

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

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Abstract

States take costly actions to increase their international status. However, a state's status-enhancing behavior may affect individual (the state), relational (the state relative to another state), and systemic (states uninvolved in status-changing actions) status. We examine status stability in the case of foreign aid, a space of clear international hierarchies in which aid donation (receipt) is status-conferring (status-denying). The disruption of typical aid flows during COVID-19 allows us to examine status reversals, or unusual aid transactions, that could destabilize established hierarchies. Using an online information experiment, we find that aid donations (1) increase perceptions of respect, but not influence, and (2) increase individual status for unusual donors while decreasing relative status for unusual recipients. Respondents also adjust the absolute status attributed to states outside of the transaction in order to maintain the same hierarchical ranking. While individual actions may affect individual status, the hierarchy of the international system remains stable.

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1 Introduction

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

The benefits of status imply that states will take costly actions to change their status. States invest in nuclear weapons, join international organizations, or host the Olympics in order to boost their standing in the eyes of foreign audiences (Levite, 2003; Hafner-Burton & Montgomery, 2006; Larson & Shevchenko, 2010; Pu & Schweller, 2014; Pratt, 2021), sometimes at the expense of other political goals (Barnhart, 2016). While a significant body of scholarship has focused on conflict as a means of status-enhancement, states possess multiple strategies other than war to augment their international standing (Renshon, 2016; Duque, 2018).¹ To understand how state status can change within the international system, we examine disruptions to expected international hierarchies using the case of foreign aid.

How does foreign aid affect perceptions of status in the international system? This question has remained hard to answer because aid relationships tend to reinforce existing hierarchies. The same donor states tend to give aid to the same recipient states for prolonged periods of time (Schraeder *et al.*, 1998). Thus, we argue that the best way to gain empirical leverage over this question is to study “unusual” aid cases that are capable of updating people’s priors. In this paper, we focus specifically on how the provision of aid by unusual donors and the acceptance of aid by unusual recipients affects people’s beliefs about

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

international status on three different dimensions: individual, relational and systemic. It is precisely the exceptional nature of these relationships that allows us to better understand how hierarchies, at multiple levels, are destabilized.

In the context of foreign aid, donor status provides both moral and material benefits that are recognized by citizens in donor states, citizens in recipient states, and the international system at large (Heinrich *et al.*, 2018; Bueno de Mesquita & Smith, 2007). Recipients of foreign aid are perceived as less developed and less powerful than donors of foreign aid (Carnegie & Dolan, 2020). Therefore, becoming the type of state that donates (receives) foreign aid will increase (decrease) a nation’s international standing (Donno *et al.*, 2018). Where the perceptions of “superior” donors and “inferior” recipients meet unusual role reversals in foreign aid activity, the “stable and structured” opinions that citizens have about foreign aid and international status should update (Milner & Tingley, 2013).

But whose status changes? While we focus on bilateral aid transactions as a stimuli for understanding status change more broadly, status can also be relational. 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). This implies that if unusual aid activity destabilizes perceptions of status for one party in a transaction, it might also impact the status of the second party. Even further, an unusual aid transaction might also have system-wide ripple effects on the larger international ecosystem. Unusual donors might change the identify and meaning of the original donor group (Hafner-Burton, 2013; Gray, 2013; Brooks *et al.*, 2015). An increase in relative status for one country might also be accommodated with a decrease in rank for another country, which may or may not be a part of the original transaction. Therefore, we design our study to understand how unusual aid transactions can impact the status of countries inside and outside the bilateral donor-recipient relationship.

The 2019-2020 COVID-19 pandemic has destabilized the international system across multiple dimensions, including changing patterns of aid provision and receipt between major donors and recipients of foreign aid. The United States, a top provider of foreign aid, has

led the world in both COVID-19 cases and associated deaths. As a result, the US has, at times during the pandemic, taken on the role of aid recipient by accepting foreign aid in the form of medical supplies.² Building on this real-world case of unusual aid activity, we evaluate the effects of unusual aid relationships on international status in an online information experiment that accounts for the multidimensional nature of status perceptions in our measurement strategy (Herrman, 2013; Fiske *et al.*, 2002, 2007). Unusual aid acts during COVID-19 did indeed affect respondents’ respect for unusual donors. However, unusual donations were not rewarded with increased perceptions of influence. While unusual aid donors are rewarded with individual gains in respect, unusual aid recipients are penalized with relative declines in respect. An increase in respect for an unusual donor could destabilize established hierarchies if the individual state’s status overtakes that of other states in the international system. Respondents offset the potential change in international hierarchy that such movements could imply by adjusting the ratings of third-party countries that are outside the bilateral transaction. They shift the rating of other states in the ecosystem of international status so that there is no overall change in *rank*, or hierarchical ordering, for unusual donors, recipients, or third-party states.

While there is a strong consensus that status is important to states, status research in international relations remains in its’ “youth” (Renshon, 2017). Our results have several important implications for how domestic audiences understand changes to the international hierarchy. Theoretically, we build on a growing body of empirical status literature that shows status is not only driven by military considerations but also by economic ones (Powers & Renshon, 2021; Carnegie & Dolan, 2020; Duque & Houser, 2021; Brutger & Rathbun, Forthcoming). Behavioral shifts in other forms of international economic cooperation, such as foreign aid, may serve as an important substitute to international conflict. However, in the existing literature, the multiple potential meanings of status has made the measurement

²Prior to COVID-19 the OECD notes no instances of the US accepting aid since 1947. However, it is unlikely that the medical supply transaction will appear in the OECD data as the data track development assistance.

of the concept difficult to “pin down” (Heffetz & Frank, 2011, 11). We offer several important methodological advancements. First, we explore this question in a unique moment in international relations, the COVID-19 pandemic, which features aid flows that deviate from existing aid hierarchies. This allows us to better understand how unusual behaviors may lead to status changes and how status might dissipate in the international system. Second, this paper is the first, to our knowledge, to study the system-level impacts of status changes. By allowing respondents to rate multiple countries within and outside of the bilateral aid transaction, we demonstrate that respondents update the rating of third-party countries in order to maintain their status-quo ranking. Our work suggests that the assimilation of new information on status creates ripple effects across the larger international system and that these ripple effects have a status quo bias. Finally, by treating status as a multidimensional concept for which respondents consider a host of factors, we are able to directly compare how unusual behaviors impact different perceptions of status (specifically, respect and influence). We find evidence that respect is more easily manipulated by symbolic or one-off status-altering actions than influence. Status is not a monolith and should not be studied as such. By testing status perceptions across multiple dimensions and multiple levels of analysis, we offer new insights into how status operates within the international system.

2 Status (In)stability in the International System

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

We focus specifically on how status conveys a state’s place in the international hierarchy.

Status describes a deference hierarchy among comparable actors in which actors of lower standing defer to the interests of actors with higher standing (Wolf, 2011). Material attributes such as military capacity or wealth impact states’ standing in this hierarchy (Paul *et al.*, 2014).³ Membership in a specific group, such as “major powers”, “nuclear states” or “rogue states”, can also convey status.⁴

Importantly, states value status and seek to improve their position in the international system (Frank, 1985; Huberman *et al.*, 2004). The benefits of status can be intrinsic – status for status’ sake – or instrumental. 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 and realist theories, status can also provide instrumental benefits, where deference yields material benefits such as FDI or trade concessions (Tomz, 2012). Intrinsic and instrumental notions of status are inseparable and together provide strong incentives for states to invest in status-enhancing behaviors.

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

But what happens if states are successful in augmenting their status? We argue that changes in status can occur across three different dimensions: individual, relational, and system-wide. Individual-level status changes have received the most attention in recent

³Status has also been studied as an attribute of fundamental values like ideology or culture (Larson & Shevchenko, 2010). See Duque (2018) for a summary of status attributes that have been pursued in the literature.

⁴A discussion of status cannot be entirely divorced from larger conceptions of legitimacy and authority in international relations (Hurd, 1999; Lake, 2009). States that achieve high status via collective assent are viewed as legitimate, giving them the authority to dictate various policy domains of subordinate states. This is consistent with our theoretical argument.

papers, concluding that when states engage in status-enhancing activities, their individual status value increases in isolation to the status of other countries. For example, Carnegie & Dolan (2020) find that Americans perceive an increase in India’s status when India refuses foreign aid. Powers & Renshon (2021) test the effect of six different international scenarios on leader approval in the US and find that international outcomes that present the US as a high-status state lead to higher approval ratings for the leader, with approval ratings mediated by status concerns. 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 should decrease (increase). When a state engages in activities that are status-conferring or status-denying, both the domestic and international public update their beliefs about the individual, status of that state.

Importantly, as Renshon *et al.* (2018) note, status is also relative. In a bilateral relationship, a status change in one state could change the status of another state by comparison. The change could occur in individual beliefs about status for the second state or the *relative* value of status for the second state in relation to the first. As previous work suggests, a high-status act should *increase* the acting state’s status and a low-status act should *decrease* the acting state’s status. However, in a bilateral transaction, a change in status for the acting state may affect the status of the other party. In other words, if status is understood as zero-sum, a gain in Country A’s status should come at the expense of Country B. Even if Country A’s status-enhancing actions do not result in a change in the individual value of status for Country B, the *relative* status relationship between the two countries could still change because status is hierarchical.⁵ In a recent empirical piece, Brutger & Rathbun (Forthcoming), for example, 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

⁵Theoretically, relational change could manifest as either a change in the rank ordering of two countries or a change in the perceived distance between two countries. Empirically, we test for both changes in relative distance and rank in Section 5.3

trade. We argue that both relative and absolute changes in status should be observed when status changes occur in clear bilateral relationships.

Finally, does the status of states uninvolved in a status-conferring or status-denying event change? The relatively-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. States do not act, and status is not evaluated, in a vacuum. Indeed, the theoretical status literature emphasizes the relational nature of status even though most empirical tests are conducted at the level of individual-country status (Renshon *et al.*, 2018; Duque, 2018). States attempt to increase their status by behaving like the type of state that already has high status or belongs to a high-status group of states. 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) Ukraine intended to behave in a manner distinct from its Soviet past. 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 of Ukraine’s membership in the program. The signal sent by membership in an NPT may have changed because different types of states now participate in the treaty. In the words of Groucho Marx, “I wouldn’t want to belong to a club that would have me as a member.”

Yet, status changes to the international system may or may not result in the same zero-sum behavior we would expect to observe in a bilateral transaction. This remains an empirical question. Take, for example, Chinese aid in Africa’s effect on African perceptions of global foreign policy. This bilateral relationship increases approval of China in the eyes

of African recipients of aid (Dreher *et al.*, 2020). In a zero-sum conception of international status, an increase in Chinese foreign policy approval should also result in a relative decrease in approval for the foreign policies of other actors, especially rival states. Dreher *et al.* (2020) find that the US and other donor countries do not see their individual approval decline as a result of the presence of Chinese aid, perhaps because recipients do not update their expectations about other donor behavior without additional information; However, they do not investigate the relative approval ratings between China and other third party countries. The signal sent by status-altering behavior by one state could be informative about the status of other states in the international system (by changing the meaning of group membership, for example) or it may result in no updating about the relative status of other actors because these other actors' actions have not changed. The system-wide implications of status changes remain an open and understudied question.

3 Status and Foreign Aid

How does foreign aid affect perceptions of international status? Do foreign aid transactions lead to status change? The case of foreign aid expands our understand of status-conferring interactions and provides analytically-useful examples of reification and disruption of international hierarchies. While Powers & Renshon (2021) show that status concerns exist across multiple issues – publics are responsive to changes in economic, military, and moral status – most work has focused on status as a cause of conflict. With a few exceptions, the role of foreign aid in status competition has received comparatively less attention.⁶ Second, like other issue areas, foreign aid usually subscribes to a clear status hierarchy. Most aid transactions perpetuate the status quo as the same donors give aid to the same recipients for prolonged periods of time, thus creating group identities for donors and recipients (Schraeder *et al.*, 1998). Also like other issue areas, foreign aid's inclination towards stable relation-

⁶Duque & Houser (2021) also work to fill this gap. They find that Americans are more supportive of foreign aid when cued to consider that a reduction in aid spending would hurt US status.

ships makes studying status change an empirical challenge: most states that choose to give foreign aid may already be perceived as the type of states that give foreign aid.⁷ However, we can observe disruptions, or unusual behavior, in typical aid relationships. It is in these unusual circumstances that new information is provided with which to update perceptions of status. We empirically and theoretically focus on how the international community updates its perceptions of status when states deviate from their typical aid behavior.

Shifts from recipient (donor) to donor (recipient) can occur over the long or short term. Mass public perceptions of a state’s status may or may not keep pace with these changes. Recent decades have witnessed the rise of non-Western donor states like China, India, Brazil and Saudi Arabia (Six, 2009). While many of these states are former recipients of foreign aid, today they have experienced sufficient economic growth to abstain from receiving significant foreign aid and offer aid donations. Policymakers may be aware of the changing nature of the aid landscape, but mass publics may be less familiar with “new donors” and may perceive their donations as unusual or unexpected. High income – or high status – states, here conceived of as donor states, may also accept aid. High status countries are not immune from natural disasters or financial crises that require emergency assistance from the international community. For example, foreign aid poured into Greece during the Eurozone crisis (Moyo, 2015) and into Japan following the Fukushima nuclear disaster (Ford & Provost, 2011). Importantly, the United States turned down foreign aid following Hurricane Katrina because it was worried about how that action would be perceived by the international community (Brinkley & Smith, 2005). Both long- and short-term shifts in aid relationships may create unusual aid transactions that provide analytical traction to examine changes in status hierarchies. We choose to examine short-term, high-profile status reversals in the context of COVID-19 as outlined below.

How are unusual aid donations status-conferring? Donors of foreign aid are viewed with “superiority and power” for material, strategic, and moral reasons (Kuusik, 2006, 57). First,

⁷For example, foreign aid relationships often reflect existing hierarchies such as colonial ties (Alesina & Dollar, 2000).

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 states at the top of the economic hierarchy. Acting as a donor state can signal economic prowess which states can then use to their advantage in other material transactions. Second, vast literatures on foreign aid confirm that aid is given strategically (McKinley & Little, 1977; Dreher *et al.*, 2009; Reynolds & Winters, 2016; Kuziemko & Werker, 2006) and often to manipulate the policy positions of its recipients (Bueno de Mesquita & Smith, 2007; Dreher *et al.*, 2008; Dreher & Sturm, 2012).⁸ Foreign aid can thus be understood as a social contract, akin to relational hierarchy, where donors provide necessary funds in order to offset the recipient’s required policy concessions (Lake, 2009). Third, providing aid can also provide moral superiority. Aid demonstrates a dedication to helping the world’s poor, improving international audiences’ perception of the donor (Goldsmith *et al.*, 2014; Dreher *et al.*, 2020).

In contrast, recipients of foreign aid are viewed with “inferiority and powerlessness” (Kusik, 2006, 57). Accepting aid diminishes status by signaling lower capacity, less autonomy, and historical notions of underdevelopment. First, receiving aid implies that domestic capacity is lacking, either to build or buy what the domestic population requires. The lack of adequate resources conveys incompetence and a much lower position in the economic hierarchy. This perception could be domestic and international. A large literature on the effects of foreign aid on recipient government legitimacy examines whether domestic audiences of recipient countries find that their governments are not capable or not responsive to domestic political concerns if aid is a substitute for domestic revenue generation.⁹ Second, in the aid-

⁸While status gains may be an explicit motivation for foreign aid donors, it is not required for our theory to hold. There are many alternative explanations for why donors provide aid including benevolence and quid-pro-quo insurance considerations for an uncertain future. Regardless of donors’ intentions, we are interested in the perceptions of their actions by the international audience. Perceptions may or may not accord with donors’ motivations and therefore we theorize about the effects of foreign aid transactions rather than justifying their occurrence.

⁹See the literature on foreign aid and government legitimacy including Dietrich & Winters (2015), Dietrich *et al.* (2018), and Briggs (2018). For a recent accounting of evidence on this topic, see the *Studies in Comparative International Development* 2020 special issue.

for-policy-concessions framework (Bueno de Mesquita & Smith, 2007), recipients of foreign aid are pulled by the strings of their benefactors. By virtue of this contract, they sacrifice foreign policy autonomy in exchange for the aid they receive. Third, cultural, historical, and racial factors play an important role in maintaining the lower group identity of aid recipients. Paternalist arguments have helped to entrench the idea that developing countries, and even formerly developing countries, cannot handle their own affairs, and deserve a lower place in the international system.¹⁰

We thus expect that aid provision by unusual donors and receipt by unusual recipients may affect states' status on the individual, relational, and systemic levels if it provides new information on which to update. First, following Carnegie & Dolan (2020) and Powers & Renshon (2021), we hypothesize that the individual action of aid donation (aid receipt) should have a positive (negative) effect on a state's status.

H1a: Aid provision will increase perceptions of individual status for unusual donor countries.

H1b: Aid provision will decrease perceptions of individual status for unusual recipient countries.

Second, we expect that these changes in status should occur relative to the other state in the aid transaction, thus effecting status comparisons in the bilateral relationship.

H2a: Aid provision will increase perceptions of relative status for unusual donor countries.

H2b: Aid provision will decrease perceptions of relative status for unusual recipient countries.

¹⁰For example, Baker (2015) demonstrates that White Americans prefer to send aid to African versus Eastern European recipients, a finding “not [due] to the greater perceived need of black foreigners but to an underlying racial paternalism that sees them as lacking in human agency.”

Finally, while unusual aid activity should theoretically affect both parties to the transaction, it is less clear how third parties in the international system will be affected and whether the effects will be individual or relative. Prior work suggests that third parties' status could be affected by changes in one or multiple states' status. If status is understood as a zero-sum game, the relative status of third parties might shift. If the meaning of group membership changes, perceptions of individual status for third parties could update. However, third parties could also be unaffected by status changes if perceptions of status require direct information about changes in the third party's behavior. This remains an empirical question with potentially countervailing effects. We offer two sets of opposing hypotheses to distinguish these opposing mechanisms of status-updating. We do not have expectations for the direction of systemic effects.

H3a: Aid provision by unusual donors and aid acceptance by unusual recipients will impact perceptions of individual status for countries outside the bilateral aid transaction.

H3b: Aid provision by unusual donors and aid acceptance by unusual recipients will not impact perceptions of individual status for countries outside the bilateral aid transaction.

H4a: Aid provision by unusual donors and aid acceptance by unusual recipients will impact perceptions of relative status for countries outside the bilateral aid transaction.

H4b: Aid provision by unusual donors and aid acceptance by unusual recipients will impact perceptions of relative status for countries outside the bilateral aid transaction.

We apply our hypotheses to the case of the COVID-19 pandemic because it altered patterns of foreign aid donation and receipt across the world. The epidemiological scale of the virus dwarfed most countries' abilities to respond individually and foreign assistance rose rapidly to meet the need for humanitarian relief, medical personnel, and equipment in the most-affected areas. Important for our project, it also disrupted many of the typical roles and relationships in aid provision. For example, while the US has committed and disbursed

virus specific aid, China has played a much larger part in contributing to global eradication, providing a blitz of humanitarian aid to countries as diverse as Iraq, Serbia, Peru, and the Philippines (Kurtzer & Gonzales, 2020).

Traditional high-income donor states have also been some of the most affected by the virus. In the beginning of 2020, the relative unpreparedness of the US and Europe in addition to the devastating toll of the virus in these high-income states led some “unusual donors” to offer assistance. For the US in particular, the government was sharply criticized for accepting foreign assistance from the Kremlin in April 2020. Russia was quick to tout its planeload of ventilators and medical supplies destined for New York City as “humanitarian aid” and the US media ran with this message using 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 turned out to be highly controversial, and political commentary was quick to point out that “it is an uncomfortable and humbling spot for the U.S. to find itself in – the world’s richest and most powerful country, one that plays an outsize role in global security issues and international affairs, suddenly turned supplicant.” (Shesgreen & Hjelmgaard, 2020). Other critics pointed out that Russia’s foreign aid efforts were just a propaganda effort, citing that many of Russia’s shipments of medical supplies to Europe were labeled with the phrase “from Russia with love (Togoh, 2020). Amidst this backlash and aware that the optics of aid acceptance were negative, the US State Department tried to clarify that the medical equipment was a purchase rather than charity (US Department of State, 2020). However, substantial conversations continued about how much of the medical equipment was paid for by the US versus Russia and whether there was a grant element involved in providing medical equipment below market rates (Sprunt, 2020). Regardless, these circumstances proved to be a politically-salient instance of an unusual donor sending aid to an unusual recipient. We use this example to ground our theoretical expectations of status changes in response to unusual foreign aid transactions and design our experimental study, as described in Section 4.

4 Experimental Design

We test our hypotheses with an online information experiment administered by Lucid on 1,532 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 B. We follow experimental approaches such as Renshon (2017), Brutger & Rathbun (Forthcoming) and Carnegie & Dolan (2020) to understand the idea of status as a second-order belief, separate from material capabilities. Section 4.1 expands on our survey instrument in more detail.

The US sample offers analytical leverage for our theoretical expectations because Americans consistently rate the US a high-status country, overestimate US contributions to foreign aid, and are concerned with international status. First, stable favorability ratings of the US by Americans biases against finding significant results. As we ask a US audience to rate the US and four other states, status-updating about the US, as an unusual recipient, is done by a domestic rather than international audience. 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.¹¹ The US domestic public consistently ranks the US favorably in comparison to other countries and as US respondents are more likely to feel attached to the US’ high status position, this biases against finding a punishing effect for unusual recipients. We would expect sharper status changes if the same experiment was enumerated in another country.¹²

Second, US citizens generally believe that the US spends a disproportionate amount of its own budget on foreign aid (Milner & Tingley, 2013). This suggests that US citizens are amenable to receiving free money to help fight COVID-19. However, the international status of the US relative to other countries was a major talking point in the 2016 presidential campaign of Donald Trump, who claimed that other countries were “laughing at us” (BBC

¹¹Appendix E provides public opinion data from Pew.

¹²We leave this to future research.

News, 2018). An emphasis on national pride may make citizens less amenable to accepting foreign aid, particularly from non-traditional donors. A US sample provides an opportunity to tease apart the countervailing effects of the economic benefits of foreign aid and the international status costs of its acceptance. It adds not only to our understanding of status change but also to our understanding of how public opinion on foreign aid matters in donor countries.

We base our experimental treatments on the real delivery of Russian medical supplies to the US and its coverage in the national press. Specifically, we utilize a factorial design whereby respondents are randomly assigned to read a hypothetical headline about aid acceptance or are directed straight to the outcome measures. For respondents who learn of the US’ aid acceptance, we further randomize the donor country (UK, China and India). The treatment wording for the UK condition appears as follows, with all treatment wordings 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.

While the vignette is realistic, the acceptance of a single cargo plane with medical supplies is a small act. Yet, 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. Actual news coverage from major outlets like the *New York Times* and *USA Today* use much stronger rhetoric than our prime, going as far as to portray the act as “turning the tables.”¹³ Our

¹³The following NYT headline serves as the template for our vignette. “TURNING THE TABLES, RUSSIA SENDS VIRUS AID TO U.S. MOSCOW — In the early 1990s, amid the poverty-ridden collapse of the Soviet Union, American food aid in the form of a flood of cheap chicken thighs — Russians called them “Bush legs” —symbolized the humiliating downfall of a superpower. Three decades later, Moscow got a chance to turn the tables. A giant An-124 Russian military transport plane landed at Kennedy International Airport in New York, bearing cartons of masks and ventilators from Russia for a pandemic-stricken metropolis” (Troianovski, 2020)

treatment, a relatively-diplomatic statement about a single aircraft of foreign assistance, is comparatively-weak prime, making it less likely that we will find a treatment effect.

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 because we would be manipulating hypothetical and real examples across treatment conditions, which would result in a bundled treatment. The politicization of President Trump’s ties to Russia might also have biased our results in unexpected ways. While hypothetical cases might introduce additional challenges to our study if respondents don’t find the hypothetical 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, China’s role as the originator of the virus and the labeling of COVID-19 as the “China virus” by President Donald Trump limits China’s generalizability if aid is perceived as absolving for China’s “fault” (Neuman, 2020). Even in more benign rhetoric, medical supplies from China have been deemed shoddy and inadequate (Su, 2020). Therefore, we also include India as another unusual donor of foreign aid, who is on better diplomatic terms with the United States and unassociated with the virus’ origin. While referencing specific countries is inherently a bundled treatment, we can be more confident if aid provision elevates status in the same way for both countries. Finally, we theorized that aid provided by long-time donors is unlikely to provide new information with which to update perceptions of status. We therefore include the United Kingdom as a third treatment country. The UK’s aid provision should act similarly to a placebo in that it a “usual” aid donor.

4.1 Measuring Perceptions of Status

Measuring ideational concepts is challenging. While status might be a unified theoretical concept for political scientists, *perceptions* of status in the general public are inherently multidimensional because multiple attributes go into the valuation of a state’s rank. When thinking about a single country, or a single country’s status, a person might consider a host of factors including geography, governance, culture, and behavior (Larson & Shevchenko, 2010). Because attempts to draw cognitive maps for all these dimensions get complicated quickly (Axelrod, 1976), image theory, a concept imported from psychology, has focused on how different components of perceptions interact. Some characteristics are more important than others and individuals tend to weight these concepts more heavily. Thus, we pair recent work in political science that focuses on the multidimensionality of status with stereotype-content models which find that the most critical dimensions in evaluating an actor (individual or state) are warmth and competence (Fiske *et al.*, 2002, 2007). In political science, Herrmann *et al.* (1997) notes that warmth aligns with goal interdependence and competence aligns with relative power.

We use two separate outcome measures that ask respondents to think about how much respect and how much influence over world politics countries have. Not only do these conceptions map to warmth (respect) and competence (influence) in the social psychology models, they represent two of the most common responses in Powers & Renshon (2021)’s open ended responses about what it means for states to achieve high status.¹⁴ The wording of both questions is based on Carnegie & Dolan (2020),¹⁵ with the exception of differentiating status as “respect” and “influence.” We ask “How much respect do other countries have for the following countries?” and “How much influence do each of the following countries have over world politics?” We ask respondents to rate each country from 1 (least respected) to 100

¹⁴In their analysis, they find that when publics think of status, of primary consideration is the positional role of status. 70% of respondents mention relative position among states as a definition of status; of these, 12% and 13% mention *respect* and *influence* as relevant dimensions of power.

¹⁵Their wording, in turn, relies heavily on the psychology literature. See Pettit & Lount (2010) and Pettit *et al.* (2013).

(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.

In addition to measuring the multidimensional nature of status, we ask respondents to evaluate status at multiple levels of analysis: individual, relative, and system-wide. Regardless of which treatment respondents receive, they are asked about the respect and influence of five different countries: the United States, the United Kingdom, India, China, and Germany. While the 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 system-wide (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 distance between status *ratings* for country pairs by subtracting the individual value of status for one country from each other country. Finally, 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 rating to change without affecting its rank.

5 Results

Does aid provision increase the perceived status of unusual donor countries? Does aid acceptance decrease the perceived status of unusual recipient countries? 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. We find that these concepts are analytically-distinct. Our treatment affects perceptions of country respect, but not influence.

Therefore, we focus on respect for the remainder of our results. Second, we present our results for the effect of information about unusual aid relationships on the status *rating* received by a given country (on a scale of 1-100). We refer to these ratings as the “individual” value of status for a country because they are analyzed in isolation of other countries. Ratings change in response to treatment for unusual donor countries and outside states, but not for unusual recipients. Finally, 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 distance between two countries and find that the comparative difference in status between unusual donors and recipients declines in response to treatment. We also present results for the effect of this information on the *ranking* of a given country compared to other countries in the international system. We find no change in countries’ rankings despite clear changes in countries’ ratings. While individual valuations of status are susceptible to change, hierarchical conceptions of status are more stable.

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 1 displays the baseline results (in other words, ratings of influence and respect by respondents in the control condition) for our two status measures. We draw particular attention to the differences in the distribution of responses for China and the US in the respect and influence outcomes. Respondents are markedly more likely to perceive of China as an influential state, rather than a respected state. The same is true for the US; while the density of respondents is still concentrated on the upper end of the 1-100 scale of respect, the median rating of US influence is 81 compared to 73 for respect.¹⁶

For respondents in our sample, respect and influence are not measuring the same thing. How does the same stimuli (unusual aid transactions) affect different dimensions of status?

¹⁶See Appendix F for additional tests of the difference between respect and influence.

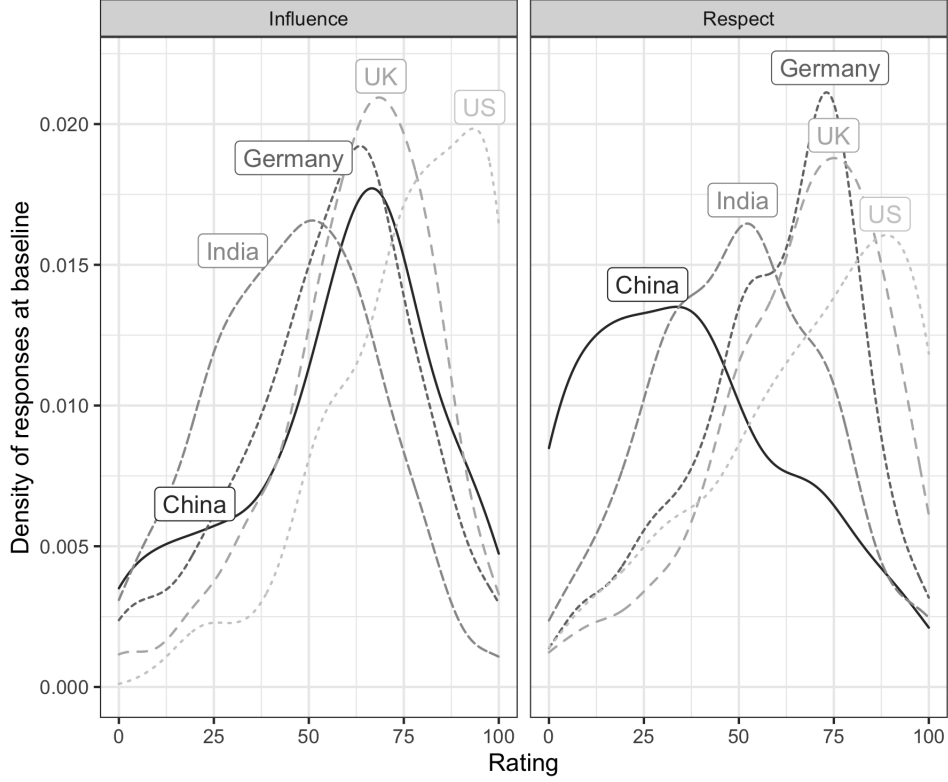


Figure 1: *Respect and Influence at Baseline*: Density plots of ratings of country respect (right) and influence (left) by respondents in the control condition. Line-types and colors represent different countries.

We examine the treatment effects of information about unusual donors and recipients for both the respect and influence outcomes. While we discuss the substance of these results in full in Sections 5.2 and 5.3, we draw attention here to the significant treatment effects for the respect outcome and the insignificant effects for the influence outcome. Figure 2 displays coefficients for the treatment effects of information about unusual donors (India, China, and the UK) on perceptions of a given country’s respect and influence. Each horizontal panel represents the individual rating of a country, with separate results estimated for each donor treatment. For example, the top left box shows average treatment effects for Chinese, Indian and British aid donations on perceptions of Chinese influence. Influence ratings (left) do not move in response to treatment, but respect ratings (right) do.

These results align with our methodological application of stereotype content models,

which relate respect to warmth and influence to competence. Warmth is less costly and easier to demonstrate over the short term than competence and we see this same trend reflected in our findings. 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. Both China and India’s respect ratings increase when Chinese/Indian aid is sent. Influence, for these two states, does not increase in response to the same stimuli, most likely because a one-time transaction does not communicate enough about long term competence and the ability to continue providing aid in the future. This pattern reflects a conception of respect that is more malleable than influence. Influence may require demonstrations of more substantial actions while respect may be more easily gained through cosmetic changes to foreign policy.

5.2 Individual status change

Turning to our main results, we focus on the right panel of Figure 2. The coefficient plot shows the average effect of our donor treatments for the respect ratings (1-100) of China, India, the US, the UK, and Germany. We first explore how the bilateral relationships between donor (India, China, and the UK) and recipient (US) countries affect perceptions of individual status (**H1a-b**) before turning to individual status changes at the system-level (**H3a-b**).

China’s (top panel) individual respect increases when respondents read about Chinese aid to the US (6.22, $p = 0.01$); the same pattern occurs with India (second panel, 7.49, $p = 0.004$). However, the UK’s (fourth panel) respect rating does not increase with information about British aid (2.10, $p = 0.29$). 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. This explanation is consistent with the theory that the donor-recipient relationship must be unusual in order to disrupt established perceptions of status; in this case, the UK may not be “unusual enough” of a donor despite the US being an unusual

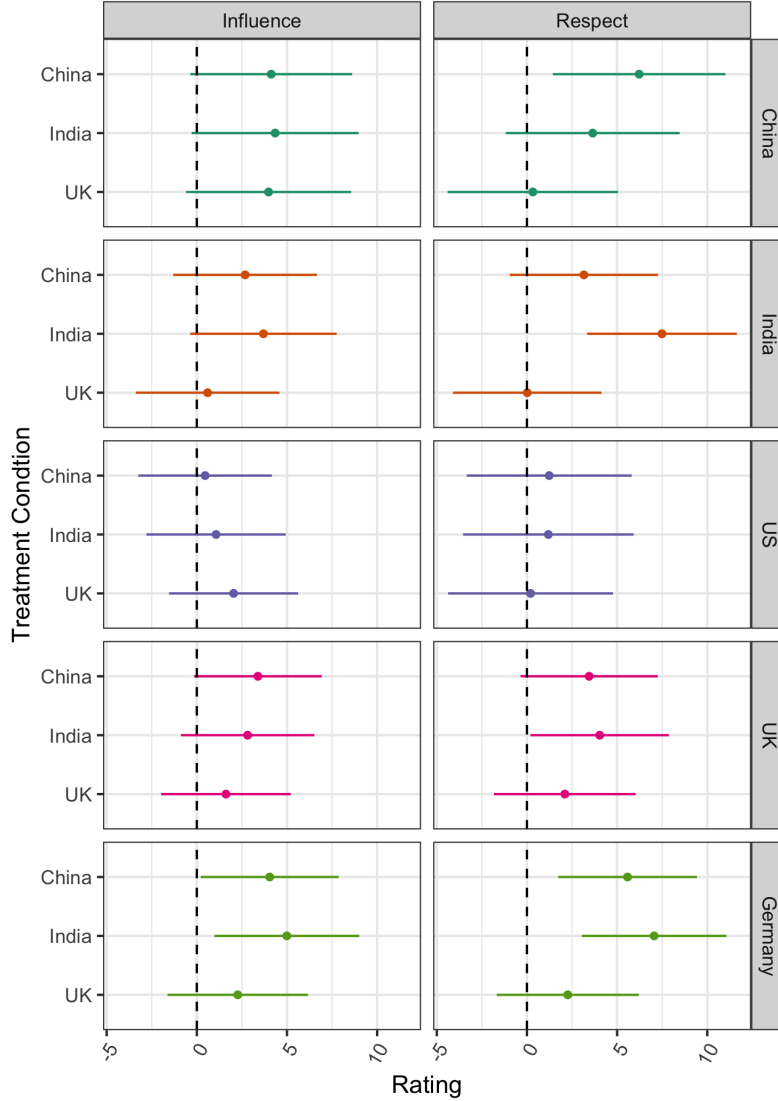


Figure 2: *Average Treatment Effect on Respect and Influence Ratings*: Top panel displays average effect of treatment on countries' influence ratings. Bottom panel displays ATE on respect ratings. Point estimates and robust 95% confidence intervals displayed.

recipient. Relatedly, it is possible that because the respect ratings of the UK are already high, respondents also face a ceiling effect.

We do not find evidence that respondents *decrease* the respect rating of the US as an unusual recipient (third panel) in response to information about the US receiving aid from India (1.18, $p = 0.62$), China (1.23, $p = 0.59$), or the UK (0.2, $p = 0.93$). Contrary to our expectations, status, as proxied by respect, is *not* a zero-sum game in which status gains

for one country necessarily result in *individual* status losses for another when we analyze country status in isolation. These results suggest that, at least in the case of small, symbolic aid donations, unusual recipients are not punished with lower status.¹⁷

We also examine the system-level effects of treatment on individual respect ratings. While examining the impact of Chinese aid to the US on respect for China and the US may seem obvious, it is less obvious how this unusual aid relationship should affect countries that are unrelated to the transaction. When China gives aid to the US, the respect rating for Germany (bottom panel) also increases significantly (0.59, $p = 0.04$). The same pattern occurs for India, where Germany (7.05, $p = 0.006$) and the UK (4.03, $p = 0.04$) both receive boosts in their respect ratings.¹⁸ The treatment does not mention Germany in any condition and the UK is not mentioned in the India treatment condition, so these results speak to the system-level effects for countries outside of the aid transaction.

We posit that this phenomenon is an example of status stability in international hierarchies. While it may be reasonable to expect China and India’s status to increase as a result of sending a plane of medical supplies to the US, this action should not affect perceptions of status in Germany and the UK. Rather, this unexpected ratings boost can be attributed to an attempt to maintain the same relative distance between established high-status countries and lower-status countries. Respondents maintain the same relative position of each country despite the status-altering actions of India and China. Therefore, a respondent may not be updating their beliefs about Germany when Germany is attributed a higher rating in this scenario. Rather, the respondent may have changed the value of respect for Germany precisely

¹⁷This directly contrasts with Carnegie & Dolan (2020), who find that states are rewarded in the eyes of the international community for rejecting aid. Two potential explanations may explain this discrepancy. First, our treatment is quite small, while the rejection of large-scale humanitarian aid in their survey experiment is a much more substantial treatment. Perhaps the US would indeed see a decline in respect should the country choose to accept a larger aid package in the face of a disaster. Second, Carnegie & Dolan (2020) ask about status in India in isolation, not as part of a battery of questions about other states. We discuss the role of implicit comparison in determining ratings in Section 5.3.

¹⁸The UK also sees a boost in respect rating from the China treatment condition (3.45, $p = 0.08$). This finding provides additional suggestive evidence that the UK’s respect rating behaves in a manner similar to Germany’s. Both India and China also see suggestive status increases from the others’ treatment condition (India: 3.16, $p = 0.13$; China: 3.65, $p = 0.13$). These findings fail to reach traditional levels of significance, but provide additional suggestive evidence of systems-level impacts of status-changing events.

because they received no additional information about Germany’s role in the status-altering event and need to preserve the relative distance between unusual and traditional donors. The perception of the international hierarchy may not change, and instead status simply shifts upwards to accommodate the rise in individual respect for a low-status state. Thus, in our experiment, individual changes in system-wide status have a status quo bias.

5.3 Relative status change

Next, we examine the relative change in status distance between different country pairs. Tables 1, 2, and 3 display bilateral status interactions between each possible pair of countries. The individual respect rating in each column country is subtracted from the individual respect rating in each row country. The top left cell of each table, for example, represents US respect minus UK respect. Negative values denote a decrease in the distance between the UK and the US; positive values are an increase in the distance between the two states. In this case, we are not interested in whether one country’s status is rising or falling in isolation; rather, we examine changes in status in relation to other states.

Table 1 shows suggestive evidence that Chinese aid donations decrease the respect gap between the US and China ($p = 0.117$) and the US and Germany ($p = 0.104$). Recall that, in Figure 1, the US is usually given a higher individual rating than China or Germany, so the decrease in gap between the US and these states reflects a loss in relative US status. When China and Germany experience individual status gains from Chinese aid, the US’ lack of individual change translates to a *relative* status decline. Similarly, in Table 2, we find strong evidence that Indian aid donations decrease the gap between the US and Germany ($p = 0.047$) and the US and India ($p = 0.03$). As in the China treatment condition, the India treatment causes a relative loss of status for the US as an unusual donor, which is in line with our expectations from **H2a-b**.

Why does the US’s status relative to Germany decrease when Germany is uninvolved in the aid transaction between the US and China and the US and India? This remarkable

	UK	China	Germany	India
US	−2.046 (2.536)	−4.989 (3.179)	−4.470 (2.753)	−1.827 (2.864)
UK	-	−2.935 (2.764)	−2.425 (1.766)	0.209 (2.205)
China		-	0.524 (2.566)	3.099 (2.500)
Germany			-	2.655 (2.166)
India				-

Table 1: *Relative change for China treatment:* Relative change in status for each country compared to each other country. OLS results for the distance in absolute status between the each row minus each column. Light grey indicates significance at the 12%, medium grey at 10%, dark grey at 5%. Robust standard errors in parentheses.

	UK	China	Germany	India
US	−2.494 (2.567)	−2.274 (3.267)	−5.594** (2.814)	−6.111** (2.829)
UK	-	0.367 (2.854)	−3.017 (1.865)	−3.635* (2.137)
China		-	−3.319 (2.549)	− 3.802 (2.536)
Germany			-	−0.445 (2.109)
India				-

Table 2: *Relative change for India treatment:* Relative change in status for each country compared to each other country. OLS results for the distance in absolute status between the each row minus each column. Light grey indicates significance at the 12%, medium grey at 10%, dark grey at 5%. Robust standard errors in parentheses.

	UK	China	Germany	India
US	−1.735 (2.543)	−0.200 (3.198)	−2.105 (2.844)	0.020 (2.758)
UK	-	1.684 (2.767)	−0.370 (1.890)	1.795 (2.221)
China		-	−1.860 (2.524)	0.431 (2.478)
Germany			-	2.211 (2.150)
India				-

Table 3: *Relative change for UK treatment:* Relative change in status for each country compared to each other country. OLS results for the distance in absolute status between the each row minus each column. Light grey indicates significance at the 12%, medium grey at 10%, dark grey at 5%. Robust standard errors in parentheses.

finding provides evidence for the idea that the US is losing relative status even if, as Section 5.2 outlines, the individual status of the US is unchanged. Germany, on the other hand, gains individual status *in order* to maintain relative status compared to China and India.¹⁹ These movements (Germany) and lack of movements (the US) explain why the distance between the US and Germany shrinks even though Germany is uninvolved in the transaction.

Surprisingly, we also find evidence that Indian aid decreases the gap between the UK and Germany ($p = 0.106$) and the UK and India ($p = 0.089$). While the comparative decline of the UK is likely explained by similar mechanisms to the US, we do not draw conclusions about the specific psychological processes that drive these results. Future political psychology work should examine why some states lose relative status while others maintain relative status in circumstances where neither party is involved in a bilateral transaction. One potential explanation could be that the UK is rated above Germany, China, and India on average, meaning that German respect is “closer” to Indian and Chinese respect before experimental treatment. Respondents may be unwilling to let Germany’s status dip below that of India’s and therefore attribute the state higher respect to maintain that rank. In contrast, the UK is safely above China and India and its rank status is not threatened by these small changes.

Finally, Table 3 shows no change in relative status for any combination of states when the UK provides aid. This is consistent with the idea that the UK treatment is not causing respondents to update their perceptions of international status because the UK is considered a “usual” donor.

5.4 Rank status change

Lastly, to better understand the relationship of unusual aid events to the international system, we conduct a final test of our relative status hypotheses (**H2a-b** and **H4a-b**). We look at the effect of treatment on the hierarchical ranking of states inside and outside the aid transaction. To do so, we transform each respondents’ rating of individual states into a

¹⁹When China (India) gives aid to the US, the distance between Chinese (Indian) and German respect is not significantly affected.

relative rank – the highest-rated state by an individual receives a rank of 1 while the lowest-rated state receives a rank of 5. Table 4 then displays the effect of treatment on the relative value of respect using an ordered probit regression, which is the most appropriate model for the analysis of ordinal dependent variables, such as rank, where the distance between observations is not uniform. (Jackman, 2000). Robustness tests can be found in Appendix D.

	<i>Dependent variable:</i>				
	US	UK	Germany	China	India
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
China	−0.121 (0.082)	0.049 (0.079)	−0.054 (0.079)	0.091 (0.078)	0.018 (0.083)
UK	0.038 (0.080)	0.068 (0.076)	−0.039 (0.076)	0.030 (0.075)	−0.099 (0.080)
India	−0.047 (0.082)	−0.016 (0.078)	−0.004 (0.078)	0.038 (0.078)	0.018 (0.082)
Observations	1,532	1,532	1,532	1,532	1,532
<i>Note:</i>			*p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01		

Table 4: *Respect rankings*: Ordered probit regression results reported with robust standard errors.

Compared to our rating results (both individual and relational), we see no movement in relative status as a result of any treatment. Unusual aid donors do not increase in rank and neither do unusual aid recipients decrease in rank. There are also no system-wide implications for relative status. How do these null results for hierarchical rank square with the results for individual and relational ratings? These results are consistent with a stable international hierarchy that does not respond substantively to small status shifts, such as a single plane load of medical supplies. Indeed, we posit that respondents ensure consistent status rankings in the international system by artificially-inflating individual status ratings.

In other words, absolute German status had to increase to preserve Germany’s relative status (both in distance and in rank). While we do not speak to specific psychological processes, individual status change is one mechanism that allows respondents to preserve their relative status ranking of the international system.

6 Conclusion

Status is neither a monolithic nor isolated phenomenon. In this paper, we examine the multidimensional and systemic nature of status by focusing on disruptions in standard aid behavior, which we term “unusual” aid transactions. The context of unusual foreign aid transactions allows us to understand how status *changes* in the international system when traditional hierarchies are disrupted. We argue that unusual aid donations should be status-enhancing and unusual aid receipts should be status-denying. Moreover, status is not conferred in a vacuum. While previous work has focused on how status might change for an individual country as a result of its actions (Renshon, 2017; Brutger & Rathbun, Forthcoming; Carnegie & Dolan, 2020), we posit that status changes may also be relational (affecting the relative comparison between transacting parties) and systemic (affecting countries outside of the transaction).

The failure of the US to adequately address the pandemic with its domestic resources opened up an opportunity for non-traditional donors such as Russia and China to demonstrate their generosity and competence by offering aid to the US in the form of medical supplies. Based on these real events, we conducted an online information experiment using hypothetical cases of COVID-19-specific aid provision to the US. We find that (1) aid donations increase respect, but not influence, and (2) unusual donors are rewarded with increased perceptions of individual respect, which also manifests as a decline in relative respect for the US as an unusual recipient. However, hierarchical ranking is stable and neither unusual donors, recipients or third parties see any changes in the ordering of the international system.

We conclude that ratings, and the distance between ratings, can change while rankings are maintained because the increased respect for unusual donors is offset by increased respect for other parties outside the aid transaction. Respondents adjust ratings of respect across the entire international system in order to maintain status-quo rankings in the face of unusual behavior.

Our findings have substantial implications for how we study both international status and foreign aid. Here, we outline both methodological and theoretical contributions, as well as several avenues for future research. First, our results demonstrate that status hierarchies are stable, even if individual states' status is malleable. While scholars have long been interested in status change, status quo bias in international hierarchy is strong. While it is beyond the scope of this paper to systematically investigate the universe of cases under which people are willing to challenge their status quo biases, it is clear that symbolic acts, like a one-time aid transfer, are unlikely to systematically destabilize established hierarchies.

Second, we demonstrate how the operationalization and measurement of status impacts the conclusions we reach. Status is perceived as a multidimensional concept by survey respondents and therefore, the same unusual event can move different dimensions of status in different directions. In our work, we identify clear changes in one dimension of status, respect, due to unusual aid transactions but no significant changes in another, influence. While this article demonstrates the multidimensionality of status on two dimensions (respect vs. influence), future research should be attuned to other status dimensions and whether they respond in similar or dissimilar ways to external stimuli.

Our delineation of individual, relational, and systemic effects also demonstrates the need for clear and careful assumptions about the level at which status change occurs. Focusing on individual-level status might hide cognitive processes at the system level, and vice versa. Similarly, we must also be careful in how we make within- and cross-country comparisons of status. Focusing on changes in individual status ratings may hide stability in rankings, while focusing on relative status rankings may mask updating in individual ratings. Therefore,

developing richer theoretical arguments and more rigorous empirical tests that distinguish both the level of analysis and appropriate comparison group will move the field of status studies forward.

Finally, what are the implications for foreign aid? The literature has routinely found that recipient incumbents are often rewarded for securing foreign resources, whether or not they have a hand in their deliverance (Milner *et al.*, 2016; Findley *et al.*, 2017; Schneider & Cruz, 2017).²⁰ Accepting foreign aid does not necessarily harm state legitimacy (Dietrich & Winters, 2015; Dolan, 2020). While the connection between foreign aid and government legitimacy has almost exclusively been studied in developing countries, this phenomenon is not necessarily isolated to developing countries. To the best of our knowledge, no other work has investigated the effects of aid on a government’s reputation in the industrialized world for a country like the United States. While we encourage future work to measure the status effects of unusual donors and recipients in other countries, our sample suggests that the US’ reputation is not impacted by accepting foreign aid. At least under emergency circumstances, unusual aid receipts do not appear to be penalized and this accords with existing findings in developing countries (Carnegie & Dolan, 2020). How different features (i.e. size, sector, type of foreign aid) affect this relationship is a fruitful avenue for future work.

²⁰Although this is not always the case. See Briggs (2018) for an explanation of how foreign aid might lower vote shares for political incumbents

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A 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 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.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	<p>How much respect do other countries have for the following countries? Please rank each country from 1 (least respected) to 100 (most respected).</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • US • UK • China • India • Germany 	0 (least respected) - 100 (most respected)
Influence	<p>How much influence do each of the following countries have over world politics? Please rank each country from 1 (least influence) to 100 (most influence).</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • US • UK • China • India • Germany 	0 (least influence) - 100 (most influence)

B 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 3: Covariate balance table

C Attention checks

We report results for the sample of respondents who are most likely to have been attentive survey-takers. Table 5 presents our main results for the subsample of participants who took more than six minutes to answer the survey questions (above the first quartile of respondents). Table 6 presents our main results with the subsample of respondents who spent between six and twenty minutes on the survey (between the first and third quartiles). Our results are not only robust to dropping inattentive respondents, but become more precise.

	<i>Dependent variable:</i>				
	US	UK	Germany	China	India
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
China	1.599 (2.385)	3.730* (1.996)	5.239*** (2.017)	5.893** (2.483)	3.696* (2.133)
UK	-0.212 (2.422)	2.848 (2.068)	1.980 (2.079)	-0.223 (2.456)	-0.216 (2.125)
India	0.967 (2.487)	4.905** (1.988)	6.486*** (2.097)	3.612 (2.499)	8.317*** (2.146)
Constant	67.511*** (1.741)	65.289*** (1.480)	59.863*** (1.475)	37.581*** (1.761)	49.004*** (1.506)
Observations	995	991	993	990	987
R ²	0.001	0.006	0.012	0.009	0.021
Adjusted R ²	-0.002	0.003	0.009	0.006	0.018

Note:

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

Table 5: *Respect rating*: Dropping bottom quartile of respondent times.

	<i>Dependent variable:</i>				
	US	UK	Germany	China	India
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
China	−0.067 (2.970)	4.151 (2.641)	7.100*** (2.657)	5.514* (3.208)	4.135 (2.797)
UK	−3.126 (3.091)	2.072 (2.762)	3.142 (2.749)	−0.127 (3.179)	−0.642 (2.817)
India	−0.721 (3.121)	6.055** (2.643)	9.247*** (2.779)	6.140* (3.277)	9.688*** (2.792)
Constant	69.236*** (2.217)	63.813*** (1.993)	56.840*** (2.009)	36.722*** (2.301)	47.438*** (1.999)
Observations	644	642	644	642	640
R ²	0.002	0.009	0.021	0.011	0.027
Adjusted R ²	−0.002	0.004	0.016	0.006	0.022

Note:

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

Table 6: *Respect rating*: Dropping bottom and top quartiles of respondent times.

D Ordinal probit robustness

Figure 4 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.

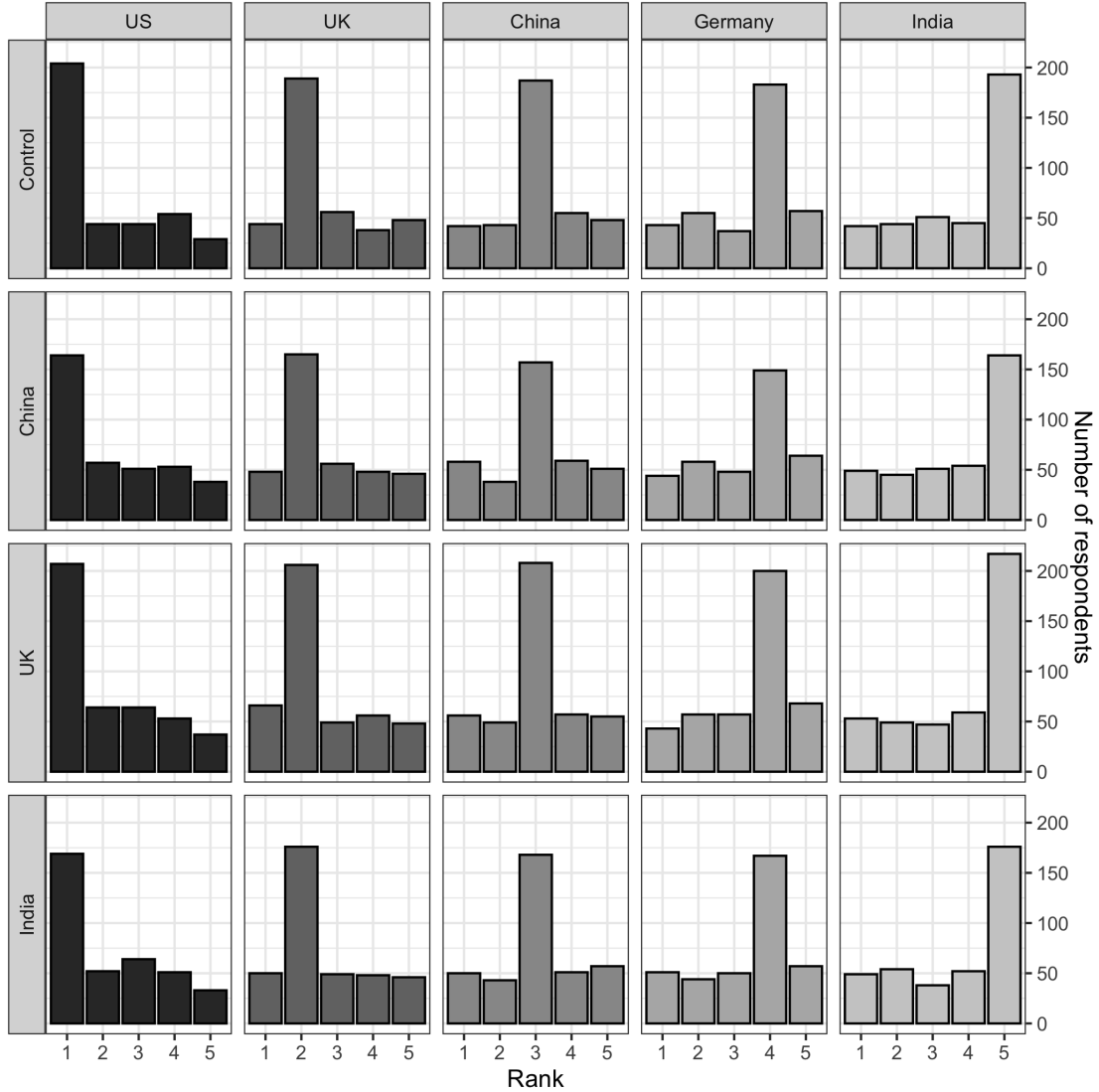


Figure 4: *Histogram of country rank by treatment condition*: Country ranks are displayed in columns, treatment conditions are displayed in rows. Color corresponds to country.

We report Wilcoxon rank sum tests for the ordinal probit models within-country (across treatments) in Table 7. 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 7, 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 7: *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 absolute change in status, we see that absolute 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.

E Home Bias

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

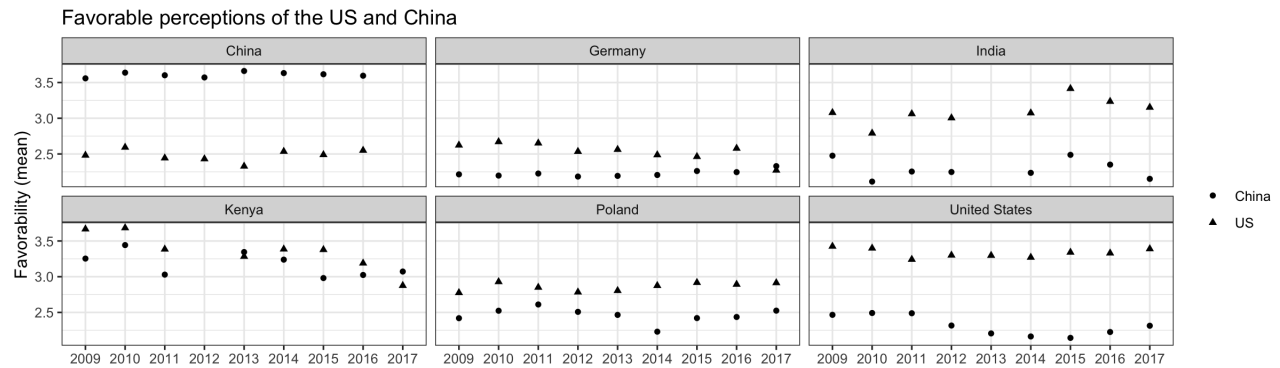


Figure 5: Favorable Perceptions of the US and China

²¹PEW Global Attitudes & Trends Datasets 2009-2017

F Comparing respect and influence

Table 8: Influence, Respect, and Difference between the two by Country

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

Difference between Influence and Respect Ratings

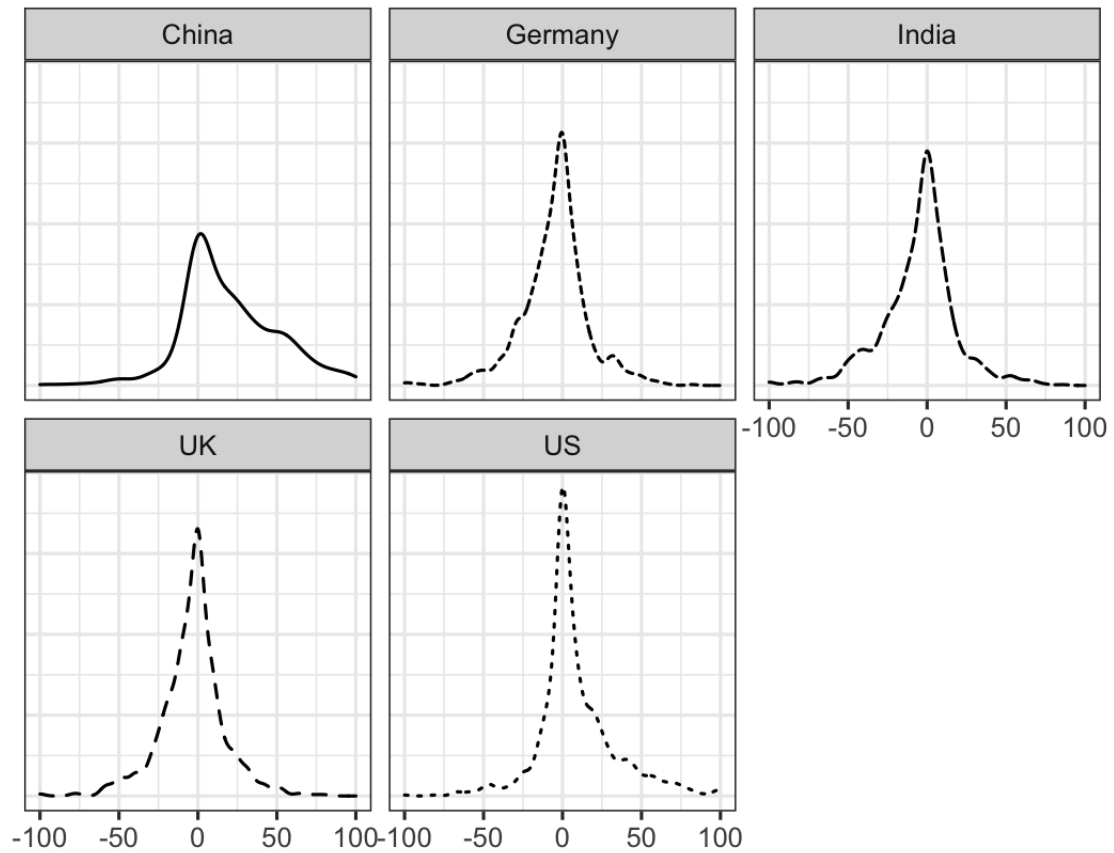


Figure 6: Density of difference between influence and respect rankings, by country

G Support for aid acceptance

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

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

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

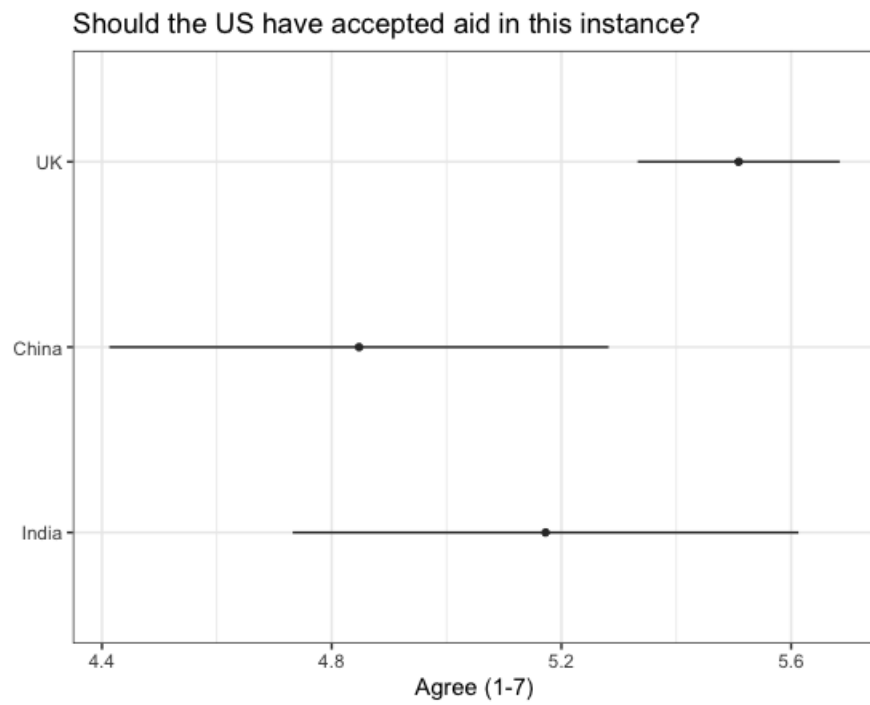


Figure 7: Aid acceptance by treatment condition

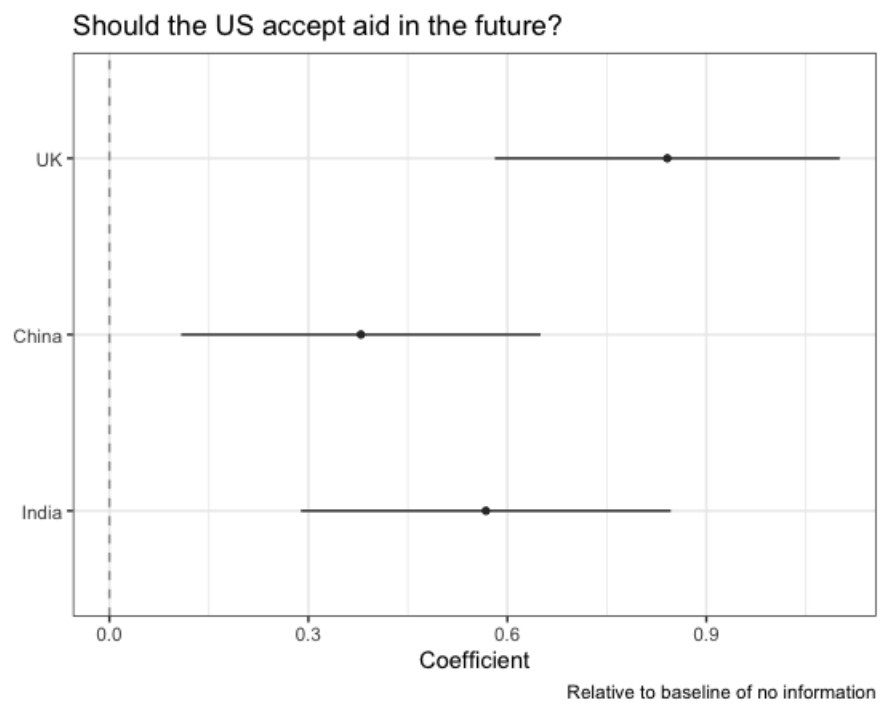


Figure 8: Aid acceptance in the future by treatment condition

H Treatment effects

All treatment effects of accepting aid

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

All treatment effects of accepting aid with background covariates*

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

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

I 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: "[Control/India/China] has been a long time recipient of US foreign aid, and remains a developing country." with half of the respondents in the Indian and Chinese conditions randomly receiving the prime. We chose not to add a former behavior prime for the United Kingdom in order to preserve external validity.

The following tables present our results.²² Priming respondents that India and China were former recipients had null effects on all of our outcome measures. These null effects suggest that information that these countries are former aid recipients is likely bundled into respondents' understanding of the countries. The status prime, then, does not effect outcomes because the information does not cause respondents to update their perceptions of India and China.

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

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

OLS estimates with robust standard errors in parentheses.

Table 9: Respect rating by country and status prime

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

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

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

OLS estimates with robust standard errors in parentheses.

Table 10: Influence rating by country and status prime

J Replication Study

We fielded a replication study on June 29, 2020 with the same treatments and outcome measures. In this follow up study, conducted approximately a month after our original sample, we do not find the same patterns of changes in respect. See the bottom right panel of Figure 9 for a visual display of the replication study. We compare these replication results to our findings for subsamples of the main survey results by vulnerability to COVID-19.

We find that respondents with lower perceptions of their personal vulnerability to the virus are less likely to reward new donors with a higher status. While we cannot speak specifically to the longevity of status effects, these results highlight the importance of salience, which has previously played an important role in the disaster aid literature. The resurgence of the Black Lives Matter movement and citizens' general wariness to continue COVID-19 precautions in the long term, may suggest that the receipt of foreign assistance had only a small window of political salience. Only when an issue is salient can status be manipulated through actions tied to this issue.

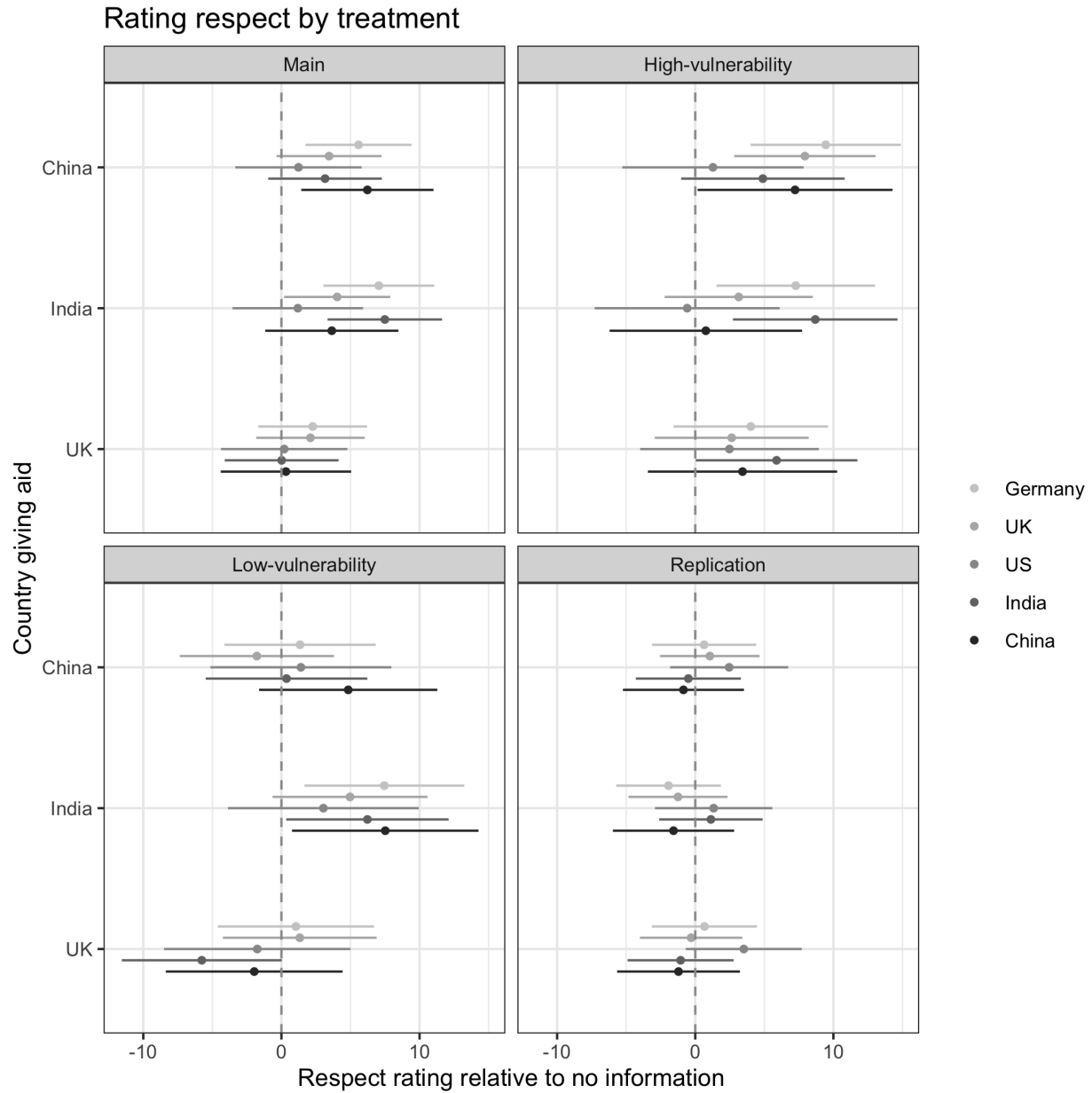


Figure 9: *Results by sample population:* Results from four respondent populations: main, main (high-vulnerability only), main (low-vulnerability only), and replication.