campaigns. A large action in the realm of foreign aid, which Americans recognize as a form of influence and believe the US provides in abundance, should be a salient, status-altering treatment for a US sample.

We note that our theory is not US-centric and there are clear shortcomings to the use of a US sample, including bias against finding significant results due to American perceptions of superiority and the reinforcement of Western perspectives in the study of international relations. We see this initial study as a way to validate our theory in a convenient and internationally-salient sample of respondents and strongly urge future research to consider replicating our status analyses in other populations. In Section 6.3, we reanalyze the data of three survey experiments conducted in non-US samples to demonstrate that our theory travels outside of the US.

While we cite several examples of foreign aid receipt by high-status states in Section 3, we base our experimental treatments on the real delivery of Russian medical supplies to

the US and its coverage in the national press. Respondents are randomly assigned to read a hypothetical excerpt of a news article 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). The treatment wording for the UK condition appears as follows. All treatment wordings are provided in Appendix A.1 .

[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.

The vignette is realistic. The acceptance of a single cargo plane with medical supplies is a small act, but the single plane that arrived from Russia on April 1st, 2020 made headlines for days. We choose language that approximated how the public was informed about this specific event, but are careful to avoid any political commentary. Our treatment, a diplomatic statement about a single donation, is a comparatively-weak prime.

We choose to manipulate hypothetical donor states in our treatment conditions in order to evaluate multiple donors simultaneously. While the case of Russian aid motivates our treatment, we cannot pair the Russian example with other donations. This would manipulate hypothetical and real examples across treatment conditions, which would result in a bundled treatment. While hypothetical cases might introduce additional challenges to our study if respondents don't find the example plausible, we believe this offers a conservative estimate of the treatment effect. We choose to include China as a hypothetical donor country because China has played the largest role in distributing virus-specific aid and its foreign aid activities have been framed as a threat to US interests. However, as the virus originated in China, aid could be perceived as a strategy to absolve China of perceived blame. Therefore, we also include India as another relatively low-income, less-expected donor of foreign aid that 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 in our results if aid provision elevates status in the same way for both countries. Finally, because aid provided by long-time donors is unlikely to provide new information on

which to update, we include the United Kingdom as a placebo.

4.1 Measuring Perceptions of Status

Given our review of the literature, we address definitional disagreements by operationalizing status as comprised of two main concepts. Respondents are asked to think about how much *respect* and how much *influence* over world politics countries have (as proxies for intrinsic and instrumental status respectively).¹⁰ 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 rate 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. Based on previous work, respect may be more malleable than influence.

In addition to capturing different dimensions of status, our design allows us to evaluate status at multiple levels (individual and relative) and for multiple actors. Regardless of which treatment respondents receive, they are asked about the respect and influence of five different countries: the US, the UK, India, China, and Germany.¹¹ While the first four countries represent the recipient and donor countries in our vignettes, we include Germany as a high-status anchor. We intended for inclusion of this high-status third-party state to mitigate ceiling effects for the directly-experimentally-manipulated countries. Therefore, each respondent rates individual (both countries in the transaction), bilateral (both countries in the transaction relative to each-other), and third-party (three non-manipulated countries) effects.

Finally, our question wording allows us to measure status changes in several ways. We first analyze country’s individual status *rating* on a 1-100 scale. To measure relative status, we also analyze the *closeness* of status ratings for country pairs by subtracting the individual

¹⁰The wording of both questions is based on Carnegie & Dolan (2020)

¹¹We randomize both the ordering of our respect/influence outcomes and the ordering of countries within each outcome.

value of status for one country from each other country. We also use the rating information to code each respondent’s hierarchical *ranking* among the five countries. As we theorize, it is possible for a country’s individual rating and closeness to change without affecting its rank.

5 Results

How and for whom does status change? We address these questions in several ways. First, we examine the differences in baseline and treatment effects for different dimensions of status: respect and influence. Second, we present our results for the effect of information about unusual aid relationships on the *individual* status rating received by a given country. Third, we turn to our results for relative status, which we present in two ways. We provide results for the effect of information on the relative *closeness* between two countries and on the *ranking* of a given country compared to other countries in the international system. Finally, we analyze both the individual and relative status of third parties.

5.1 Respect is not influence

While respect and influence are two dimensions of the same theoretical concept, we find that respondents conceive of respect and influence as different phenomena when rating state status. Figure 5 displays the ratings of influence and respect by respondents in the control condition. We draw particular attention to the differences in the distribution of responses for China and the US. Respondents are more likely to perceive of China as an influential state, rather than a respected state. The same is true for the US.¹²

We next examine the treatment effects of information about the aid transaction for both the respect and influence outcomes. While we discuss the substance of these results in full in Sections 5.2-5.4, we draw attention here to the significant treatment effects for the respect outcome and the insignificant effects for the influence outcome. Figure 6 displays the average treatment effects (ATE) and country means for individual respect (Figures 6.A and 6.B) and

¹²See Appendix A.7 for additional tests of the difference between respect and influence.

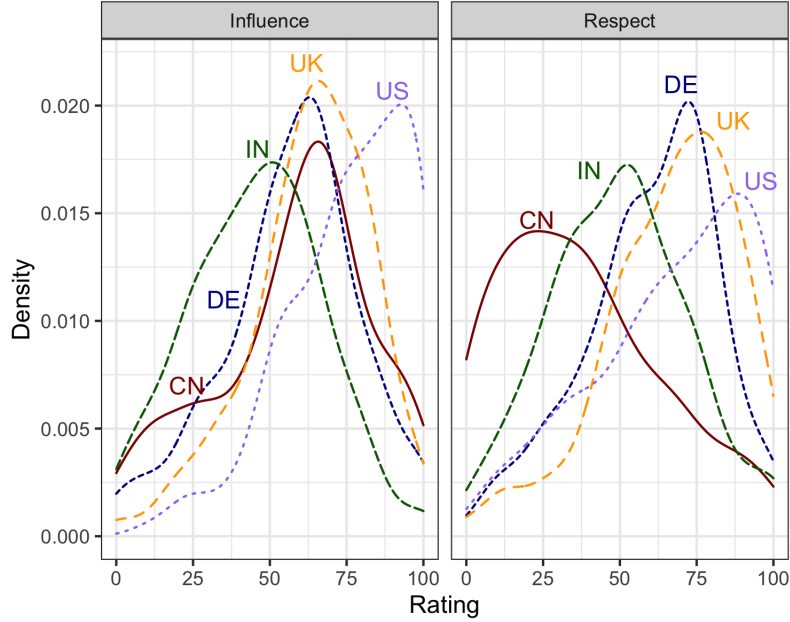


Figure 5: *Respect and Influence at Baseline*: Density plots of country ratings for influence (right) and respect (left) by respondents in the control condition.

influence (Figures 6.C and 6.D) with 95% confidence intervals. In Figures 6.A and 6.C, each panel represents a treatment condition while each row is the ATE for the respect or influence of countries of interest. In Figures 6.B and 6.D, the mean respect/influence for each country (panels) is shown by treatment and control group (rows). For example, the leftmost panel of Figure 6.A represents the ATE on American and Chinese respect when China offers aid to the the US. The top panel of Figure 6.B presents average respect for China when China gives aid compared to average respect for China in the control (no information) condition.

In line with our survey of the literature and psychological models that relate respect to warmth and influence to competence, we find significant results for the effect of information about aid from China and India on respect of these countries but not influence. As expected, warmth is less costly and easier to demonstrate over the short term than competence. Importantly, our treatment is quite small – one plane of medical supplies to the US during a pandemic. Yet, we see striking changes in the respect ratings attributed to countries sending this hypothetical plane. Influence does not increase in response to the same stimuli. A one-time transaction may not provide sufficient new information about long-term competence

and the ability to continue providing aid in the future. We report all results for influence in Appendix A.8 .

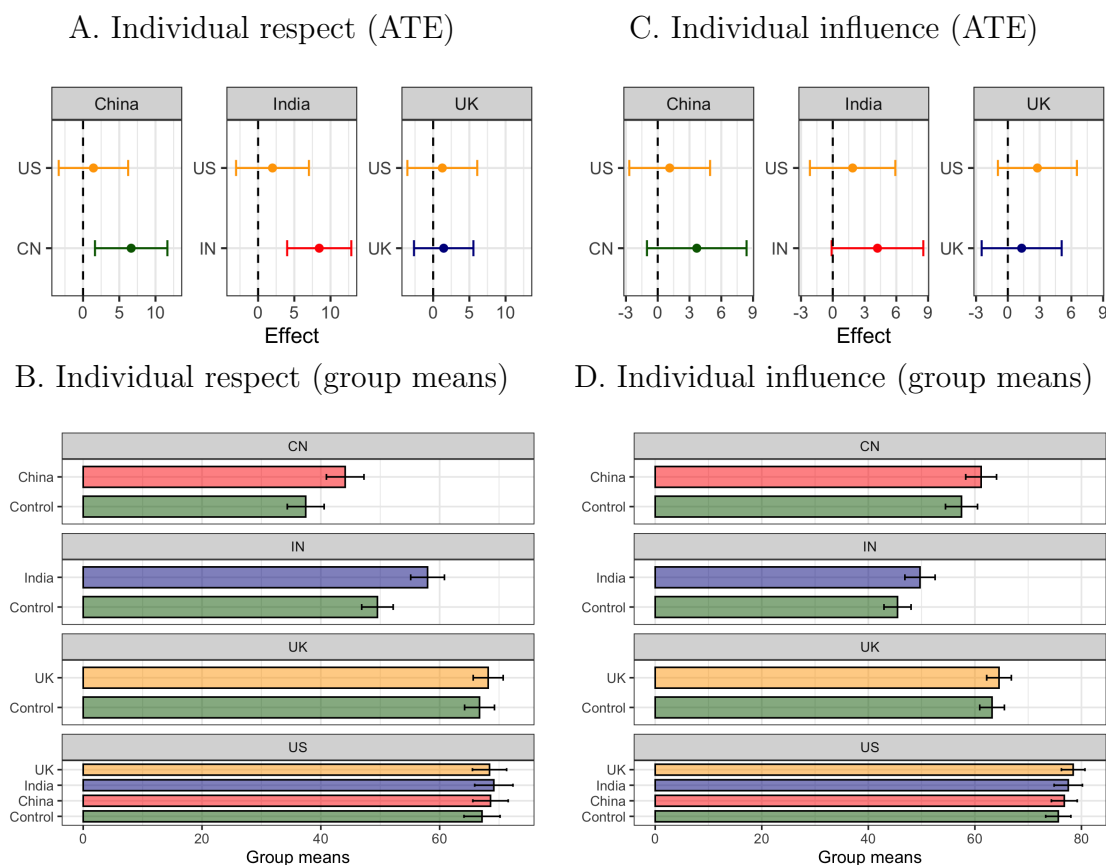


Figure 6: *Individual status results*: Panels A and B display results for respect ratings; Panels C and D influence. In (A, C), OLS estimates on the effect of treatment on the DVs with 95% robust standard errors. The treatments (listed above each panel), aid to the US from China, India, and the UK, are compared to a control of no information for each outcome (rows). In (B, D), group means of each treatment condition (rows) are calculated with 95% confidence intervals for each outcome (panels) to provide a sense of magnitude.

5.2 Individual status change

We first explore how unusual aid transactions affect perceptions of individual status. To do so, we focus on Figures 6.A and 6.B. In line with our hypotheses, China’s individual respect increases when respondents read about Chinese aid to the US (6.64, $p = 0.01$). The same pattern occurs with India (8.43, $p = 0.00$). However, the UK’s respect rating does not increase with information about British aid (1.45, $p = 0.48$). It’s possible that respondents

may not update their perceptions of the UK because they already believe the UK to be the type of country that provides aid. We test this in Appendix A.11 with an additional information prime that India and China are former aid recipients. We find no effect of the prime on Chinese and Indian respect. This strengthens our intuition that participants already know which states are traditional aid donors and recipients and therefore do not award the UK with additional status for typical behavior. Alternatively, it is possible that because the respect ratings of the UK are already high, respondents face a ceiling effect.

We do not find evidence that respondents *decrease* the respect rating of the US in response to information about the US receiving aid from India (1.98, $p = 0.43$), China (1.43, $p = 0.55$), or the UK (1.26, $p = 0.60$). Status, as proxied by respect, does not appear to be a zero-sum game in which status gains for one country necessarily result in *individual* status losses for another. These results suggest that, at least in the case of small, symbolic aid donations, recipients are not punished with lower status.

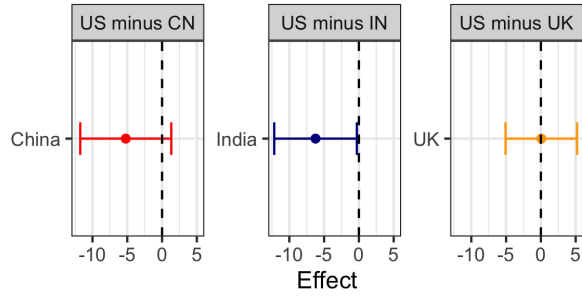
5.3 Relative status change

5.3.1 Closeness

In evaluating relative status, we first use a measurement of closeness. We transform the dependent variable from individual to relative closeness by subtracting the individual respect of one state in each treatment pair from the other. For example, to calculate the respect of India relative to the US, we subtract India’s value from the US’s value for each respondent. Because the US is the most-highly rated state in our control condition, positive ATEs indicate that the difference between the status of the two states has increased (or their closeness in status has decreased). Negative values represent decreased distance, or increased closeness. Figure 7.A shows the ATE of each donor treatment on the relative closeness between donor-recipient pairs. Figure 7.B presents the mean difference of each pair relative to the control group, along with 95% confidence intervals.

We find that the relative closeness between India and the US increases (that is, India’s

A. Closeness (ATE)



B. Closeness (group mean)

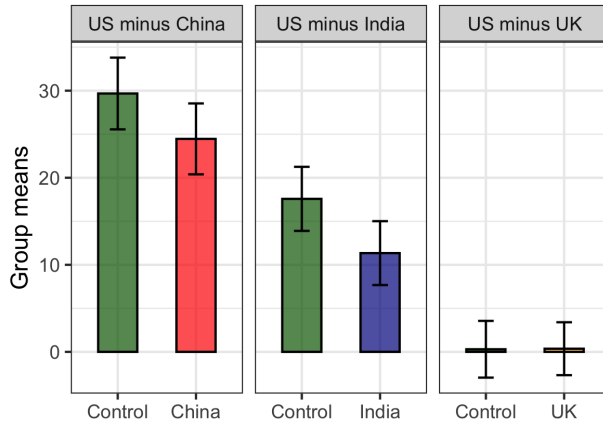


Figure 7: *Relative (closeness) status results*: In (A), OLS estimates on the effect of treatment on the DVs with 95% robust standard errors. The treatments (rows), aid to the US from China, India, and the UK, are compared to a control of no information for each outcome (panels). The outcomes are calculated by subtracting the status value of one country from another to obtain a measure of “closeness” between the two states. In (B), group means of each treatment condition (columns) are calculated with 95% confidence intervals for each outcome (panels) to provide a sense of magnitude.

respect becomes closer to that of the US) when participants are given information that the US received aid from India (-6.23 , $p = 0.04$). India’s respect increases relative to the US by one fifth of a standard deviation, a statistically and substantially significant increase. While China’s respect relative to the US moves in the same direction in response to the Chinese aid treatment, the effect just misses conventional levels of significance (-5.21 , $p = 0.12$). In contrast, and in line with the individual results for the UK, the US does not change in relation to the UK in the UK aid treatment condition (0.06 , $p = 0.98$). In fact, the difference between US and UK respect is negligible in both the treatment and control conditions.

5.3.2 Rank

Lastly, to better understand how unusual aid events affect international hierarchy, we conduct a test of relative status using our measure of rank. To do so, we transform each respondents' rating of individual status into a relative rank – the highest-rated state by an individual receives a rank of 1 while the lowest-rated state receives a rank of 5. Figure 8 then displays the ATE from ordered probit estimations of our three donor treatments (Chinese, Indian, and British aid). Robustness tests can be found in Appendix A.3 .

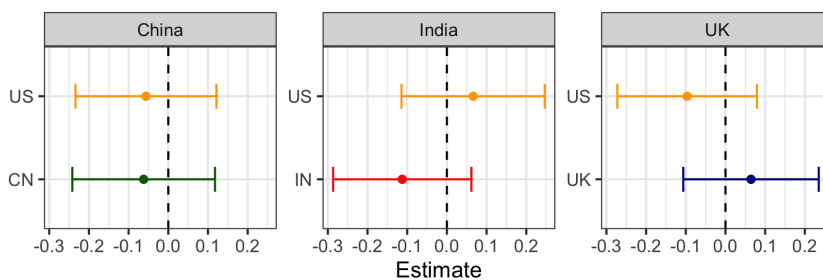


Figure 8: *Relative (rank) respect results*: Probit estimates on the effect of treatment on the DVs with 95% robust standard errors. The treatments (panels), aid to the US from China, India, and the UK, are compared to a control of no information for each outcome (rows). The outcomes are calculated by transforming the rating of each country outcome into its rank among all other country ratings.

Compared to the individual and closeness measures, we see no movement in ranked respect as a result of any treatment. Donors do not significantly increase in rank. China and India might increase their rank in the expected direction when they provide aid, but neither manages to achieve significant change. The UK's rank is also static. Similarly, recipients do not decrease in rank. The US did not change its rank for any of the three treatments. This implies that changes in relative closeness were not large enough to impact relative rank.

5.4 Third-party respect change

Finally, we hypothesize that status changes might reverberate through the larger international system. In this section, we test whether information about respect-enhancing activities for one country affects the status of countries that are not involved in the status transaction.

We repeat the tests for individual, relative closeness, and relative rank changes on states for which no information was given (Germany and the two additional non-manipulated states).

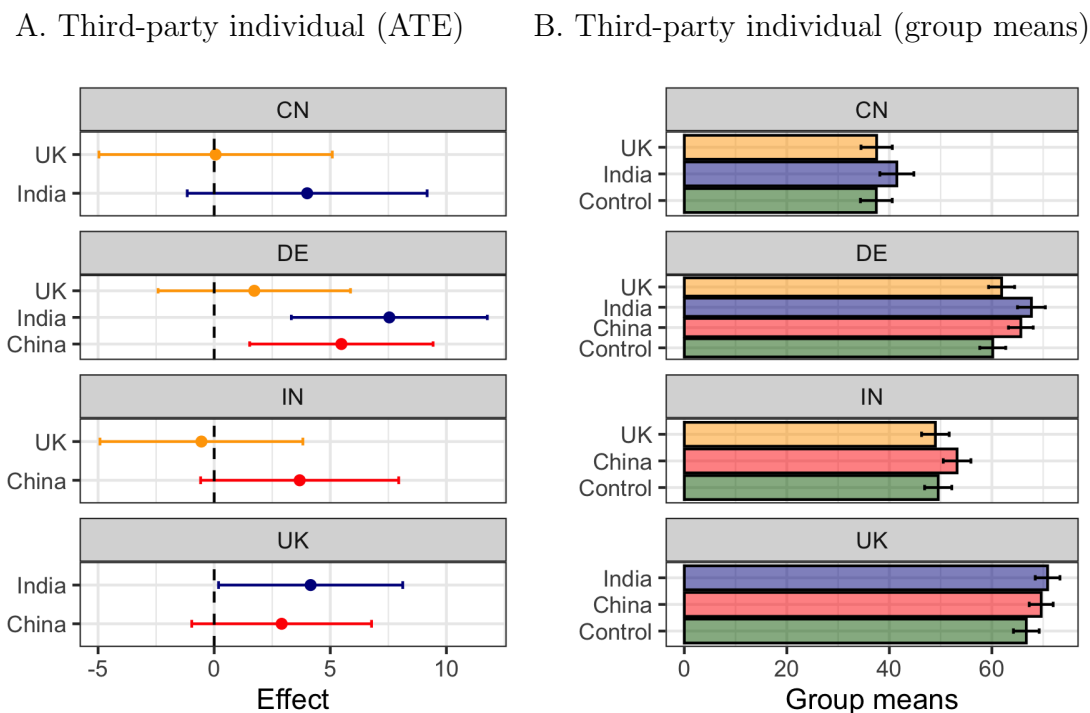


Figure 9: *Third-party individual respect results*: In (A), OLS estimates on the effect of treatment on the DVs with 95% robust standard errors. The treatments (rows), aid to the US from China, India, and the UK, are compared to a control of no information for each outcome (panels). In (B), group means of each treatment condition (rows) are calculated with 95% robust standard errors for each outcome (panels) to provide a sense of magnitude.

We do indeed witness the movement of third-party states' individual respect ratings in response to information about the status-altering activities of other states. These changes in individual respect are plotted in Figure 9. Figure 9.A shows the ATE and Figure 9.B displays average respect for third-party states (panels) by information treatment (rows). Even though no information on Germany was provided, Germany's respect increases significantly and substantively in response to information about China (5.48, $p = 0.01$) and India (7.54, $p = 0.00$) but not the UK (1.72, $p = 0.41$). India's respect also increases in response to information about Chinese aid (3.68, $p = 0.09$). The same is true for China's respect, which substantively increases when India gives aid (4.00, $p = 0.12$) even as it misses standard levels of significance. The UK's respect increases significantly and substantively when India

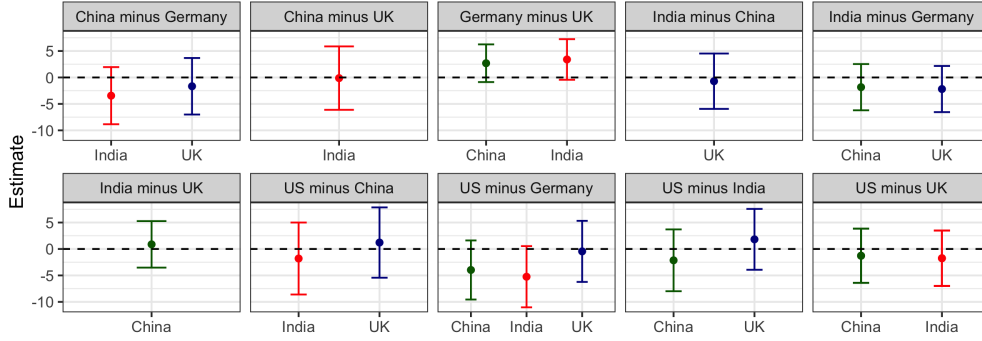
gives aid (4.15, $p = 0.04$) and substantively, though not significantly, when China does (2.90, $p = 0.14$).

The respect of third-parties also changes relatively. Again, we calculate the closeness of country pairs (by subtracting the individual respect of one state from the other) and plot the ATEs by treatment (columns) in Figure 10.A. Figure 10.B displays the mean difference by treatment and control conditions (columns). Here, the status ordering within each pair matters for interpretation. German respect moves closer to the US when India (-5.24 , $p = 0.07$) and China give aid (-3.97 , $p = 0.16$), although the movement isn't significant in the China treatment. Germany also moves closer to the UK when India (3.40 , $p = 0.08$) and China (2.69 , $p = 0.14$) provide aid. Paired with our earlier results, this suggests that increased closeness to the US and the UK is driven primarily by positive updating on Germany's individual status. No other country pairs see significant changes in relative status.

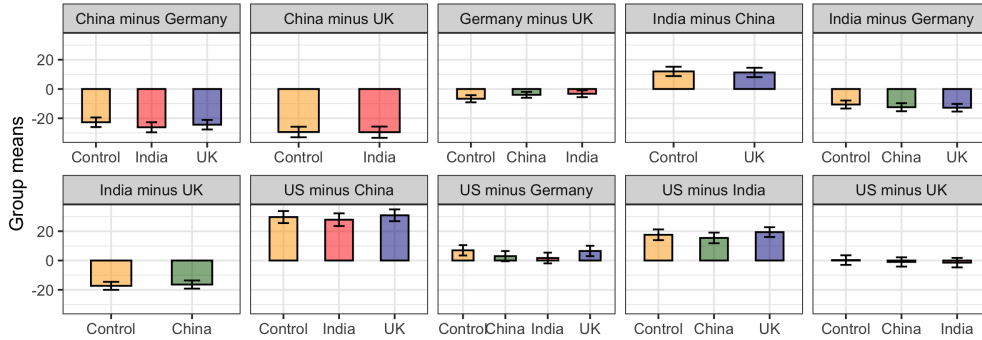
Finally, Figure 10.C investigates changes in relative rank for third parties based on an ordered probit model. Third-party states do not see significant changes in rank in response to any treatment. This stability in ranking directly parallels the effects of treatment on states involved in the transactions.

While our experimental design does not allow us to explore the mechanisms through which respondents update their perceptions of third-parties, one possible interpretation of our results is the existence of a status-quo bias in the international hierarchy. Germany's increase in individual respect when China and India give aid may be a cognitive attempt to maintain the distance between established high-status states and lower-status emerging donors. Respondents may update their respect for Germany because they received no additional information about Germany's role in the status-altering event and need to preserve the relative distance between the other states. This accords with how individual status changes can preserve relative status (closeness and rankings), akin to the illustrative example in Figure 4.III. Future research is needed to understand the psychology of status updating but the results are consistent with a stable international hierarchy that, despite small shifts in

A. Third-party closeness (ATE)



B. Third-party closeness (group means)



C. Third-party rank (ATE)

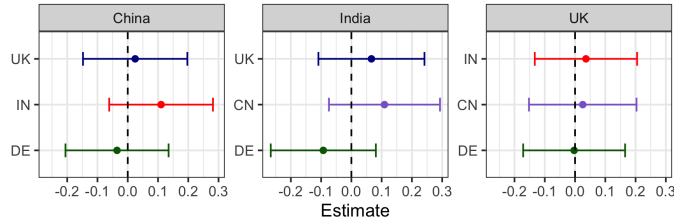


Figure 10: *Third-party relative respect results*: In (A), OLS estimates on the effect of treatment on relative closeness with 95% robust standard errors. The treatments (columns), aid to the US from China, India, and the UK, are compared to a control of no information for each outcome (panels). The outcomes are calculated by subtracting the status value of one country from another to obtain a measure of “closeness” between the two states. In (B), group means of each treatment condition (columns) are calculated with 95% confidence intervals for each outcome (panels) to provide a sense of magnitude. In (C), ordered probit estimates on the effect of treatment on relative rank with 95% robust standard errors. The outcomes are calculated by transforming the rating of each country outcome into its rank among all other country ratings.

individual state status, does not respond substantively to low-cost status interventions.

6 Extensions and external validation

Our original survey experiment illuminates how status-altering activity has implications at multiple levels and for multiple actors. However, several threats to external validity may challenge our substantive findings. First, foreign aid could be a specific case of status competition that leads us to assume greater or less movement in state status. Second, survey experiments can only claim to have internal validity for a given sample population¹³ and the quality of survey responses on popular survey platforms such as Amazon’s MTurk and Lucid has declined over the course of the pandemic (Aronow *et al.*, 2020). Third, the US sample limits our analysis to a single superpower with a populace largely ignorant about foreign affairs. By asking about US status for this population, we also may bias against finding changes in the international system due to low knowledge and sociotropic concerns from respondents. Finally, our information treatment was a very small nudge; a plane full of medical supplies is unlikely to have any impact on the course of the pandemic in the US and can be considered a symbolic gesture. It is unlikely that such a small treatment would impact public opinion under conditions of less uncertainty than the beginning of the pandemic (Bisbee & Lee, 2021; Katzenstein & Seybert, 2018).

To address these concerns, and to demonstrate the applicability of our framework to the general literature, we first field an exact replication of our original survey experiment on Lucid. We then conduct a high-quality replication in the Cooperative Election Survey that uses the same design with a new vignette about election monitors. Finally, we also reanalyze three existing survey experiments from Dietrich *et al.* (2018), Mattingly & Sundquist (2021), and Carnegie & Dolan (2020). These exercises allow us to confirm that the empirical distinction between individual and relative status generalizes beyond the COVID-19 pandemic and in non-US samples.

¹³Though work has found that survey results extrapolate to representative US samples and to elite populations (Coppock, 2019; Kertzer, 2020).

6.1 Replications of main results

6.1.1 Lucid sample

We conducted an exact replication of our initial experiment on June 29, 2020 on a sample of 1082 Americans via the survey platform Lucid. Full results of the study can be found in Appendix A.4 . We note that, in line with existing literature on the declining attention to survey questions on Lucid over the course of 2020 (Aronow *et al.*, 2020), over half our participants failed multiple attention checks in this survey.¹⁴ Given this limitation, several of our key results failed to replicate (see Figure 11).

Our replication demonstrates the importance of salient information treatments in regards to status. Just as our survey of the literature shows clear disparities in the ability of information treatments to alter influence outcomes, our exact replication shows the limits of non-salient information treatments to alter respect outcomes. In this case, the window for status-changing events may be short lived. These results should caution researchers against expecting significant status changes even at the individual state level for treatments not well-matched to the contexts in which survey experiments are fielded (Slough & Tyson, n.d.).

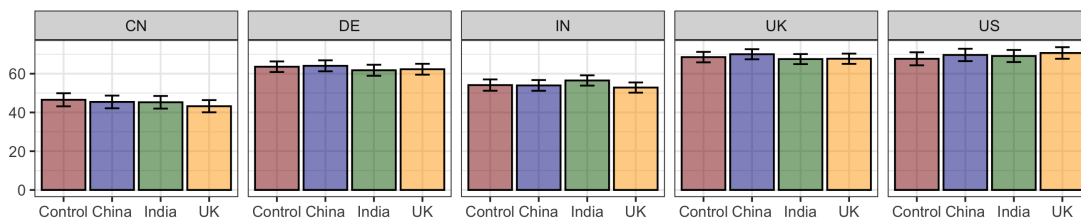


Figure 11: *Replication respect results*: Group means of each treatment condition (columns) are calculated with 95% confidence intervals for each outcome (panels).

¹⁴The survey was fielded on a full sample of 1221 respondents. We report results only for those who passed an initial attention check. Of the remaining sample, only 592 respondents passed an additional check.

6.2 CES sample

We also replicate the design of our initial experiment with different vignettes that inform respondents of the hypothetical US acceptance of election monitors from the UK or South Africa in the lead-up to the 2020 national elections. The experiment was fielded in the pre-election CES on a high-quality, nationally-representative sample of 747 Americans during the period of September 29, 2020 to November 2, 2020. Full design specifications can be found in Appendix A.4 .

We expect that information about the reception of election monitors in the US will cause the US public to update negatively about the US’s status while updating positively about the status of the states sending election monitors. Right-wing websites warned in the run up to the 2016 presidential election that “A swarm of hundreds of United Nations-linked ‘international election monitors,’ many of them hailing from nations ruled by repressive dictatorships, will descend on the United States this year to supervise and ‘monitor’ America’s elections” (Newman, 2016). However, while pre-2020 election research shows that a majority of Americans support the presence of international election monitors, the reasons Americans list for their necessity are the malfunctioning of US electoral institutions and fears that their votes will not count (Rich, 2020). Thus, Americans may associate the presence of election monitors with the presence of a problem with US elections, thereby causing individuals to perceive the US as having lower status. In contrast, sending election monitors to another country can be viewed as increasing the status of the sending country by virtue of its commitment to democracy (Bush, 2011).

We find that the presence of election monitors does not affect the individual status of the US (-2.48 , $p = 0.38$), but does increase the status of South Africa when South Africa sends election monitors (4.69 , $p = 0.06$). The relative status of South Africa also improves in comparison to the US (-7.05 , $p = 0.06$). As in our main results, while the US’s individual status is unmoved (Fig 12), its relative status decreases (Fig 13).

We also find evidence of third-party movement. With regard to the individual status of Germany, again an uninvolved state in the election-monitoring transaction, we see suggestive

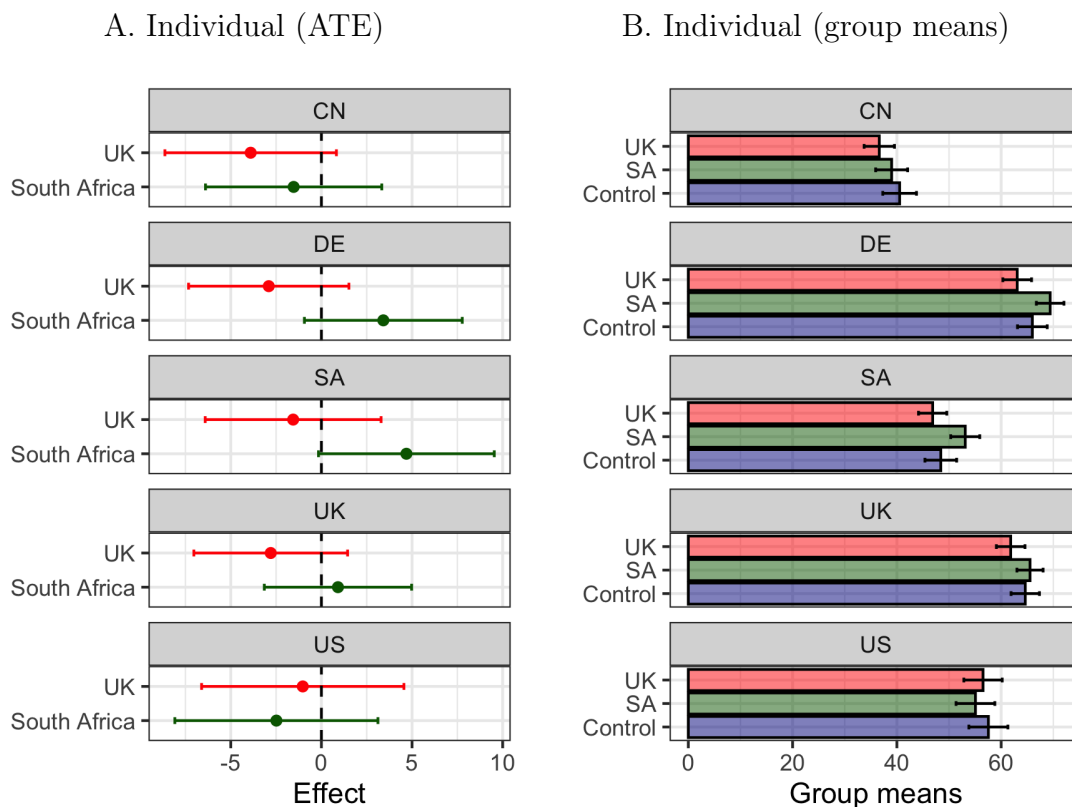
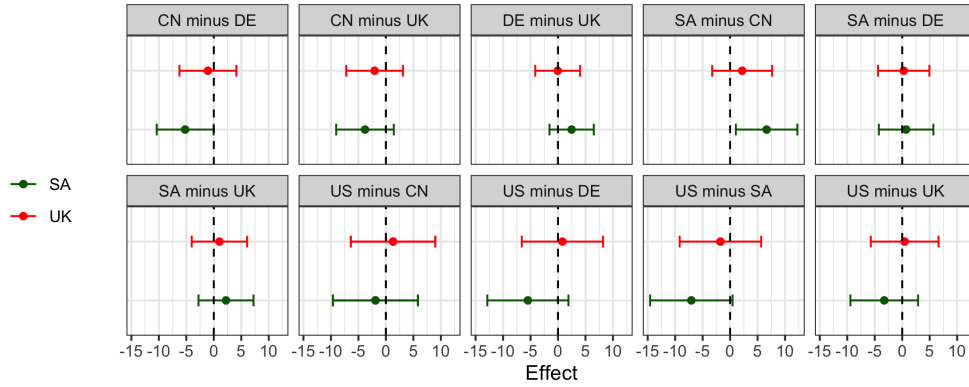


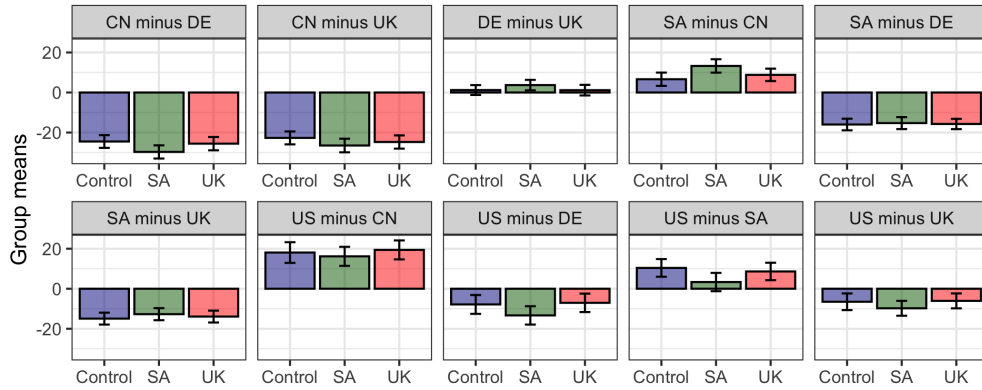
Figure 12: *Election monitoring individual status results*: In (A), OLS estimates on the effect of treatment on the DVs with 95% robust standard errors. The treatments (rows), election monitors to the US from South Africa and the UK, are compared to a control of no information for each outcome (panels). In (B), group means of each treatment condition (rows) are calculated with 95% confidence intervals for each outcome (panels) to provide a sense of magnitude.

evidence of an increase in its individual status (3.41, $p = 0.12$) and its status relative to the US (-5.48 , $p = 0.14$) in the South Africa condition. The same pattern does not occur for China, a third-party state that was also not part of the election monitoring information. There is no change in China's individual status (1.53, $p = 0.54$), but it does lose status relative to South Africa when South Africa sends election monitors (6.64, $p = 0.02$). Finally, as in our original experiment, we find no changes in the ranking of states in response to treatment. Figure 13.C shows that, while there is some substantive movement in rankings, especially in response to the South African treatment, no state's ranking significantly increases or decreases in response to treatment. Status rankings demonstrate remarkable stability across issue areas.

A. Closeness (ATE)



B. Closeness (group means)



C. Rank (ATE)

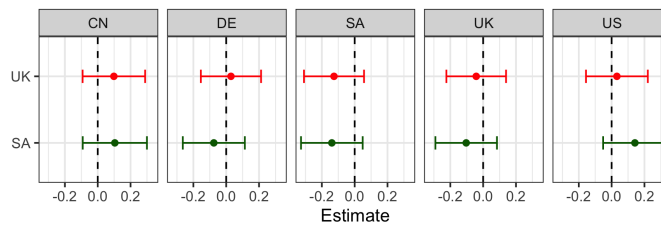


Figure 13: *Election monitoring relative status results*: In (A), OLS estimates on the effect of treatment on relative closeness with 95% robust standard errors. The treatments (columns), election monitors to the US from South Africa and the UK, are compared to a control of no information for each outcome (panels). The outcomes are calculated by subtracting the status value of one country from another to obtain a measure of “closeness” between the two states. In (B), group means of each treatment condition (columns) are calculated with 95% confidence intervals for each outcome (panels) to provide a sense of magnitude. In (C), ordered probit estimates on the effect of treatment on relative rank with 95% robust standard errors. The outcomes are calculated by transforming the rating of each country outcome into its rank among all other country ratings.

We draw several conclusions from the successful replication of our initial survey. First, perceptions of status change in response to two different interventions: aid and election monitoring. Second, status can and does change along two dimensions: individual and relative. Third, perceptions of states in the general international community are affected by status-changing actions of individual states. However, while status is malleable, there may also be limits to the effect of status-enhancing activity on international hierarchy. The replication confirms the external validity of our original framework.

6.3 Reanalysis of status experiments

To further bolster the external validity of our results, we reanalyze three recent survey experiments conducted in non-US samples: Dietrich *et al.* (2018), Mattingly & Sundquist (2021), and Carnegie & Dolan (2020). While all three surveys query the status of multiple states, they do not analyze relational status *between* countries. Neither do they analyze the implications for third-parties in their main results. We present full results in Appendix A.9 . None of the surveys ask respondents to rate the status of their own country, alleviating the possibility that status-stability is driven entirely by sociotropic concerns of respondents. Two surveys, Dietrich *et al.* (2018) and Carnegie & Dolan (2020), were administered before the COVID-19 pandemic, alleviating concerns about temporal effects; Mattingly & Sundquist (2021) was administered during the pandemic and provides additional support for the value of our theoretical framework for international status during extraordinary and ordinary times.

First, we use Dietrich *et al.* (2018) to replicate our analyses for individual and relative status amongst both transacting and third-party states. In this study, respondents viewed a video about a real aid project in Bangladesh that had been sponsored by USAID but were randomly assigned to see USAID’s branding in the video. The survey experiment asked Bangladeshis “about the overall influence of some other countries on Bangladesh,” including the US.¹⁵ In Appendix A.9 .1, we show that not only did the information about US aid to

¹⁵While our primary outcome of interest is status (here, influence) in the international community, influence on Bangladesh can be considered a highly-salient and similar outcome.

Bangladesh increase the perceived influence of the US, it decreased the perceived influence of Arab states, who were not involved in the transaction. This pattern holds for relative comparisons as well. The status (closeness) of Arab states declines in comparison to several other countries, while The status (closeness) of the United States rises. However, we show that, consistent with our original findings, the relative rank of countries does not change as a result of information about foreign aid. Changes in individual and relative (closeness) status for transacting and third parties are not large enough to upset established hierarchies.

Second, Mattingly & Sundquist (2021)'s primary study examines individual status gains from social media statements about Chinese aid to the Indian Red Cross and the World Health Organization. We replicate Mattingly & Sundquist (2021) and extend their data to test for relative status changes (closeness) for the US and China given information treatment in an Indian population sample. As we show in Appendix A.9 .2, Chinese status increases individually along three dimensions (attitudes toward government, cooperative policies towards China, and China's handling of COVID-19) following the foreign aid information treatment. However, the US's individual status is stable across all treatments and outcomes. There are no individual effects for the US, yet the US' status significantly declines relative to China in the area of COVID-19. While status increases *individually* for the status-enhancing actor (China) along three dimensions, it increases *relative* to other states (the US) on only one dimension. These results demonstrate the importance of our theoretical framework and are akin to the type of status changes we highlight in Figure 3.III of our main text.

Third, Carnegie & Dolan (2020)'s design allows us to test for the relative (rank) difference in status changes for India and other states given information treatment in a US sample. The original paper finds that the individual status of India increases in response to aid rejection. However, when we reanalyze the effect of aid rejection on the rank of several different countries, we find no significant changes (see Appendix Table 6). Here again, India's individual status increased in response to a status-altering event, but not enough to upset existing hierarchies. Conclusions differ based on which conception of status is measured. Together, these reanalyses reaffirm the value of studying status as both an individual attribute

and one informed by perceptions of the state relative to other members of the international community.

7 Conclusion

In this paper, we provide both a clear framework and measurement strategies to better understand how international status changes. We argue that status changes can occur on different levels (individual and relative), for different concepts (respect and influence), and for multiple actors (transacting and third-parties). These changes are not mutually exclusive and the measurements we use impact the conclusions we draw. Respect is more malleable than influence. Status changes are relational and have ripple effects in the international system. But, international hierarchy is also stable. Despite defining status as a social and positional concept, the existing literature has overlooked these key dimensions of status change with its narrow focus on the individual status of acting parties. Our findings thus provide ample fodder to future research on how status operates across systems of states.

Our framework integrates and expands upon many existing explanations for status-seeking behavior. If status behavior is one-size-fits-all, then we can't account for the plethora of status-seeking actions that we observe in the international system. Status cannot only be a reflection of influence: Qatar waged an expensive campaign to host the FIFA World Cup. Respect is not the only driver of status: the US attempted to increase its influence over Central American nations' immigration policies by withdrawing foreign aid, despite international condemnation and backlash. Status is not only conferred individually: Americans care about the relative effect of trade on other countries, even as the effects on the US remain constant (Mutz & Lee, 2020). And status changes matter for states that are not directly affected: the US considers the Asian Infrastructure and Investment Bank a threat even as the Bank does not engage with Americans. Our framework provides insight into the multiple motivations for status-changing actions and multidimensional effects these have on international status.

For example, recent work by Rathbun *et al.* (2021) suggests that much of what we consider status-seeking behavior may in fact be fairness-seeking; states may be willing to act against international norms, sacrificing respect, in order to gain influence that suits their domestic publics' perceptions of what the state is owed. Implicit in this finding is that status takes many forms; we explicitly demonstrate that there is a tradeoff between them. States aiming to acquire greater influence may do so at the *expense* of international respect, or at the benefit or expense of other states. This lays the groundwork for future research about what dimensions of status states and their citizens value and under what circumstances.

While a significant body of scholarship has focused on the role of status-seeking behavior in war, we highlight how other forms of international activity also drive status acquisition (Renshon, 2016; Wohlforth, 2009). But how do states decide on *which* status actions to invest in? Do all actions generate status in the same way? Do countries have “foreign aid status” that differs from “trade status,” or “technology status”? How do states evaluate the tradeoff across status dimensions, particularly in light of their foreign policy goals and relevant community of comparison states? These are all questions that arise out of our framework, and to which we do not have existing answers.

Finally, *who* updates their perceptions of status in response to status-changing events? Although space constraints prevent us from discussing some of the nuances of our findings, we report heterogenous effects of treatment by partisanship and nationalism in Appendix A.12 . Partisanship does not drive our main results, though liberals are more likely than conservatives to update their perceptions of third-party states. In contrast, low-nationalism individuals are more likely to update their perceptions of state status across almost every treatment condition and outcome. Together these results suggest interactions between domestic political identity and the way information is incorporated – about acting, transacting and third parties – following a status-altering event. Our theory sets forth a robust research agenda about how, on what dimension, and for whom status operates in the international system.

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A.1 Survey experiment

The survey protocol for this survey experiment was submitted to the relevant Institutional Review Board (IRB) Human Subjects Committee prior to launching the survey experiment and was granted an exemption under federal regulation 45 CFR 46.104 (2)(ii). The informed consent protocol were designed in line with the APSA Principles and Guidance for Human Subjects Research. We do not include any deceptive material, intervene in political processes, or collect sensitive and/or personally identifiable information.

We recruited participants via the platform Lucid, which implements an automated marketplace to connect research participants to researchers. Participants, all US-based, were paid \$1 per completed interview.

Below is the text of our consent protocol. Respondents were required to give affirmative consent before proceeding to the survey experiment.

You are invited to participate in a research study that will take approximately 15 minutes to complete. You will be asked to answer some questions about yourself and your preferences.

There are no known or anticipated risks to you for participating. Participation in this study is completely voluntary. You are free to decline to participate, to end participation at any time for any reason, or to refuse to answer any individual question without penalty or loss of compensation. The researcher will not know your name, and no identifying information will be connected to your survey answers in any way. The survey is therefore anonymous.

If at any time you have questions or concerns about the survey or your rights or welfare as a research subject, contact [Author name] at [Author email]. If you would like to talk with someone other than the researchers to discuss problems or concerns, to discuss situations in the event that a member of the research team is not available, or to discuss your rights as a research participant, you may contact the [Author's university] Human Subjects Committee, [phone number], [email]. Additional information is available at [Link to statement of research participant's rights at Author's university].

If you would like to participate, simply click the 'I agree to participate' box below, then click the →→→ button to start the survey.

A.1 .1 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.

A.1 .2 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 | How much respect do other countries have for the following countries? Please rank each country from 1 (least respected) to 100 (most respected): US, UK, China, India, Germany (order randomized). | 0 (least respected) - 100 (most respected) |
| Influence | 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): US, UK, China, India, Germany (order randomized). | 0 (least influence) - 100 (most influence) |

A.1 .3 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 14: Covariate balance table

A.1 .4 Density

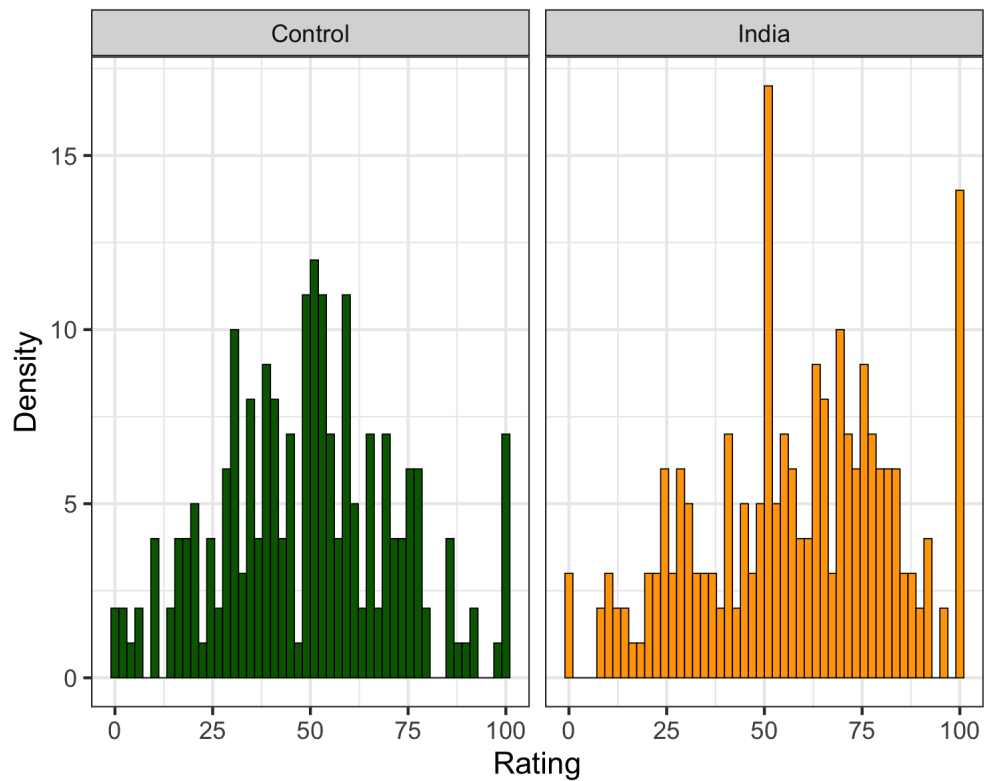


Figure 15: India respect ratings by control and India aid treatment conditions. Results for other outcomes available upon request.

A.2 Additional attention checks

We report results for the sample of respondents who are most likely to have been attentive survey-takers. Table 1 presents our main results for the subsample of participants above the first quartile of respondents in timing for the pre-treatment demographic checks. Table 2 presents our main results with the subsample of respondents between the first and third quartiles of timing for the demographic checks. Our results are not only robust to dropping inattentive respondents, but become more precise.¹⁶

| | <i>Dependent variable:</i> | | | | |
|-------------------------|----------------------------|----------------------|----------------------|----------------------|----------------------|
| | US | UK | IN | DE | CN |
| China | 0.065 (2.653) | 3.601 (2.216) | 2.672 (2.336) | 4.615** (2.211) | 5.902** (2.756) |
| India | 2.818 (2.821) | 5.555** (2.287) | 8.391*** (2.402) | 7.495*** (2.310) | 2.635 (2.811) |
| UK | 0.269 (2.731) | 3.218 (2.365) | 0.377 (2.429) | 3.014 (2.391) | -0.238 (2.835) |
| Constant | 67.486*** (1.962) | 64.511*** (1.684) | 49.547*** (1.682) | 59.718*** (1.646) | 39.304*** (1.954) |
| Observations | 794 | 792 | 786 | 792 | 788 |
| Adjusted R ² | -0.002 | 0.004 | 0.015 | 0.010 | 0.004 |

Note:

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

Table 1: *Respect ATE*: Excluding respondents in the first quartile of response times.

¹⁶Results are robust to including demographic controls. Results available from the authors upon request.

| | <i>Dependent variable:</i> | | | | |
|-------------------------|----------------------------|----------------------|----------------------|----------------------|----------------------|
| | US | UK | IN | DE | CN |
| China | 1.409 (3.118) | 5.549** (2.630) | 5.965** (2.716) | 4.659* (2.690) | 8.843*** (3.091) |
| India | 5.695* (3.322) | 8.417*** (2.699) | 13.158*** (2.806) | 9.184*** (2.731) | 6.285* (3.246) |
| UK | 1.565 (3.328) | 4.555 (2.872) | 2.328 (2.940) | 2.508 (2.867) | 2.079 (3.223) |
| Constant | 65.530*** (2.309) | 63.129*** (1.954) | 46.424*** (1.876) | 59.121*** (1.892) | 36.205*** (2.057) |
| Observations | 559 | 558 | 553 | 558 | 555 |
| Adjusted R ² | 0.001 | 0.012 | 0.035 | 0.015 | 0.010 |

Note:

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

Table 2: *Respect ATE*: Excluding respondents in the first and fourth quartile of response times.

A.3 Ordinal probit robustness

Figure 16 displays the raw data on country ranks for the respect outcome in a histogram. Visually, this plot suggests that ranking is relatively constant across treatment conditions, consistent with our ordered probit model.

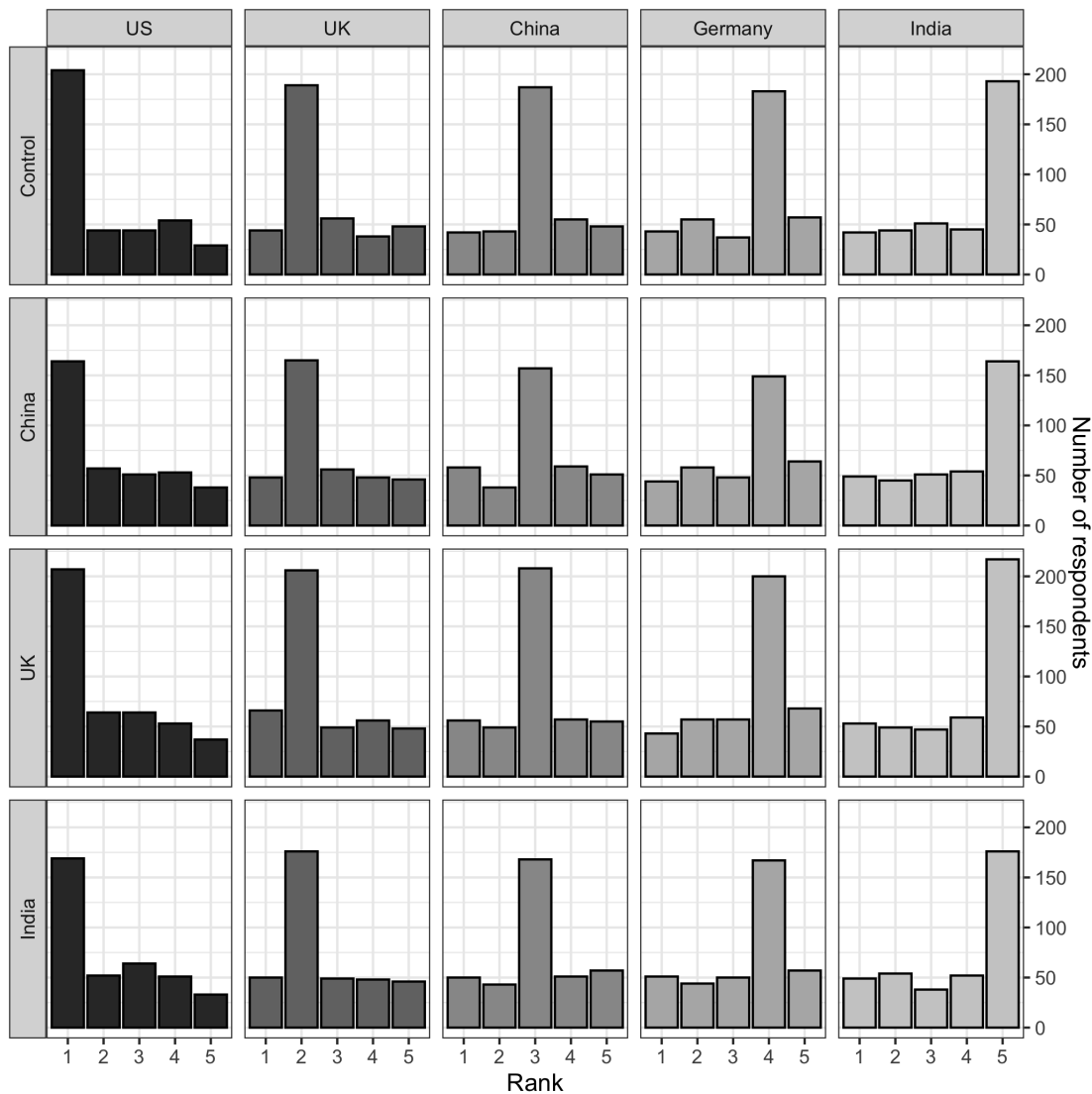


Figure 16: *Histogram of country rank by treatment condition:* Country ranks are displayed in columns, treatment conditions are displayed in rows. Color corresponds to country.

We report Wilcoxon rank sum tests for the ordinal probit models within-country (across treatments) in Table 3. The Wilcoxon rank sum test is a two-sided nonparametric test of the differences in distribution of two independent groups of ordinal variables. In Table 3, the distribution of each treatment populations (reported under “Model”) is compared to the baseline condition (control). Under the null hypothesis, the distributions of both populations are equal.

| Country | Model | Effect size | Z-score | p-value |
|---------|-------|-------------|---------|---------|
| US | China | 0.49 | -2.20 | 0.03 |
| | UK | 0.25 | -1.13 | 0.26 |
| | India | 0.43 | -1.92 | 0.05 |
| UK | China | 0.11 | -0.51 | 0.61 |
| | UK | 0.21 | -0.93 | 0.35 |
| | India | 0.00 | -0.00 | 1.00 |
| China | China | 0.07 | -0.31 | 0.76 |
| | UK | 0.14 | -0.62 | 0.53 |
| | India | 0.01 | -0.05 | 0.96 |
| Germany | China | 0.12 | -0.55 | 0.58 |
| | UK | 0.06 | -0.25 | 0.80 |
| | India | 0.13 | -0.58 | 0.57 |
| India | China | 0.34 | -1.54 | 0.12 |
| | UK | 0.03 | -0.12 | 0.91 |
| | India | 0.26 | -1.15 | 0.25 |

Table 3: *Wilcoxon rank sum test with continuity correction*: All models reported in comparison to control. Effect size, z-score, and p-value reported for each model and each country.

For the UK, China, India, and the UK, the null hypothesis cannot be rejected in any treatment condition. However, for the US, we can reject the null hypothesis of equal distributions for the China and India treatment conditions ($p = 0.03$, $p = 0.05$). These results suggest that bilateral transactions can change international hierarchies within the transaction pair, but not for the larger international arena. For these same treatments, neither the UK nor Germany (both countries outside of the transaction pair) see a change in rank. When put into conversation with our rating results for individual status changes, we see that individual increases in status for Germany, China, the UK, and India in the India and China treatment conditions maintain the relative status of these countries. The US's rating is maintained (there is no change in the absolute value of its rating), but, relative to other states, its rating decreases. The Wilcoxon rank sums test estimates an effect size of 0.49 and 0.43 for the China and India treatments, respectively, which can be characterized as a moderate effect on the rank of the US.

A.4 Replication studies

See Appendix A.1 for consent protocols which were replicated in our additional surveys.

A.4 .1 Study 1

The first replication study was fielded on June 29, 2020 on a sample of 1221 Americans quota-sampled to census margins. We recruited participants via the online survey platform Lucid, which implements an automated marketplace to connect research participants to researchers. Participants, all US-based, were paid \$1 per completed interview. Demographics are available from the authors upon request. Study vignettes exactly mirror the main survey (see Appendix A.1).

1082 respondents passed an initial attention check. Of these, 592 passed a second set of checks, less than half of the initial sample. Figure 17 displays the main respect results for the set of respondents who passed both attention checks, which remain null. However, both India and China’s respect levels move in the expected, positive direction in response to the Indian and Chinese aid treatments, respectively, which suggests that this less-attentive sample leaves us underpowered to detect the smaller effects expected of a less-salient information treatment.

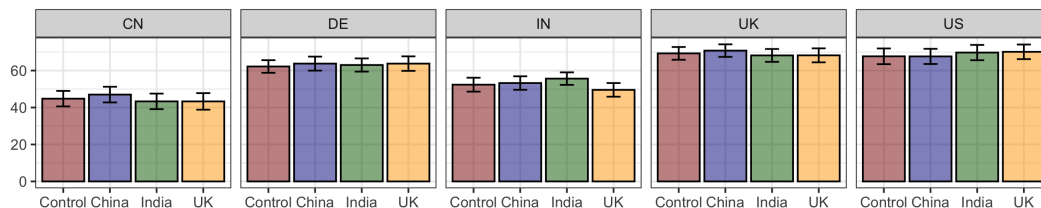


Figure 17: *Replication results with additional attention check*: Group means of each treatment condition (columns) are calculated with 95% confidence intervals for each outcome (panels).

A. Full sample

| | control (N=284) | | UK (N=273) | | India (N=283) | | China (N=291) | |
|-----------|-----------------|-----------|------------|-----------|---------------|-----------|---------------|-----------|
| | Mean | Std. Dev. | Mean | Std. Dev. | Mean | Std. Dev. | Mean | Std. Dev. |
| age | 46.4 | 16.6 | 47.1 | 16.7 | 43.7 | 16.7 | 44.5 | 16.6 |
| gender | 0.5 | 0.5 | 0.5 | 0.5 | 0.5 | 0.5 | 0.5 | 0.5 |
| hhi | 9.7 | 7.5 | 9.6 | 7.5 | 9.1 | 7.1 | 8.5 | 7.1 |
| education | 4.6 | 2.0 | 4.5 | 2.0 | 4.3 | 2.0 | 4.5 | 1.9 |

B. Attention check (1)

| | control (N=252) | | UK (N=251) | | India (N=252) | | China (N=263) | |
|-----------|-----------------|-----------|------------|-----------|---------------|-----------|---------------|-----------|
| | Mean | Std. Dev. | Mean | Std. Dev. | Mean | Std. Dev. | Mean | Std. Dev. |
| age | 47.8 | 16.4 | 48.2 | 16.7 | 45.3 | 16.6 | 45.9 | 16.3 |
| gender | 0.5 | 0.5 | 0.5 | 0.5 | 0.5 | 0.5 | 0.5 | 0.5 |
| hhi | 9.9 | 7.5 | 9.7 | 7.4 | 9.4 | 7.0 | 8.8 | 7.1 |
| education | 4.6 | 2.0 | 4.4 | 2.0 | 4.3 | 2.0 | 4.5 | 1.9 |

C. Attention check (2)

| | control (N=147) | | UK (N=123) | | India (N=137) | | China (N=155) | |
|-----------|-----------------|-----------|------------|-----------|---------------|-----------|---------------|-----------|
| | Mean | Std. Dev. | Mean | Std. Dev. | Mean | Std. Dev. | Mean | Std. Dev. |
| age | 50.8 | 15.5 | 49.9 | 17.7 | 47.7 | 16.2 | 46.9 | 16.1 |
| gender | 0.5 | 0.5 | 0.6 | 0.5 | 0.5 | 0.5 | 0.5 | 0.5 |
| hhi | 10.3 | 7.1 | 9.7 | 7.4 | 9.8 | 6.8 | 8.5 | 7.0 |
| education | 4.8 | 1.9 | 4.5 | 1.9 | 4.5 | 1.9 | 4.5 | 1.9 |

Figure 18: *Covariate balance by sample*

A.4 .2 Study 2

The first replication study was fielded from September 29 to November 2, 2020 on a sample of 747 Americans in Cooperative Election Survey. Demographics are available from the authors upon request. The outcome questions for measuring respect and influence (see Appendix A.1 .2) replace [India] with [South Africa] in this replication; all other countries remain the same.

Vignettes:

1. No Information
2. UK Proposes Sending Election Monitors to the US to Monitor the 2020 Presidential Election July 24, 2020
[LONDON] – The United Kingdom has raised the idea of sending dozens of its own election observers to monitor the implementation of new COVID-19 related voting procedures in US presidential and congressional elections this November.
3. South Africa Proposes Sending Election Monitors to the US to Monitor the 2020 Presidential Election July 24, 2020
[JOHANNESBURG] – South Africa has raised the idea of sending dozens of its own election observers to monitor the implementation of new COVID-19 related voting procedures in US presidential and congressional elections this November.

A.5 Survey of literature

Our survey consists of papers with experimentally-manipulated treatments designed to observe public opinion outcomes related to international status. Search criteria for these papers included “international status experiment”, “international prestige experiment”, “international approval experiment”, “international influence experiment”, and “international respect experiment”. We citation-mined and forward-citation-mined each selected work to identify additional papers. Several papers related to the concept of international status were not included because status was the treatment condition (status threats, for example) rather than the outcome. Status-adjacent outcomes, such as preferences for foreign aid allocation, were not included. No field experiments with international status outcomes were identified. The included studies are: Carnegie & Dolan (2020); Dietrich *et al.* (2018); Kitagawa & Chu (2021); Mattingly & Sundquist (2021); Morse & Pratt (2021); Powers & Renshon (2021); Viskupić (2020). Figure 19 presents results for the subset of studies that examine status and foreign aid.

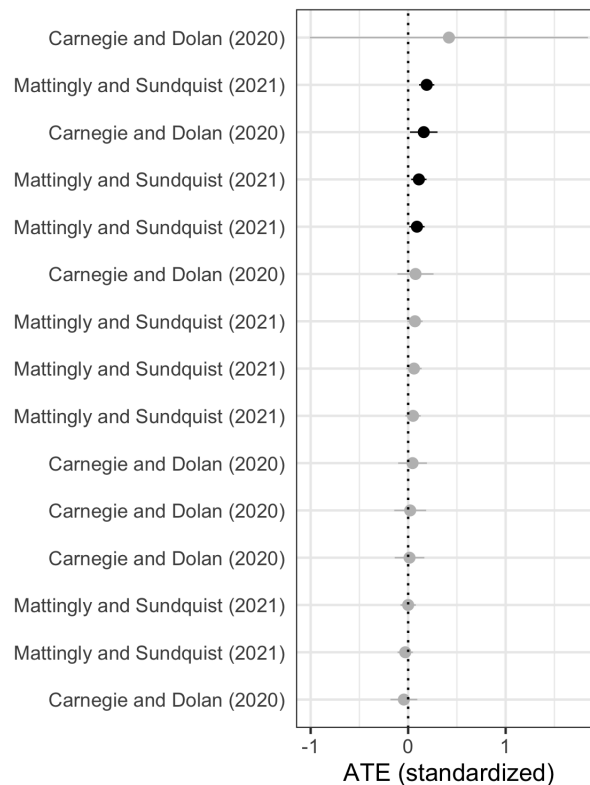


Figure 19: *Survey results: Aid treatments only.* Point estimates of the effect of treatment on outcomes with 95% confidence intervals displayed. Statistically significant results in black, insignificant results in grey.

| Paper | Outcome | Concept | Order |
|-------------------------|---|-----------|--------|
| Powers & Renshon (2021) | How do you think the president's actions in this situation would affect the military and economic power of the United States in the eyes of foreign political leaders around the world? | Influence | Second |
| Powers & Renshon (2021) | How do you think the president's actions in this situation would affect the status or prestige of the United States in the eyes of foreign political leaders around the world? | Respect | Second |
| Morse & Pratt (2021) | The US government has the skills to achieve its foreign policy objectives. | Influence | First |
| Carnegie & Dolan (2020) | How do you think India's actions would have affected the international community's (i.e. international organizations, world leaders) opinion of it? | Respect | Second |
| Carnegie & Dolan (2020) | How do you think [India/Country X]'s actions would have affected the U.S.'s opinion of it? (Less highly, more highly, would not change opinion) | Ambiguous | Second |
| Viskupič (2020) | Composite Index: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. I respect Country A 2. I admire Country A 3. Country A is honorable 4. Country A deserves prestige 5. (Reverse coded) I do not hold Country A in high esteem 6. Country A has high moral credit | Respect | First |

Table 4: *Status literature*: Select examples of status-measurement questions in existing scholarship. Authors' classification of question type and order of belief in last two columns.

A.6 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.¹⁷ Notably, the Chinese sample views China as more favorable and the American sample views the US as more favorable.

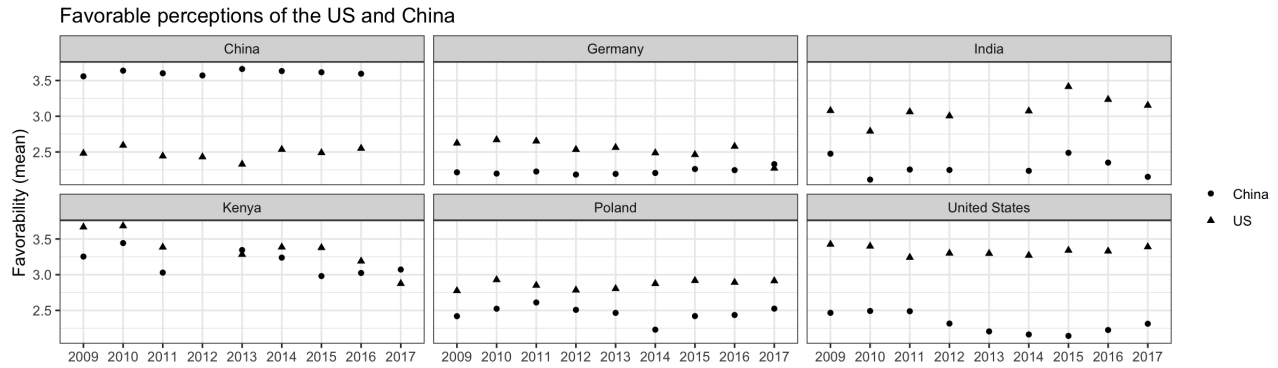


Figure 20: *Favorable Perceptions of the US and China*

¹⁷PEW Global Attitudes & Trends Datasets 2009-2017

A.7 Comparing respect and influence

| Country | Influence | | Respect | | Difference | |
|---------|-----------|----------|----------|----------|------------|----------|
| | Mean | SD | Mean | SD | Mean | SD |
| CN | 60.59086 | 26.21077 | 40.23664 | 27.74981 | 20.353326 | 30.16196 |
| DE | 59.20435 | 22.13706 | 63.93362 | 22.46820 | -4.727669 | 20.50768 |
| IN | 47.59978 | 23.46474 | 52.42295 | 24.05922 | -4.859803 | 23.02054 |
| UK | 65.22137 | 20.46768 | 68.88030 | 21.43320 | -3.700873 | 19.25640 |
| US | 77.13370 | 21.11656 | 68.33116 | 26.43260 | 8.793254 | 23.93830 |

Table 5: *Influence, Respect, and Difference between the two by Country*

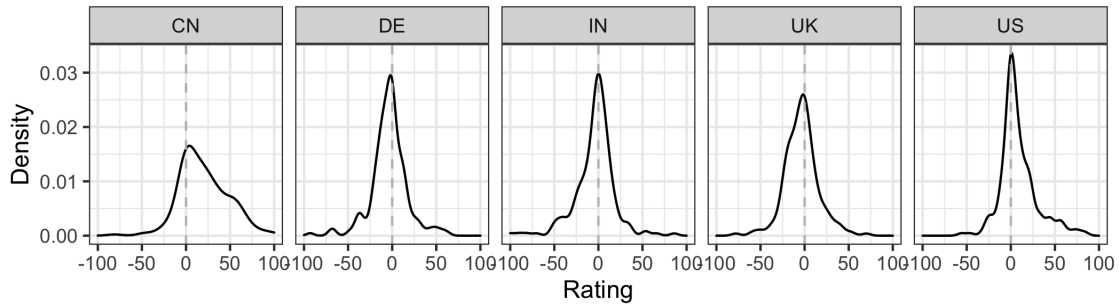


Figure 21: *Density of difference between influence and respect rating, by country: Influence rating minus respect rating. Values above zero indicate higher influence than respect; values below zero indicate higher respect than influence.*

A.8 Influence effects

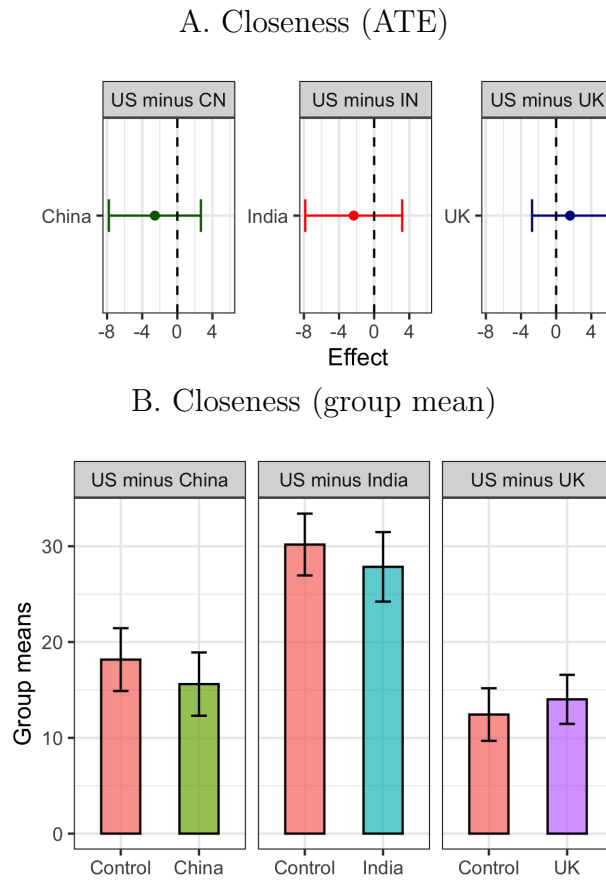


Figure 22: *Relative (closeness) influence results*: In (A), OLS estimates on the effect of treatment on the DVs with 95% robust standard errors. The treatments (rows), aid to the US from China, India, and the UK, are compared to a control of no information for each outcome (panels). The outcomes are calculated by subtracting the status value of one country from another to obtain a measure of “closeness” between the two states. In (B), group means of each treatment condition (rows) are calculated with 95% confidence intervals for each outcome (panels) to provide a sense of magnitude.

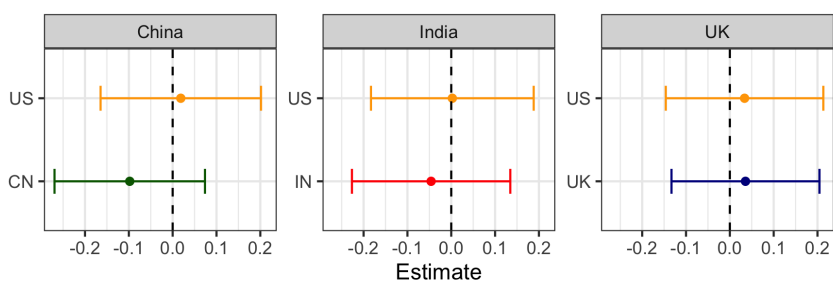


Figure 23: *Relative (rank) influence results*: Probit estimates on the effect of treatment on the DVs with 95% robust standard errors. The treatments (panels), aid to the US from China, India, and the UK, are compared to a control of no information for each outcome (rows). The outcomes are calculated by transforming the rating of each country outcome into its rank among all other country ratings.

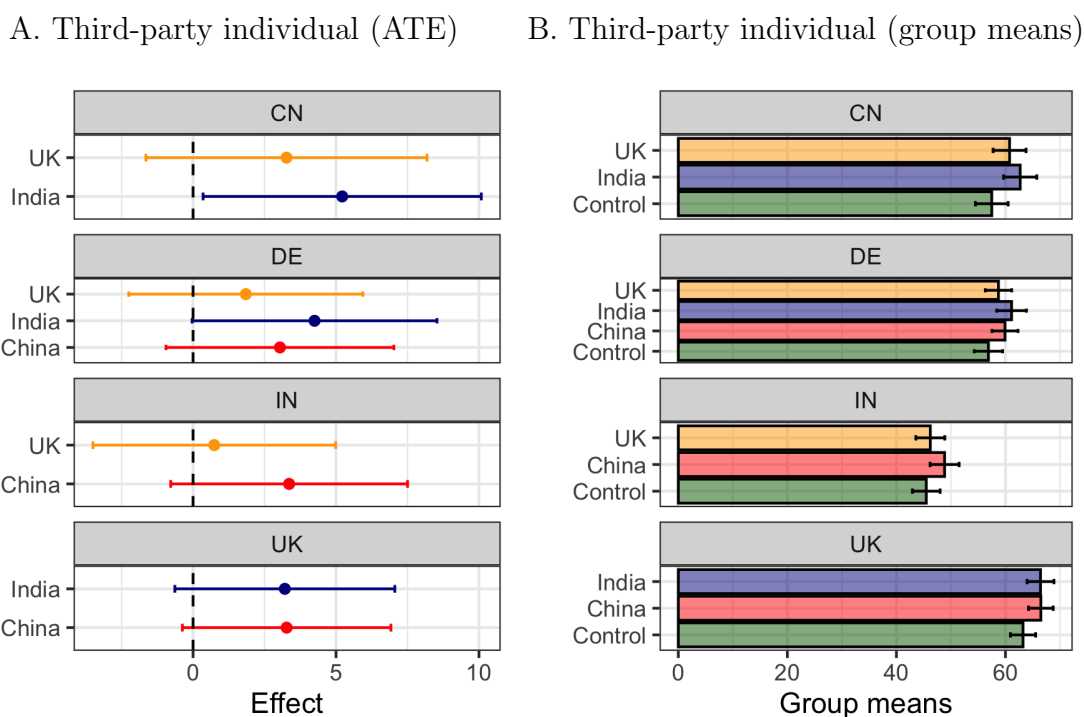
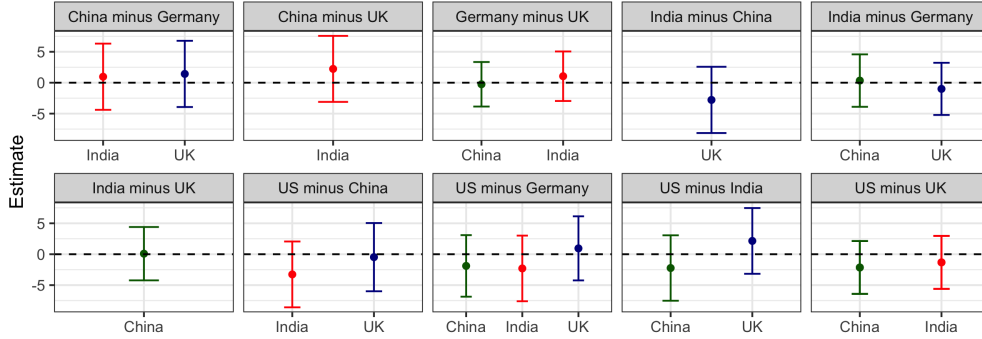
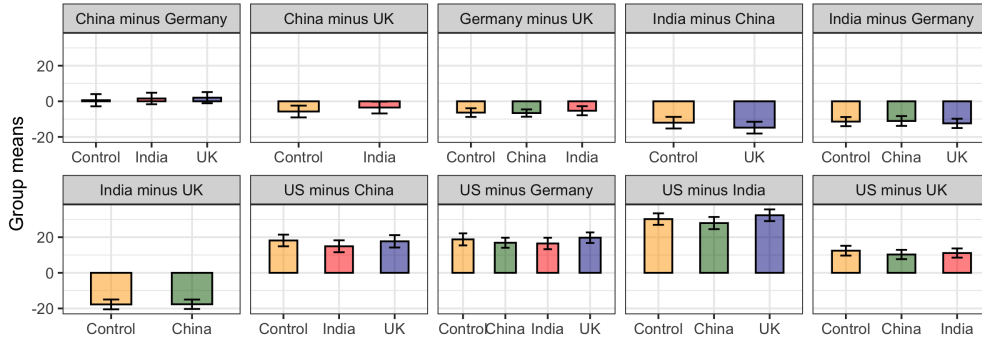


Figure 24: *Third-party individual influence results*: In (A), OLS estimates on the effect of treatment on the DVs with 95% robust standard errors. The treatments (panels), aid to the US from China, India, and the UK, are compared to a control of no information for each outcome (rows). The outcomes are calculated by subtracting the status value of one country from another to obtain a measure of “closeness” between the two states. In (B), group means of each treatment condition (rows) are calculated with 95% confidence intervals for each outcome (panels) to provide a sense of magnitude.

A. Third-party closeness (ATE)



B. Third-party closeness (group means)



C. Third-party rank (ATE)

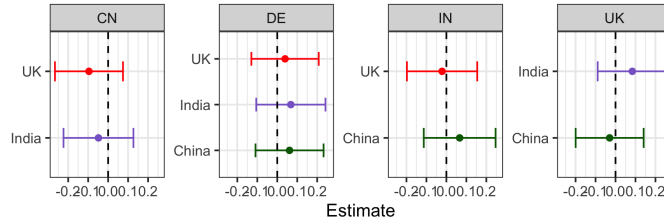


Figure 25: *Third-party relative influence results*: In (A), OLS estimates on the effect of treatment on relative closeness with 95% robust standard errors. The treatments (columns), aid to the US from China, India, and the UK, are compared to a control of no information for each outcome (panels). The outcomes are calculated by subtracting the status value of one country from another to obtain a measure of “closeness” between the two states. In (B), group means of each treatment condition (columns) are calculated with 95% confidence intervals for each outcome (panels) to provide a sense of magnitude. In (C), probit estimates on the effect of treatment on relative rank with 95% robust standard errors. The outcomes are calculated by transforming the rating of each country outcome into its rank among all other country ratings.

A.8 .1 Replication: Election monitoring

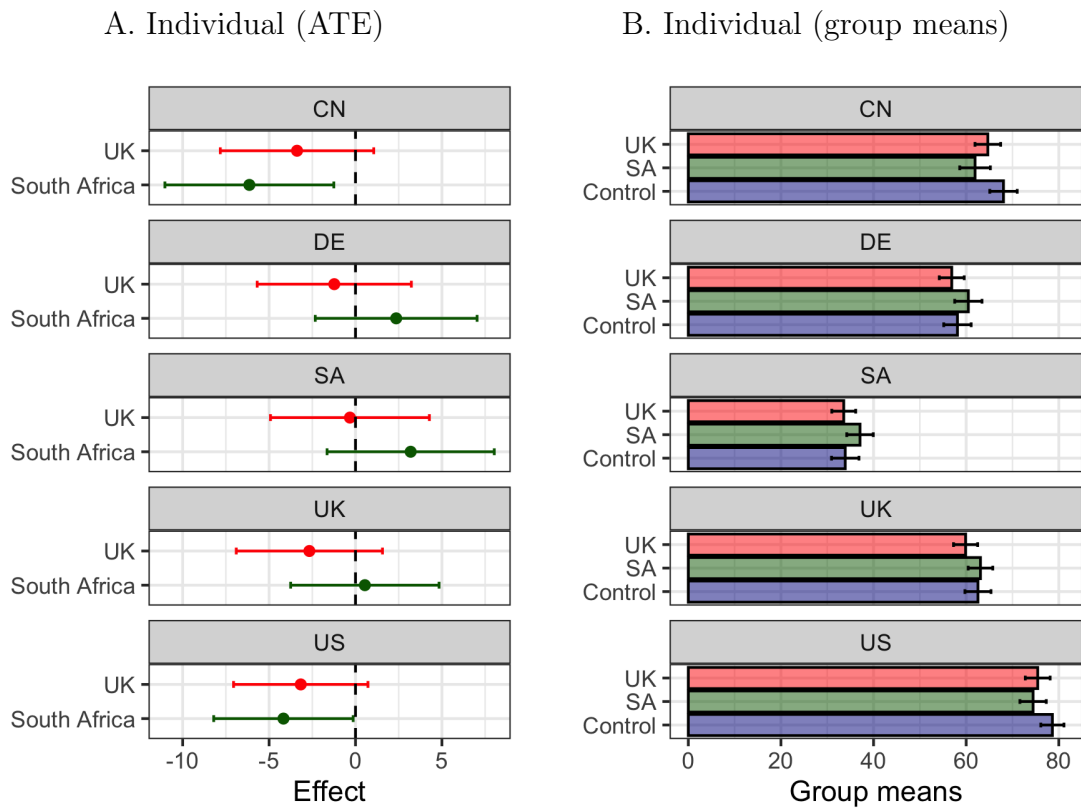
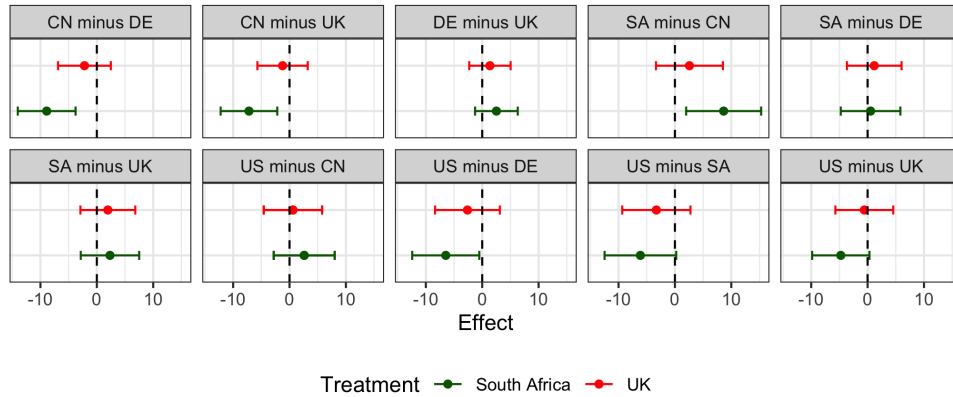
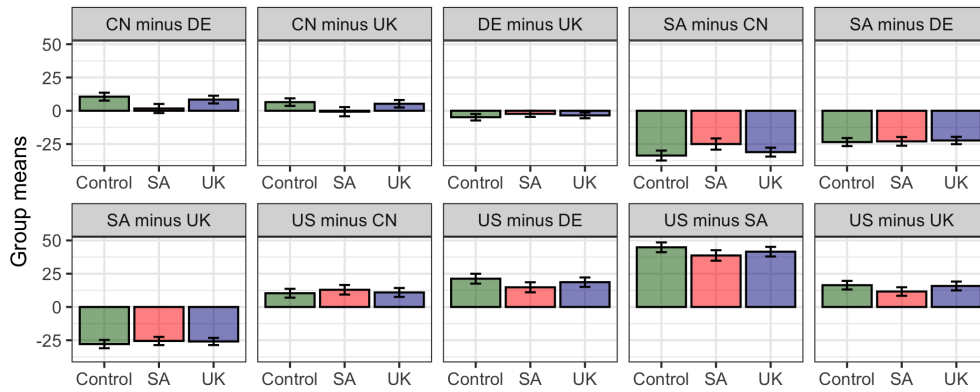


Figure 26: *Election monitoring individual influence results*: In (A), OLS estimates on the effect of treatment on the DVs with 95% robust standard errors. The treatments (rows), election monitors to the US from South Africa and the UK, are compared to a control of no information for each outcome (panels). The outcomes are calculated by subtracting the status value of one country from another to obtain a measure of “closeness” between the two states. In (B), group means of each treatment condition (rows) are calculated with 95% confidence intervals for each outcome (panels) to provide a sense of magnitude.

A. Closeness (ATE)



B. Closeness (group means)



C. Rank (ATE)

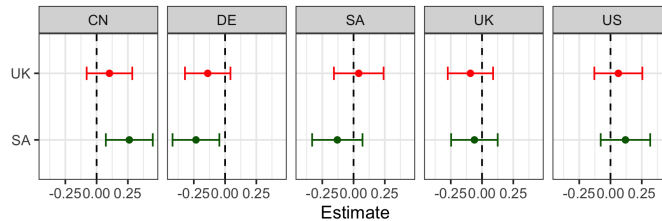


Figure 27: *Election monitoring relative influence results*: In (A), OLS estimates on the effect of treatment on relative closeness with 95% robust standard errors. The treatments (columns), election monitors to the US from South Africa and the UK, are compared to a control of no information for each outcome (panels). The outcomes are calculated by subtracting the status value of one country from another to obtain a measure of “closeness” between the two states. In (B), group means of each treatment condition (columns) are calculated with 95% confidence intervals for each outcome (panels) to provide a sense of magnitude. In (C), probit estimates on the effect of treatment on relative rank with 95% robust standard errors. The outcomes are calculated by transforming the rating of each country outcome into its rank among all other country ratings.

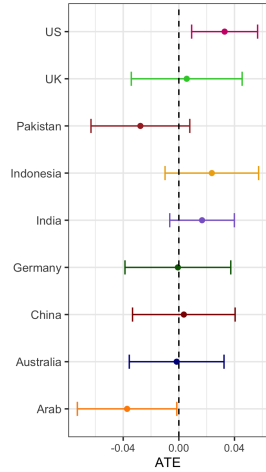
A.9 Reanalyses

A.9 .1 Dietrich *et al.* (2018)

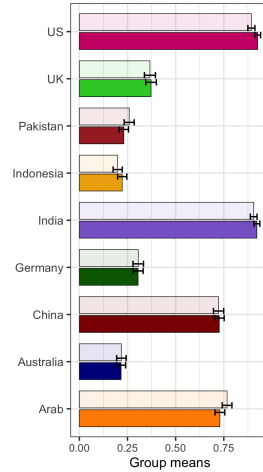
Dietrich *et al.* (2018) test the effect of information about USAID branding on a local development project in Bangladesh on people’s perceptions of the influence of a battery of different countries using a survey experiment. Figure 28 shows the individual and relative status costs/benefits of information about USAID funding (relative to no information about funding) on the perceived influence of the US, UK, Pakistan, Indonesia, India, Germany, China, Australia, and Arab countries. We note that Dietrich *et al.* (2018) calculate influence on a binary scale which differs from our 0-100 ratings in the original surveys. We caution readers about the substantive interpretations of the individual, relative, and rank differences in this reanalysis as each respondent could not adjust the ratings of the outcome countries to reflect rank. Individual influence, here as in our own study, is an average of across all respondents. Relative (closeness) influence is the difference in averages between two outcomes across all respondents. And relative (rank) influence requires us to aggregate all average influences across respondents and compare. We therefore more are cautious in our interpretation of the relative results in the Dietrich *et al.* (2018) reanalysis given the differences in outcome design. Details on these calculations are available in our replication materials.

Nonetheless, there remains strong evidence that third-party states see changes in their level of influence on Bangladesh when Bangladeshi respondents see USAID branding. This evidence supports our general theory that publics make inferences about the status of third-party states from relevant information about the status-changing actions of others. These updated perceptions of international status occur at both the individual and relative (closeness) level.

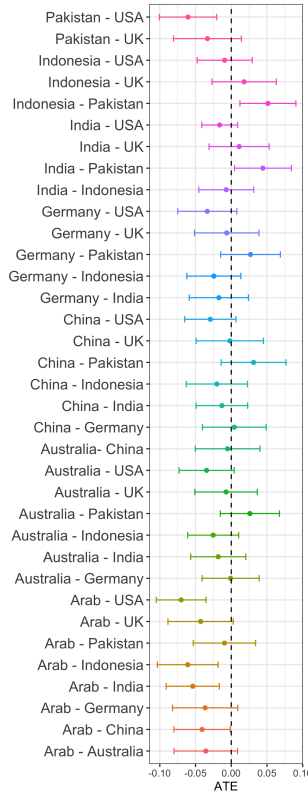
A. Individual ATE



B. Individual Group means



C. Relative (Closeness) ATE



D. Relative (Closeness) Group means

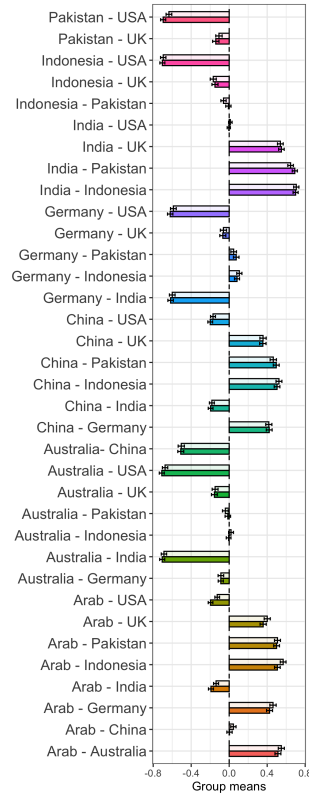


Figure 28: *Dietrich et al. (2018) Replication with Full Panel*: Panel A depicts the average treatment effect of US branding of aid projects on perceived influence (0 to 1) of a given country with 95% robust standard errors. Panel B shows the group means of each country by treatment status with 95% confidence intervals. Panel C depicts the effect of US branding of aid projects on perceived influence (0 to 1) of a given country compared to another country; outcomes calculated by subtracting the influence of country B from country A and 95% robust standard errors depicted. Panel D shows the group means of each country by treatment status with 95% confidence intervals. Opaque bars indicate control condition; fully-colored bars indicate treatment.

A.9 .2 Mattingly and Sundquist (2021)

Mattingly & Sundquist (2021)'s primary study examines individual status gains (proxied by outcomes: *Attitudes towards [American/Chinese] people*, *Attitudes towards [American/Chinese] government*, *India should have cooperative policies with [the US/China]*, and *[the US/China] has handled COVID-19 well*). They evaluate the effect of social media statements about Chinese aid to the Indian Red Cross and the World Health Organization. These treatments are evaluated against a control of innocuous social media content. We replicate Mattingly & Sundquist (2021) and extend their data to test for relative status changes for the US and China given information treatment in an Indian population sample.

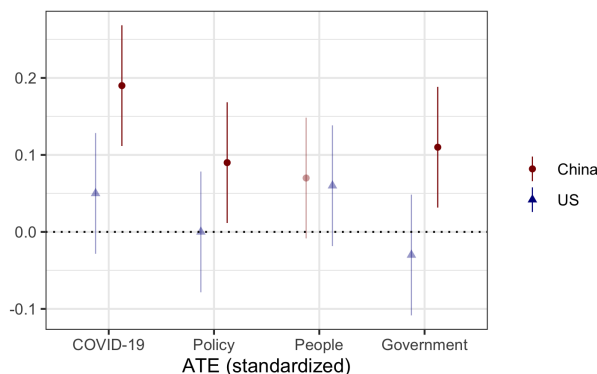


Figure 29: *Mattingly & Sundquist (2021) Replication with Relative Effects*: Columns depict outcomes, colors states for which outcomes were evaluated. Standardized average treatment effects with 95% robust standard errors depicted.

As Figure 29 shows, for the foreign aid treatment, Chinese status increases individually along three dimensions (attitudes toward government, cooperative policies towards China, and China's handling of COVID-19) On the other hand the US's individual status is stable across all treatments and outcomes. There are no individual effects for the US but the US' status significantly declines relative to China in the area of COVID-19. While status increases *individually* for the status-enhancing actor (China) along three dimensions, it increases *relative* to other states (the US) on only one dimension. These results demonstrate the importance of our theoretical framework and are akin to the type of status changes we highlight in Figure 3.III of our main text. They demonstrate how analyzing relative status challenges that conclusion one would arrive at by examining only individual status.

A.9 .3 Carnegie and Dolan (2020)

We replicate Carnegie & Dolan (2020) to test for the relative (rank) difference in status changes for India and other states given information treatment in a US population sample. The authors identify rank status gains by asking respondents to rank states in the international system using the following outcome measure:

Below is a list of several countries, including India. Please rank the following countries in terms of how much international status (respect, prestige) they have among the other countries in the world. To change the order of the list, use your cursor to drag and drop the items. Please order the list so that the country with the most status is at the top of the list, the country with the second most status is next, and so on.

In Table 6, we report ordered probit findings for each state the authors ask about in their constructed international system. We find no significant change in state rank following the aid rejection treatment.¹⁸

| <i>Dependent variable: Rank of [Country]</i> | | | | | | | |
|--|-------------------|------------------|------------------|-------------------|------------------|-------------------|-------------------|
| | India | Germany | China | Kenya | Indonesia | Venezuela | Haiti |
| Aid Rejection | -0.046 (0.082) | 0.046 (0.067) | 0.087 (0.077) | -0.032 (0.085) | 0.120 (0.080) | -0.078 (0.097) | -0.096 (0.082) |
| Observations | 758 | 758 | 758 | 758 | 758 | 758 | 758 |
| Adjusted R ² | 0.000 | 0.000 | 0.000 | 0.000 | 0.000 | 0.000 | 0.000 |

Note:

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

Table 6: *Carnegie & Dolan (2020) Replication with Systemic Ranking Effects: Average treatment effect of India's aid rejection on rank of countries. Each model represents a different country's change in rank outcome. Robust standard errors in parentheses.*

The original paper finds that the individual status of India increases in response to the aid rejection treatment in a separate question. However, because the individual status of other countries (Germany, China, Kenya, Indonesia, Venezuela, and Haiti) was not a part of the survey, we do not know from this experimental design whether the lack of change in ranking is due to a compensatory mechanism in the status of transacting and third-parties or because India's status does not increase enough to constitute a system-rank change, as in Mattingly & Sundquist (2021). Our reanalysis suggests that there is an important benefit to measuring individual status and rank status side by side to better understand the mechanism of status quo bias.

¹⁸Carnegie & Dolan (2020) report ranking results for India in their paper.

A.10 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 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.

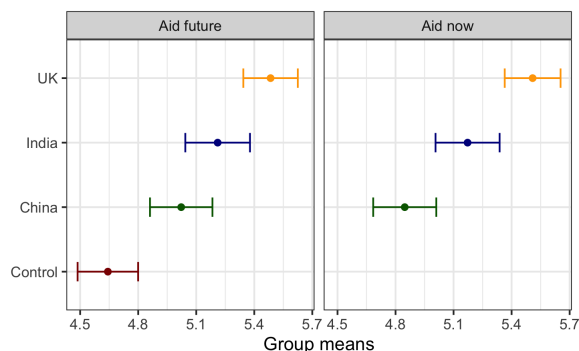


Figure 30: *Aid acceptance*: Group means of support for aid acceptance currently and in the future by treatment condition. Point estimates with 95% robust standard errors displayed.

A.11 Former recipient prime

Our experiment was designed to test public support for accepting aid and perceptions of the respect and influence of other countries. We theorized that when citizens are 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: “[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.

We compare the effects of prime within the aid treatments, that is, India vs. India plus prime and China vs. China plus prime, in Figure 31.¹⁹ Priming respondents that India and China were former recipients had null effects on all of our outcome measures; though the effect of the prime is significant at $p = 0.09$ for India when India gives aid. These null effects suggest that information that these countries are former aid recipients is likely bundled into respondents' understanding of the countries.

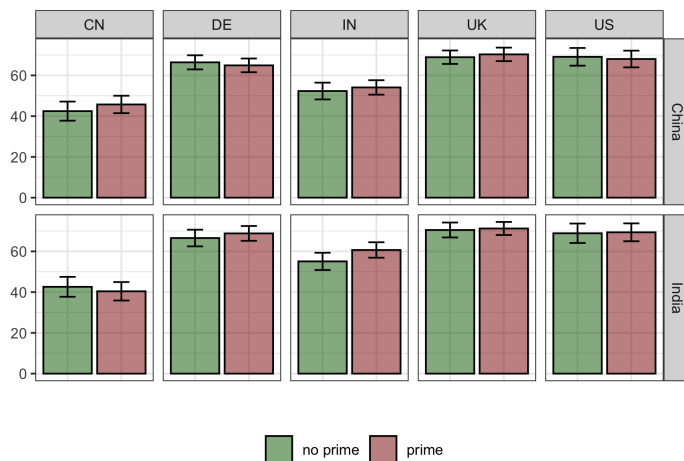


Figure 31: *Prime treatment*: Group means of each treatment condition (rows) are calculated with 95% confidence intervals for each outcome (columns) to provide a sense of magnitude. Colors indicate prime and no prime.

¹⁹Results are robust to including demographic controls. Results available from the authors upon request.

A.12 Heterogeneous effects

A.12 .1 Party

We expect that conservatives will be less accepting of foreign aid from new, non-western donors, and would be less willing to elevate their international status. For our measure of party ID, we transform a seven point ideological scale into a dichotomous measure. For ease of interpretation, we exclude moderates from this analysis. While the isolationist and anti-China rhetoric from the Republican party, and particularly from President Trump, would support our theoretical intuition, we find divergent support for partisan effects. Conservatives and liberals do not differ in their perception of how Chinese aid affects US status: both attribute greater respect to China and no change in respect to the US. However, liberals are more likely to increase Germany's status when China gives aid, perhaps consistent with a theoretical framework in which liberals are more concerned with fairness in the international system (Brutger & Clark, 2021; Brutger & Rathbun, Forthcoming) and adjust Germany's status to better reflect its relative position to a newly-respected China.

A.12 .2 Nationalism

Second, we also investigate the role of nationalism, using a three item index. Respondents 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). High nationalism is indicated by values above the median nationalism index score, low otherwise. 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 find that this is indeed the case; our results for status-updating are driven almost entirely by low-nationalism individuals.

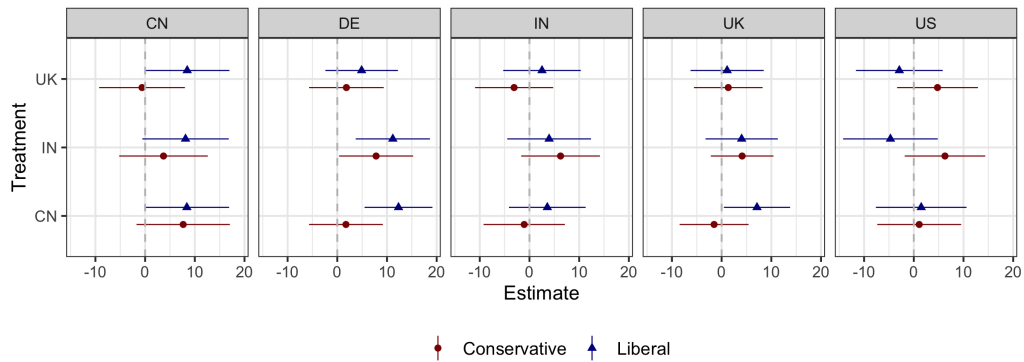


Figure 32: *Partisan heterogenous effects: ATEs of treatment by partisan identity.* Panels represent outcomes, rows treatment conditions. Point estimates with 95% robust standard errors displayed.

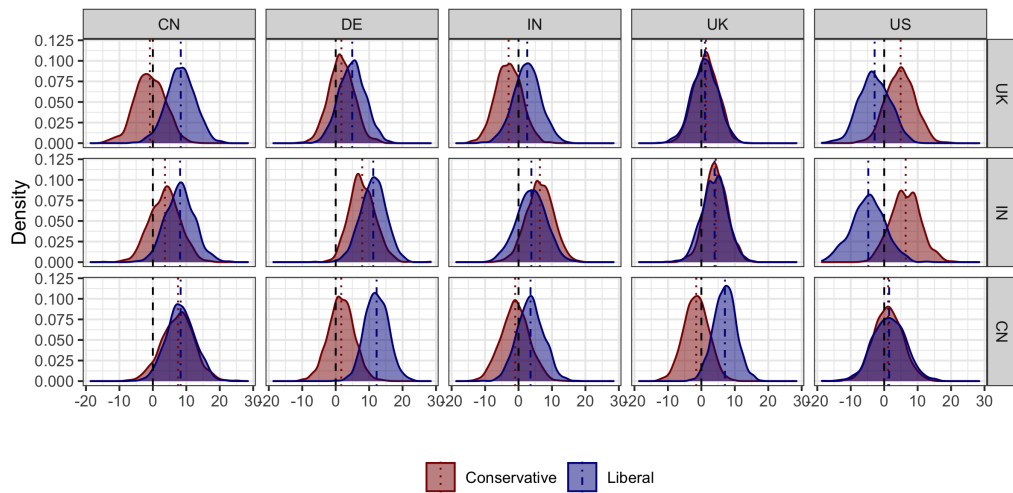


Figure 33: *Bootstrapped partisan heterogenous effects: Bootstrapped estimates of ATEs by partisan identity from 1000 draws.* Columns represent outcomes, rows treatment conditions.

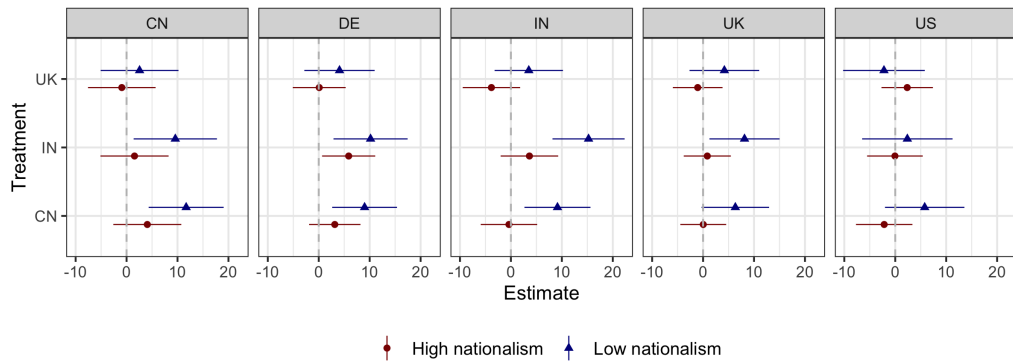


Figure 34: *Nationalist heterogeneous effects: ATEs of treatment by nationalism.* Panels represent outcomes, rows treatment conditions. Point estimates with 95% robust standard errors displayed.

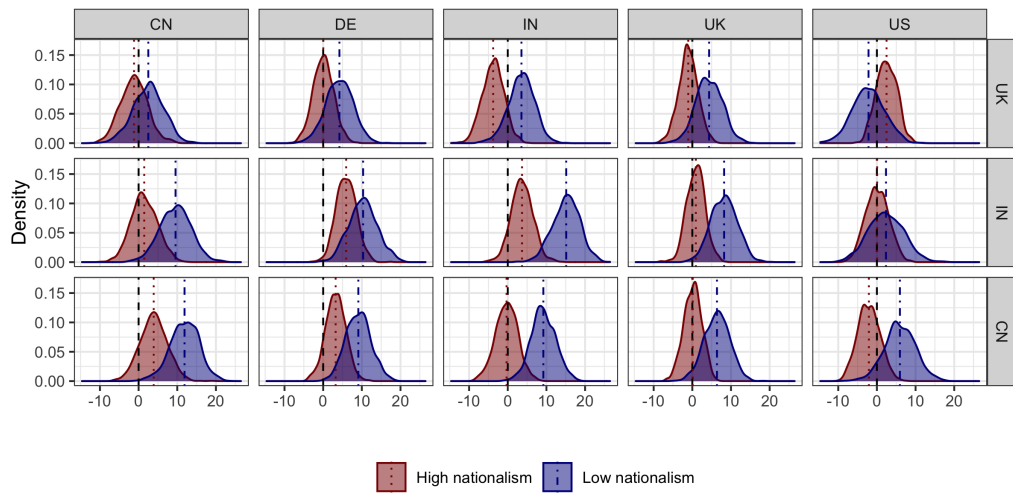


Figure 35: *Bootstrapped nationalist heterogeneous effects: Bootstrapped estimates of ATEs by nationalism from 1000 draws.* Columns represent outcomes, rows treatment conditions.