



The possibilities and limits of international status: Evidence from foreign aid and public opinion

Lauren Ferry¹ · Cleo O'Brien-Udry² 

Accepted: 12 March 2024 / Published online: 24 April 2024
© The Author(s) 2024

Abstract

States use symbolic gestures to increase their international status, or relative position, within the international community. But how do the status-seeking actions of one state affect the status of others? The common assumption is that improvements in one state's status lead to the relative deterioration of other states' status by comparison. In this paper, we focus on status' social qualities to delineate multiple theoretical pathways through which one state's status can change – or not – relative to another. Status is not conferred in a vacuum and the consequences of status-altering activities may spill over to third parties. We field an original survey and reanalyze several existing studies to understand how relative status operates in the case of foreign aid; these surveys reveal novel empirical patterns about the circumstances under which a state's status will update relative to other states. We extend the analysis to examine *who* updates perceptions, *what actions* change status, and *for whom* status changes. Our findings suggest that status-enhancing actions may be successful at augmenting status amongst peers, but ultimately unsuccessful at changing global hierarchies.

Keywords Foreign aid · International status · Public opinion

Responsible editor: Axel Dreher

Authors' contribution Research design and conceptualization: C.O. (50%), L.F. (50%); statistical analysis: C.O. (50%), L.F. (50%); writing: C.O. (50%), L.F. (50%). The order of authors is chosen alphabetically.

✉ Cleo O'Brien-Udry
coudry@sas.upenn.edu

Lauren Ferry
leferry@olemiss.edu

¹ Department of Political Science, University of Mississippi, Oxford, MS, USA

² Christopher H. Browne Center, University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia, PA, USA

1 Introduction

Do states' symbolic gestures affect international status, or their relative position in the international hierarchy? Do these actions affect *other*, non-acting, states' status? A large literature agrees that politicians and their citizens are "plainly obsessed with investing in, seizing, and defending" their states' international status because it provides social, material, and psychological benefits (Renshon, 2017, 1). Status is not only instrumentally valuable in conferring decision-making autonomy and deference (Pratt, 2018; Tomz, 2012; Wohlforth, 1998), but also intrinsically valuable as a psychological benefit (Kelley, 2017; Wolf, 2011). Status is one of the motivating reasons that states engage in world-shaping actions such as acquiring nuclear weapons, initiating conflicts, or joining international organizations (Larson & Shevchenko, 2010; Rathbun et al., 2021; Renshon, 2017), sometimes at the expense of other political goals (Barnhart, 2016). But even small actions in the international arena, such as hosting the Olympics, donating and receiving insubstantial amounts of foreign aid, and committing one-off acts of torture have demonstrably changed the perceived status of the acting state (Carnegie & Dolan, 2020; Hafner-Burton & Montgomery, 2006; Morse & Pratt, 2022; Powers & Renshon, 2023). Status clearly matters to states and they are willing to take costly actions to improve it. But do the actions that states take affect their relative position in the international system?

A change in one actor's status should lead to a change in "at least one other actor's status" (Dafoe et al., 2014, 375).¹ Ripple effects in the international system can occur when the identity or meaning of status-groupings change (Brooks et al., 2015; Gray & Hicks, 2014; Gray, 2013; Morse, 2019) or when individual state actions provide information about other states' prestige (Duque, 2018; Kinne, 2014; Renshon, 2017).² Scholars commonly posit that shifts in a state's individual status should affect its position in the international hierarchy in equal measure (Barnhart, 2017). However, we argue that this is not always the case.

In this paper, we focus on status' "social and peer referent" qualities to delineate different models of how, and for whom, status changes occur in the international system (Renshon, 2017, 113). We clarify how status can be measured *individually* and *relatively*. While individual status, the focus of current experimental literature, looks at the implications for a single state, relative measures are closer to theoretical conceptualizations of status and require comparisons between two or more states. Acknowledging this distinction, actions that change the measurement of individual status do not automatically translate to relative status changes. Status implications may reverberate to outside states or they might not.

The framework we develop for understanding international status, and the particular challenges of measuring this concept, suggest several potential paths through which status- changing attempts can alter international relations. When

¹ Emphasis added.

² While Duque (2018) discusses the idea of relational status in-depth, her definition of status as socially recognized and embedded in bilateral relations differs substantially from the conception of status as a "consensus concept" recognized across multiple publics, states, and constituencies.

state A's status increases, state B's can: 1) stay the same (maintaining B's individual status and decreasing its status relative to A), b) increase (increasing B's individual status and maintaining its status relative to A), or decrease (decreasing B's individual status and decreasing its status relative to A). All of these potential changes to state B's status are rational responses to state A's actions and would be empirically equivalent if we only studied the status implications for state A. The exclusivity of status also implies that A's actions are less meaningful if they do not change its relative status position.

We ground this argument in the case of foreign aid, an area of international relations with an implied hierarchy. Donor states are viewed with "superiority and power" (Kuusik, 2006, 57), while recipient states are perceived as less developed and less powerful (Carnegie & Dolan, 2020). A new group of emerging donors has also emerged, of which China is the most prolific. This group of former aid recipients turned donors differ substantially from traditional donors in their aid practices and have found foreign aid to be a useful tool in augmenting their international status (Asmus et al., 2021; Wellner et al., 2024; Eichenauer et al., 2021; Mattingly & Sundquist, 2023).

Our work extends recent theoretical and methodological innovations in the experimental international status literature which use public opinion as a measure of state status (Kitagawa & Chu, 2021; Morse & Pratt, 2022; Powers & Renshon, 2023; Viskupič, 2020). We thus field an original survey experiment as proof-of-concept for our novel status framework. The survey explores the dimensions along which status may change for various actors in a particular area, foreign aid, and during a particular period in time, the first wave of COVID-19. The disruption of typical aid flows during COVID-19 allows us to examine how unusual aid transactions can change relative status positions, potentially destabilizing established hierarchies. It is precisely the exceptional nature of these relationships that allows us to better understand how hierarchies, at multiple levels, change over time.

In a US sample, we find that information about a small aid donation increases the individual status measurement of the donor state. For example, aid from China to the US increases positive perceptions of China. We also identify that information affects the status of other states that do not participate in the transaction. Continuing the example, aid from China increases positive perceptions of India, even though India is not involved in giving or receiving aid. However, Chinese aid has no impact on perceptions of the UK, a more established aid donor also not involved in the transaction. When we compare the relative status of states, we find a similar pattern. Indian foreign aid decreases perceptions of American and British status *relative* to India, a notable pattern given Americans' concerns about relative loss (Brutger & Rathbun, 2021). Finally, disrupting established hierarchies is rare and we find that information about a single aid transaction does not change the rank of states in the international hierarchy. These changes (or lack thereof) in international status across individual, relative, and systemic dimensions can be best understood through our expanded framework. Our analysis highlights both the opportunities states have to alter their position in the international system relative to some states, but not others, as well as challenges to changing the world order.

To test the external validity of these findings, we apply our measures of relative status to three existing experiments on foreign aid and status (Carnegie & Dolan, 2020; Dietrich et al., 2018; Mattingly & Sundquist, 2023). In line with the established literature, we replicate previous analyses and confirm that foreign aid increases the individually measured status of aid donors. We also find that the relative status of aid donors compared to other states outside the transaction also increases, but only amongst particular states. The reanalysis of these works shows the utility of our framework in non-US samples and for other types of foreign aid events.

Finally, we use the findings from these reanalyses, along with our original survey, to outline future research avenues that extend the study of international status, including 1) *who* perceives status changes, 2) *what type* of actions change status, and 3) *for whom* does a status action have spillover effects. First, heterogeneous effects in our first survey show that individuals in the “in-group” of a nation differently update their perceptions of status compared to members of “out-groups.” Evidence from two additional, novel surveys provides support for the subsequent questions. Second, atypical status actions are more likely to generate status changes. Third, shared state characteristics, such as oil production or geography, at least partly determine whether states can be considered peer countries, and therefore affect whether status-changing actions will influence status for a wider group of states.

Our paper yields several research and policy implications. First, our work brings concepts honed in the observational international status literature to the burgeoning field of experimental international status. In this paper, we demonstrate the value of including relative status measures in experiments on public opinion. By measuring status as simultaneously individual and relational, we match status concepts to appropriate empirical measurements and deepen previous conclusions about the impact of status-altering actions. Second, our approach highlights the way status-changing events reverberate across the international ecosystem. Do the individual and relative status of non-acting states change? While future work should theorize about how individuals and states identify relevant “targets,” these findings contribute an essential first step by establishing that singular status actions may have broader implications. This implies that policymakers must carefully consider who the peers of a given state are before encouraging normatively good positions, such as decreasing carbon emissions (Keohane, 2010) or improving women’s rights (Bush & Zetterberg 2020). Finally, this paper contributes to a growing body of literature that shows status is not only driven by security considerations but also by economic and symbolic gestures (Brutger & Kertzer, 2018; Carnegie & Dolan, 2020; Hafner-Burton & Montgomery, 2006; Larson & Shevchenko, 2010; Morse & Pratt, 2022; Powers & Renshon, 2023).

2 Defining international status

There is broad agreement that status conveys a state’s position vis-a-vis a comparison group. In other words, “states occupy different positions” in the international hierarchy and “high-status states have different rights and responsibilities than

low-status ones” (MacDonald & Parent, 2021, 363). 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 or as granted through membership in high-status organizations, states may be more satisfied sharing the same status value as others so long as there is an advantage over nonmembers (Larson & Shevchenko, 2010; Murray, 2019). 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). For Rathbun et al. (2021), pure status-seeking is about the quest for exclusivity and may imply jockeying for higher ranks within membership communities. Status matters because others don’t have it, and thus “absolute values do not matter as much as comparisons to salient reference groups” (Renshon, 2016, 520).

The positional qualities of status separate this concept from related notions such as honor, reputation and credibility. Reputation, for example, is a belief about an actor’s traits, such as their resolve, informed by their past behavior (Dafoe et al., 2014; Jervis, 1989). 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, an essential element of international status.

The exclusivity implied by international status is a keen driver of state actions in the domestic and international arena. Historical evidence suggests that when states perceive the level of prestige they are attributed as incongruous with their preferred level of status compared to peer states, they respond creatively and strategically to restore or reimagine their status (Larson & Shevchenko, 2010). Barnhart (2017, 393) establishes that states that have previously suffered humiliation “will engage in competitive status-seeking measures against third-party states aimed at influencing the perceptions of other states.” Under this framework, state A attacking state C after suffering humiliation at the hands of B should enhance A’s status relative to B. Perceived status deficits have driven states to engage in belligerent actions against both adversaries and bystanders in the international community (Barnhart, 2020; Murray, 2019; Renshon, 2016).

But do the actions that states take affect their standing in the international hierarchy? Measurement here poses a dilemma as international standing is often conflated with power (MacDonald & Parent, 2021). While military and economic capacities affect material hierarchies of states (Gilpin, 1983), most scholars argue that status is related to, though not comprised entirely of, these traditional power metrics. A historical focus on large-scale status actions taken by great powers poses difficulties for disentangling the causal effects of these events on international status even as these studies establish clear and compelling evidence of status competition.

Innovations in observational work using network analysis offer an alternative approach. This body of work provides strong support for the role of status in driving state actions using power-adjacent measures, specifically diplomatic networks. Duque (2018), Kinne (2014), and Renshon (2017) argue that changes in mutual recognition and centrality within networks of representation affect multiple states’

status in the international arena. These measures are explicitly endogenous to other state characteristics—the presence or absence of embassies is deeply related to other markers of geopolitics.

A key insight from the diplomatic networks literature is the idea of status as 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 is perceptual and 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 and 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 a broader international public capable of evaluating the implications of status-enhancing actions (Frank, 1985; Huberman et al., 2004).³

Given the consensus nature of status, public opinion is one, though by no means the only, method through which to identify which states hold high or low international status. A wealth of survey experiments have used information treatments to examine the circumstances under which publics update their perceptions of international status. The use of torture, for example, decreases status perceptions of the United States (Morse & Pratt, 2022; Powers & Renshon, 2023). Information about foreign aid improves perceptions of the donor country (Dietrich et al., 2018; Mattingly & Sundquist, 2023). However, rejecting foreign aid increases *international* perceptions of India’s international status even if it does not change domestic status perceptions (Carnegie & Dolan, 2020). Similarly, while apologies for past atrocities improve perceptions of the apologizing state amongst citizens in the state that received the apology, citizens of the apologizing state disapprove of this action (Kitagawa & Chu, 2021). Public concern about international status drives policy outcomes as diverse as leader approval (Powers & Renshon, 2023) and support for military intervention (Viskupič, 2020).

The experimental literature thus neatly isolates the causal effect of information about symbolic statecraft on the perceived status of individual states. Yet, concluding that state A’s actions increase state A’s status does not extend the causal finding to states’ relative position in the international system. If there is widespread agreement that status is positional, empirical measurements of status are most meaningful in comparative perspective.

We illustrate this difference in Fig. 1, which displays three potential models of status change. As our starting point, we assume that state B has higher status than state A at time t and state A takes status changing actions at time $t + 1$ in an attempt to increase its position vis-a-vis higher-ranked B.⁴ In the first model of status change

³ Even when the public is ill-informed about foreign policy, Powers and Renshon (2023) argue that status is visible to voters because status competition is innate to social life and high-profile when it occurs between states.

⁴ In line with the literature, we thus invoke the idea of a “status deficit” as our starting point for state A (Barnhart, 2017; Renshon, 2016). We encourage future work to theorize about how different starting point assumptions for State A (relative to State B) would further nuance the framework. See for example Guzman (2008), who theorizes about the ceiling effects of state’s reputation for international law compliance.

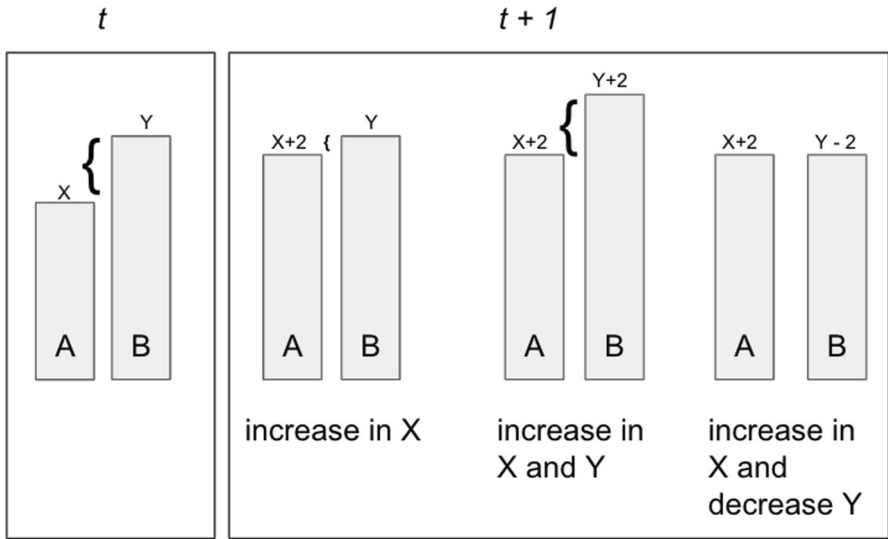


Fig. 1 Individual and relative status in the international system

(left), state A’s actions result in a higher measurement of state A’s status. This is the effect most likely to be identified by existing experimental approaches that only look at the effect of state A’s actions on state A in isolation. We refer to this as an individual measure of status. However, state A’s actions also increase the relative closeness of the two states, what we call a relative measure of status that better accords with theoretical definitions; i.e. while B remains higher ranked than A, the gap between their respective statuses has decreased. From the other perspective, looking at B’s individual status measurement would suggest that B’s status does not change. Yet, its status relative to A actually decreases. State B is now closer in status to state A, which lessens the rights and responsibilities afforded it by the status differential.

In the middle and right panels of Fig. 1, state A’s actions also impact perceptions of state B. In other words, A’s status-actions lead to updating about the individual measurement of state B. The implications of these shifts however depend on the direction of B’s updated measurement *in relation* to state A. For example, in the middle panel, the measurement of both state A and state B’s status in isolation increases. Therefore, looking at A’s individual measurement would lead to the conclusion that its status increased when in fact, its relative position remained the same. Finally, in the rightmost panel, state A’s actions lead to a decrease in the individual measurement of state B’s status. In our schematic, the relative closeness of the relationship between A and B actually increases. Illustratively, A and B now have the same status measurement, which is significant because B has lost its exclusive position over A and the deference that comes with it.

While the individual measure of state A’s status increases in all three of these examples, status implications at the system level vary substantially. Focusing just on state A would make these models observationally equivalent when they are, in fact, theoretically distinct and lead to different conclusions. By focusing attention

on status' relational quality, this framework expands the existing literature on the public opinion of international status to better align with theoretical definitions.

All three models of international status change, which are illustrative rather than exhaustive, reflect network dynamics relating states A and B. We do not posit a specific theory of how and when particular network effects might be observed. To the best of our knowledge, such a theory still eludes both political scientists and psychologists. Instead, we highlight several potential mechanisms through which symbolic gestures can have network-level implications. We pair these with new insights from experimental work using public opinion as a measure of status. Importantly, we relax the assumption from the established observational literature that individually and relatively measured status always move in tandem and open up the possibility for novel, more nuanced, findings about status as a relational and peer-referent concept.

Below, we describe potential manifestations of each of the three scenarios in more detail. In the leftmost panel, information about state A has no effect on the individually measured status of State B. As Renshon (2017) notes, Egyptian President Nasser's actions in Yemen were intended to impact Egypt's status vis-a-vis its Arab peers and not the United States. Similarly, the rise of China is unlikely to affect the status aspirations of microstates like Malta.

In the middle panel, status-actions from one member may spillover to other states with similar characteristics. When one member does something status-increasing (decreasing), the international community may raise (lower) their impression of other group members. For example, association with more or less reputable lenders can generate "peer effects" that change investors' perceptions of sovereign debt ratings (Brooks et al., 2015). Signing a trade agreement with a country with a bad reputation leads publics to perceive the signatory as more risky (Gray & Hicks, 2014). Explicit inclusion in a list of countries with poorly regulated banking systems drives a state's international reputation lower because of a "lowest-common-denominator effect;" inclusion on a blacklist is worse when the other countries on the list are in particular disrepute (Morse, 2019).

Conversely, and in line with the rightmost panel, additional work shows that zero-sum status-competition can also take place within peer groupings, rather than general hierarchies. In this case, the actions of one member imply the lack of action on behalf of another member. When one member does something status-increasing, the international community may lower their impression of others who do not act the same way. In the prisoner's dilemma, this may be associated with the "sucker's payoff" whereby one player is made worse off, while another reaps additional benefits from noncooperation. Guzman (2008) discusses this idea for arms control between the US and Soviet Union. Similarly, the "Sputnik Crisis," where the Soviets launched the first satellite, was depicted not just as a leap forward for the USSR but as a step back for the United States (Dickson, 2007). Theoretically, Honig and Weaver (2019) think about this mechanism in their argument that one organizations' success in implementing reforms can spur rivalry with other peer organizations, who fear that their status will decline in comparison unless they implement the same reforms.

Most generally, “social creativity” in status competition, in which states unable to compete on traditional status metrics seek to reframe their own comparative advantages as alternative markers of status, offers countries without the economic or military capacity to compete with great powers an alternative means of international recognition (Larson & Shevchenko, 2010). Scandinavian countries carved out a niche in international politics by focusing on humanitarianism (Murray, 2019). Similarly, states strategically adopt gender quotas to increase their international reputation for democracy regardless of other reforms (Bush, 2011, Bush & Zetterberg, 2020). Closing embassies decreases the status of the states whose representatives are sent home, despite not altering overall balance of power in the international system (Kinne, 2014; Renshon, 2017). North Macedonia even financed a \$730 million renovation of its capital to bolster its appeal to the European Union, despite domestic backlash (Hopkins, 2016). Keohane (2010) makes this vision more explicit by positing an “economy of esteem” as a means of addressing climate change: offering new spaces for previously uncompetitive states to distinguish themselves in the international arena could promote pro-social behavior. We expect that this type of social creativity has more far-reaching implications than has previously been studied.

3 Relative status and foreign aid

We continue to build our argument through the case of foreign aid. This type of small, symbolic, action may change a state’s perceived status, but not objective evaluations of their economic or military standing. For the purpose of examining status amongst multiple parties, foreign aid usefully confers information about the status of at least two parties, the donor and the recipient. This generates an explicit hierarchy between at least two states, unlike other status-altering strategies that can be pursued unilaterally (i.e. technological development or hosting the Olympics). This allows us to design information treatments that will affect both individual and relative status measures simultaneously.

In foreign aid, donors are attributed the characteristics of “superiority and power” (Kuusik, 2006, 57). This superiority manifests along several 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 (Kuziemko & Werker, 2006; McKinley & Little, 1977) 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 measure of 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. (2022) find this same effect with USAID in Africa and Milner et al. (2016) find that providing aid improves the reputation of aid providers in Uganda.

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 as well as their overall international status (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).⁵

But patterns of aid giving are also changing. A burgeoning literature highlights a new division between the group of “traditional” and “emerging” or “new” donors. This distinction is often signaled by membership in the Development Assistance Committee (DAC) of the OECD. Members of the DAC are industrialized, primarily Western donors with well-established aid programs that follow similar norms of aid-giving. Alternatively, more than thirty donors operate outside the DAC and their aid practices differ in systematic ways (Dreher et al., 2011; Woods, 2008). The latter group is less developed and less inclined to call themselves “donors”, often preferring the moniker “providers of South-South cooperation” (Smith et al., 2010). Many in this group recently accepted, or continue to accept, foreign aid from the DAC. The rise of non-DAC donors and the desire for their integration with traditional aid practices became a formal part of the Paris Declaration and DAC agenda in 2005. This attention helped solidify a distinct group identity, even if the amount of divergence from Western aid practices varies (Asmus et al., 2017).

China is at the forefront of this group, and a growing literature traces changes in approval of China in response to Chinese aid giving in sub-Saharan Africa (Blair et al., 2022; Wellner et al., 2024), Latin America (Eichenauer et al., 2021), and Southeast Asia (Custer et al., 2018; Mattingly & Sundquist, 2023). Foreign aid has been a useful way for emerging donors to compete for international recognition.⁶

⁵ We 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.

⁶ Why can’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. 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).

Serbian president Aleksandar Vučić illustrates this point in a recent statement that “China moved from a developing country receiving international aid to a super-power” (N1 Belgrade, 2021). In a more direct example of status competition within the emerging donor group, Asmus et al. (2021) find that India increases its aid allocations to locations where China has recently experienced public opinion gains.

3.1 Status, aid, and COVID-19

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. The US, for one, 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 Euro-zone crisis, Japan following the Fukushima nuclear disaster, and France following the fire at Notre Dame. The United States turned down foreign aid from both Canada and Cuba following Hurricane Katrina because it was worried about how that action would be perceived (Brinkley & Smith 2005). The global pandemic in 2020 is a prime example of an emergency condition that challenged existing relationships in the international system. Notably, foreign aid offered in emergency situations is unlikely to change the economic or military capacity of donors or recipients in meaningful ways. These acts may be more symbolic than substantive, yet they can still impact perceptions of international status in meaningful ways.

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). During COVID-19, foreign aid was one of many status-seeking activities states pursued during the pandemic (Urdinez, 2023).⁷ 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. For example, 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 (Rhee et al., 2023), and

⁷ Importantly, our reanalyses include studies conducted before the pandemic, demonstrating that neither the empirical distinction between individual and relational status nor the impact on third parties is dependent on crisis scenarios.

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).⁸

Foreign aid thus has meaningful membership communities and implications for international status. The simplest expectation would be that sending foreign aid increases international status, particularly for newer donors, while receiving foreign aid decreases international status.⁹ However, looking at the international status implications for donors and recipients in isolation, without a comparison, would obscure important network dynamics that more closely capture the theoretical understanding of status as a positional concept. Therefore, we design an experimental test below that better suits an expanded framework.

4 Experimental design

We test our conceptualization using an online information experiment. We preregistered our survey design at EGAP, where we had expectations for the donor and recipient but did not generate specific hypotheses about actors outside the transaction. As we note, we do not have a specific theory for which network dynamics status-actions might elicit, but instead strive to provide a proof-of-concept for status’ systemic qualities. Our survey was administered by the online survey firm Lucid on 1176 US respondents on June 1, 2020, in the middle of the first wave of the novel Coronavirus. Lucid’s sample is nationally-representative by age, gender, ethnicity and region and we show balance across treatment and control conditions in Appendix A.3.¹⁰

4.1 Case selection

The US’ role as a superpower makes the opinion of its citizens important to atypical donors seeking to improve their status. States routinely target status-enhancing activities to the American mass public (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). India has also sought to “improve India’s image in American

⁸ Aware that the optics of aid acceptance were negative, the US State Department later clarified that the medical equipment was a purchase rather than charity. However, it remained unclear for several weeks whether a grant element was still involved if the goods were provided at below market rates.

⁹ Indeed, these are the effects we hypothesized about in our preregistration plan. We present results for these intuitions (looking at a country’s status in isolation), before exploring the spillover implications of status actions.

¹⁰ The survey was fielded on a sample of 1,532 US respondents; however, only 1176 passed standard attention checks based on survey time. We demonstrate that our results are robust to additional forms of attention checks in Appendix A.4 in line with recent findings by Ternovski & Orr (2022) on Lucid’s decline in sample quality in 2020.

minds” (Blarel 2012, 13). While status is conferred by a multitude of actors, the American public constitutes an important audience for status-seeking countries.

The uniqueness of the United States as the world’s only superpower, however, raises important considerations. For example, the US does not accept humanitarian aid. As we note above, this makes COVID-19 exceptional and the US sample could constitute a “most likely” case for our framework. Unlike developing countries where aid fatigue is a larger concern, the receipt of a single aid shipment should be more salient to an American population. The novelty of this type of aid flow increases the likelihood of finding significant effects in a US sample.

On the other hand, the choice of a US sample constitutes a hard test for our framework. There is a persistent belief in American exceptionalism and Americans consistently rate the US as a high-status country (Smeltz et al., 2020). As we ask a US audience to rate the US and three other states, perceptions of US status are measured by a domestic rather than international audience. Public opinion data shows that countries’ own publics have consistent and positive ratings of their own favorability, while international audiences are more likely to shift their opinions over time (see Appendix B). As US respondents are more likely to feel attached to the US’ high status position, this biases against finding evidence for a decline in the US’ relative status. We would expect sharper status changes if the same experiment was enumerated in another country.

Our theory is not US-centric and there are important limitations to using a US sample. The novelty of foreign aid receipts and American perceptions of superiority may be countervailing, but we also acknowledge that US samples can reinforce Western perspectives in the study of international relations. This initial study validates our theory in a convenient and internationally salient sample of respondents and we augment our results with reanalyses of existing survey experiments conducted in non-US samples under non-emergency conditions. Our reanalyses, described in Sect. 6, strengthen the external validity of our results and confirm the value of a relative and peer-referent status framework. Importantly, they demonstrate that our framework operates in both high and low status country samples and for multiple types of aid relationships. We urge future research to consider replicating our status analyses in other populations.

4.2 Survey design

Respondents are randomly assigned to treatment in 3 stages. First, respondents are either assigned to a hypothetical news article about the US’ aid acceptance or are directed straight to the outcome measures without receiving any additional information. The latter group (approximately 25% of our sample) serves as the control. Second, 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 as follows:

[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.

Finally, for the Chinese and Indian aid conditions, we include an additional treatment arm, randomizing information on the country's past aid actions. Respondents either receive no additional information or the following sentence as a prime of China and India's identity as emerging aid donors: “[China/India] has been a long time recipient of US foreign aid, and remains a developing country.” We chose not to add a former behavior prime for the United Kingdom in order to preserve external validity. All treatment wordings and a schematic of our survey flow are provided in Appendix A.1.¹¹

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 and biases against significant results.

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. We also include India as an example of an additional non-DAC donor. Indian aid has received less attention than Chinese aid, meaning that respondents should have fewer prior beliefs. Finally, we include the United Kingdom as a hypothetical aid-provider. The UK is a traditional DAC donor.

4.3 Measuring status

The word “status” is inherently perceptual. It is multidimensional and multiple attributes may go into its valuation (Larson & Shevchenko, 2010). Having a high status in the international community might be interpreted as “being powerful,” “being a good example,” or “being respected” (Powers & Renshon, 2023). Rather than bundle these connotations, we invoke a specific meaning of status. To do so, we employ psychological work that finds that the most critical dimensions in evaluating an actor (individual or state) are warmth and competence (Fiske et al., 2007). In political science, Herrmann et al. (1997) notes that warmth aligns with goal interdependence and competence aligns with power. As we want to reduce status' conflation with power and warmth judgements are considered primary (occur before competency judgements), we focus on “what rights and respect” a high status

¹¹ We pool respondents into our four main treatments (Control, UK donor, India donor, China donor). The results are robust to the exclusion of respondents who received the former recipient prime. Results available from authors upon request.

actor can expect (Dafoe et al., 2014). Specifically, we base our question wording on Carnegie and Dolan (2020), who in turn rely on the psychology literature, where “status” is qualified as “respect, prestige” (Pettit & Lount, 2010, Pettit et al., 2013). We ask respondents “how much respect do other countries have for the following countries.” Respondents then rated 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. As Fiske et al. (1999) note, respect is related to, but not synonymous with, positive affect. Dimensions of liking and respect operate separately so it is possible to envy high-status groups without liking them.

Our design allows us to evaluate status at multiple levels (individual and relational) and for multiple actors. Regardless of which treatment respondents receive, they are asked about the respect of multiple countries. We focus on their evaluation of the US, the UK, India, and China.¹² While the first country represents the recipient, the other three represent the manipulated donor. Therefore, each respondent rates individual (both countries in the transaction), bilateral (both countries in the transaction relative to each-other), and third-party (two non-manipulated countries) status perceptions. Rating multiple countries allows respondents to invoke the type of comparisons that are innate to social life (Anderson et al., 2015). It also provides a controlled international context to facilitate benchmarking in country evaluations (Kayser & Peress, 2012).

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. This measure is closest to the existing experimental status literature. To measure relational status, we also analyze the *closeness* of status ratings for country pairs by subtracting the individual 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 measurement and closeness to change without affecting its rank.

5 Results

Turning to our first set of findings, results for individually measured respect are shown in Fig. 2. Respondents rated each country individually so this measure is most similar to previous measures of status in the public opinion literature. Group means are depicted in Fig. 2A by treatment (aid from China, India, or the UK) and control (no information). Figure 2B shows the average treatment effect (ATE) for the perceived respect of a given country by treatment. For example, the topmost row represents the ATE on American respect when the United Kingdom provides aid to the United States. Even though the act is symbolic, we see changes in respect for countries sending the hypothetical plane in line with our preregistration.

¹² We randomize the ordering of countries.

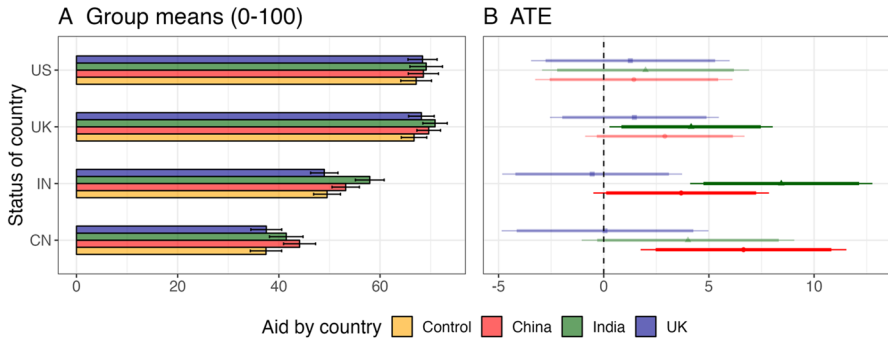


Fig. 2 *Individual status*: In (A), group means of each treatment condition are calculated with 95% confidence intervals for each outcome, the individual status of four states (China, India, the UK, and the US). The treatments, aid to the US from China, India, and the UK, are compared to a control of no information for each outcome. In (B), OLS estimates on the effect of treatment on the outcomes with 95% robust standard errors are presented

As expected, India's respect increases when it gives aid (8.43, $p=0.00$) and China's respect increases when China gives aid (6.64, $p=0.01$). 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. In other words, the UK's actions are not "against type" so they do not provide novel information on which to update perceptions of status. It's also possible that because the respect ratings of the UK are already high, respondents face a ceiling effect. Notably, receiving foreign aid does not decrease the individually measured respect of the US.¹³

Strikingly, we also find that aid from China and India increases the individual respect of third-parties uninvolved in the transaction. The UK's respect increases significantly when India gives aid (4.15, $p = 0.04$) and substantively, though not significantly, when China does (2.90, $p = 0.14$). 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. Empirically, status-actions reverberate further through the international system than has been previously tested.

The results mirror the middle example of status change in Figure 1, where we demonstrated the possibility that status-improvements by one state can positively impact the perceived status of non-acting states. Information about one emerging donor can impact perceptions of the other. The upward movement of the UK may also imply that respondents update British respect as a way to preserve the distinction between established and emerging donors. We investigate whether this increase

¹³ This is counter to the expectations in our pre-analysis plan. Relative results, however, nuance this finding.

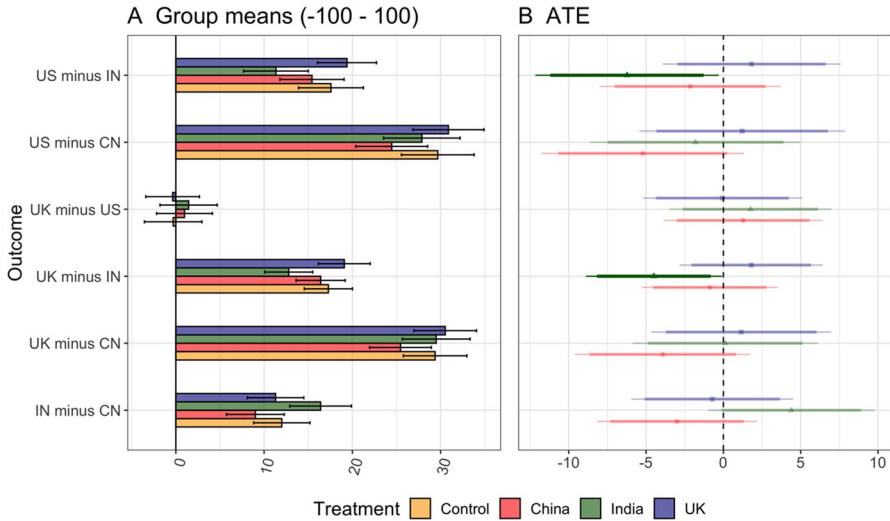


Fig. 3 *Relative status (closeness)*: In (A), group means of each treatment condition are calculated with 95% confidence intervals for each outcome, the relative status of four states (China, India, the UK, and the US) compared to each other. The treatments, aid to the US from China, India, and the UK, are compared to a control of no information for each outcome. The outcomes are calculated by subtracting the status value of one country from another. In (B), OLS estimates on the effect of treatment on each outcome with 95% robust standard errors

is enough to offset relative changes in respect. In evaluating measures of relational status, we turn first to our measure of closeness.

We transform the dependent variable from individual to relational closeness by subtracting the individual respect of one state in each treatment pair from the other. For ease of interpretation, we always subtract the respect of the lower ranked state from the higher ranked state meaning that negative values represent decreased distance, or increased closeness. 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. A negative treatment effect would indicate that Indian and American respect has become closer, a relative loss in the eyes of Americans. Figure 3A presents the mean difference of each pair relative to the control group, along with 95% confidence intervals. Figure 3B shows the ATE of each donor treatment on the relative closeness between country pairs.

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

China’s respect relative to the US moves in the same direction in response to the Chinese aid treatment, but the effect misses significance (-5.21, $p=0.12$). While these results logically follow from each countries’ individual movement (or lack therefore), the comparative decline of the US becomes important when Americans care their relative, rather than absolute, position in the international system (Brutger

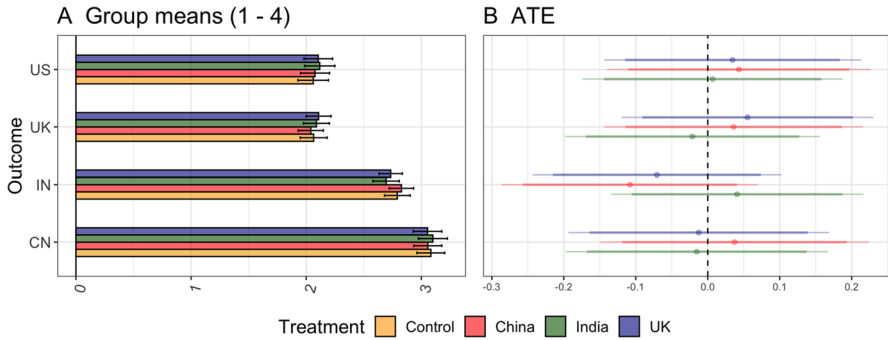


Fig. 4 *Relative status (rank)*: In (A), group means of each treatment condition are calculated with 95% confidence intervals for each outcome, the rank status of four states (China, India, the UK, and the US). The treatments, aid to the US from China, India, and the UK, are compared to a control of no information for each outcome. The outcomes are calculated by transforming the rating of each country outcome into its rank among all other country ratings. In (B), ordered probit estimates on the effect of treatment on relative rank with 95% robust standard errors

& Rathbun, 2021; Mutz & Lee, 2020). Looking just at the US would suggest that respondents don't punish the US for a status-denying act. We would miss the fact that accepting aid does indeed have consequences for the US when viewed through the lens of status competition. Perhaps because it is already an established donor (see Appendix C), the UK aid treatment condition does not effect the relative position on the US (0.06, $p=0.98$).

The relative respect of third-parties, or parties not involved in the aid transaction, also changes. British respect decreases relative to India when India gives aid (-4.49, $p=0.04$). While the UK's individual respect did increase slightly, the movement is not large enough to counter the substantial increase in Indian respect when India provides aid. The relative decline of the UK in comparison to India mirrors the relative decline of the US in comparison to India. On the other hand, Indian respect increases relative to China when India gives aid (4.39, $p=0.11$). Recall that both China and India's respect increased in the Indian aid treatment. Respondents still reward India more than China when India gives aid. Similarly, India's status relative to China decreases (-2.99, $p=0.25$) when China gives aid, though the effect is statistically insignificant. This reaffirms the importance of studying status from a positional context.¹⁴

To better understand how symbolic gestures affect international hierarchy, we conduct a test of relative respect using our measure of rank. To do so, we transform each respondents' rating of individual respect into a relative rank – the highest-rated state by an individual receives a rank of 1 while the lowest-rated state receives a

¹⁴ Using multiple hypotheses correction, results are substantively similar although less significant (See Appendix G).

rank of 4. Figure 4 then displays the ATE from ordered probit estimations of our three donor treatments (Chinese, Indian, and British aid).¹⁵

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.

While this implies that changes in relative closeness were not large enough to impact relative rank, the lack of rank change is still informative. First, the disruption of established hierarchies is a hard case and is therefore less likely to manifest experimentally. It's possible that our prime about a single aid transaction was too small and other treatments would be more likely to elicit changes in hierarchy. Status is also multidimensional and rank change might be a result of cumulative actions over multiple issue areas. Substantively, changes in relative status are still meaningful without rank change. For example, while the United States has maintained its dominant position for decades, American citizens and politicians have demonstrated concern about the closeness of other countries. They care about relative losses, even when there are absolute gains (Brutger & Rathbun, 2021; Mutz & Lee, 2020). More anecdotally, the rise of China has largely been framed as a threat to US status and the average American views China's development as a "threat" to the US' position, even though China has arguably not surpassed the United States (Kafura, 2023). Politicians have echoed these concerns. In Obama's 2008 campaign, he promised to "return America's standing in the world" (Presidential Debate Commission, 2008) while the idea of the world "laughing at us" was a key element in Trump's 2016 campaign (BBC News, 2018).

6 Reanalyzing the experimental aid and status literature

Our original survey results reaffirm the relationship between foreign aid and international status, but they also offer important caveats. States may see *relative* changes in status due to foreign aid, but these changes are confined to situations in which foreign aid provides new information about the relationship between states. In light of these findings, we return to the existing literature to demonstrate how an expanded framework can productively nuance prior conclusions. Specifically, we reanalyze three studies using replication data made available by Dietrich et al. (2018), Mattingly and Sundquist (2023) and Carnegie and Dolan (2020). All three experiments ask respondents about the status of third-party states. As an added benefit, they represent three unique samples across different populations (Bangladesh, India and the

¹⁵ We also conduct Wilcoxon rank sum tests and find some evidence that bilateral transactions can change international hierarchies within the transaction pair, but not for the larger international arena. Results available from the authors upon request.

Table 1 Foreign aid and international status reanalyzed

Paper	Treatment	Outcome	Sample	Main results	Reanalysis results
Dietrich et al. (2018)	USAID branding	Does [X country] have “a lot” of influence on Bangladesh or “not much” influence on Bangladesh	2,294 Bangladeshi citizens	USAID branding increases the perceived influence of the US in Bangladesh	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Decreased influence of Arab states Decreased influence of Arab states compared to USA, Indonesia, India, UK and China No relative effects for other third-parties
Mattingly & Sundquist (2023)	Social media statements about Chinese donations to the Indian Red Cross and WHO	Four composite measures: perceptions of the Chinese government, perceptions of the Chinese people, attitudes about India's policies towards China, perceptions of China's response to COVID-19	4,677 Indian citizens	Twitter information about Chinese foreign aid increases positive perceptions of Chinese policies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Increased positive perceptions of Chinese policies/government compared to US policies and government Increase in Chinese rank for policies/government compared to the US
Carnegie & Dolan (2020)	Information that “India did not ask for outside assistance”	Please tell me the number you think best represents India's status relative to the other countries in the world from 1 (the absolute lowest status country in the world) to 100 (the absolute highest status country in the world)	756 American citizens	Rejection of foreign aid increases India's international status among US respondents	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Rejection of foreign aid does not increase India's rank in the international system Rejection does not change the rank of any other country in the international system

US) and time periods. The treatments also differ so we can be more confident in the relative status implications of foreign aid under more mundane conditions.

Appendix D describes the full replication process and Table 1 outlines each papers' findings about the implications of status-enhancing actions for *individually* measured status. All three studies lay important groundwork in understanding the relationship between foreign aid and international status. Our contribution is to extend their analyses to include measures of *relative* status. We reiterate that opening up different levels of analyses has novel and important implications for understanding status-seeking activity.

In Dietrich et al. (2018), information about the USAID brand is shown to improve the perceived influence of the US amongst Bangladeshi citizens. We show in our reanalysis of the experiment that the information affects not only perceptions of the US, but of other states in the international community. USAID's brand also changes how Bangladeshi citizens perceive Arab states and Pakistan, even though neither state was primed in the experimental treatment. Arab states see their individually measured status decrease as well as their influence relative to the US, India, and others. These results point to a significant contagion effect of aid branding in which the presence of foreign aid from one donor actually changes the perceived influence of other donors. Here, the results are in line with status competition. The decline of Arab states' individual influence mirrors the possibility we illustrate in the right-most panel of Figure 1, whereby when one state does something status-enhancing, the international community lowers their impression of other actors who do not act in the same way. While we do not directly theorize the circumstances under which specific third-party states will experience status changes, we note that relative status movement captures an important dynamic of status change in the international system.

The importance of international ripple effects is also underscored by Mattingly and Sundquist (2023). The authors find that Chinese tweets about aid affect perceptions of China among Indian respondents. In line with theories of status competition, we find that positive perceptions of China *also* increase relative to the United States (whose actions were not manipulated in the experiment). Like the results for US status in our original survey experiment, here, the relative change occurs mechanically from the fact that perceptions of China increase in a positive direction while perceptions of the US remain unchanged. Unlike in our original survey, information about Chinese aid might fully reverse Indian respondents' preferences. While US policies and governance structures are preferred in the control condition, Indian respondents who read tweets about Chinese aid prefer Chinese systems, though the rank reversal is not statistically significant at conventional levels. The addition of network-based analysis of Mattingly and Sundquist (2023) not only supports their initial conclusion, but offers additional evidence of the significant effects of Chinese aid on China's, and the US', international reputation.

Finally, Carnegie and Dolan (2020) show that India's refusal to accept disaster aid increases its perceived international status among US respondents. They also report in their paper that India's rank in the international system does not change. When we reanalyze their results, we find that the refusal to accept aid does not change the rank for any other state in the international system either. While India's aid rejection

is indicative of positive peer effects – it triggers decreases in rank for recipients (i.e. India, Kenya and Haiti) and increases in rank for donors (i.e. Germany and China) – none of these movements are statistically significant. Asking respondents to rank states directly, the results square with our main findings. Whether this is because of conservative treatments or the stability of hierarchies, the consistency of this finding suggests that a systematic approach opens up not just new opportunities for relative change but also limitations to meaningful change in the world order. It's important to understand how status changes, and how it doesn't.

7 Discussion

State status changes individually (sometimes), relatively (for certain pairs), and hierarchically (never) in both our main results and our reanalyses of existing experiments. These puzzling patterns point to a limitation of the international status literature, which posits that changes in one type of status measurement (individual) will be mirrored across all other forms of status. We outline several ways forward in the study of international status that may answer some of the outstanding questions raised by our study.

First, in thinking about the efficacy of status actions, future work must grapple with who confers status and *who updates their perceptions of international status*. A robust literature in American politics and psychology explores how social group identities structure individuals' political attitudes and behaviors (Huddy, 2003; Nelson & Kinder, 1996). If status is relational and perceptual, individuals' ideas about their own place in social hierarchies should inform the way they view international status competition. Group competition is important to maintaining self esteem (Tajfel & Turner, 1979), so we would expect that respondents who identify with the American "in-group" and feel attached to the idea of the US as a high-status country are less likely to update their perceptions of relative status. While our main results imply that symbolic aid acts may be too small to disrupt established hierarchies, they may be able to shift the opinions of certain groups, suggesting the importance of targeting status actions not just towards certain peer countries but also to specific populations within those countries. For example, Japanese and Nazi forces during WWII, the Soviet Union, and Mao's China have all attempted to target the public opinion of minority populations in the US (Ettinger, 1946; Kelley & Esch, 1999; Masaharu, 1999).

There are multiple empirical implications that stem from this proposition. While we report average treatment effects in our main analyses, here, we provide initial evidence for three types of heterogeneous effects: nationalism, partisanship and race, in Appendix E. In the case of nationalism, we would expect that respondents who view the US as exceptional are most attached to the status quo and therefore less likely to update. Indeed, we find that highly nationalistic Americans are less likely to update their perceptions of status across almost every treatment condition and outcome. More generally, individuals who find particular countries exceptional may be less likely to consider other countries comparable, making these respondents unlikely to respond to information about status-changing actions. Similarly, US respondents

who identify as conservative should be less likely to update their beliefs about relative status given the prevalence of American exceptionalism in right-wing ideology. Consistent with this idea, we also find that conservatives are less likely than liberals to update relative status, particularly for the US relative to other nations.

Finally, strong attitudinal differences persist in America between Blacks and Whites, who look upon the world in “different and mutually unintelligible ways” (Kinder & Sanders, 1996). Race impacts political participation and trust in government institutions (Koch, 2019; Leighley & Vedlitz, 1999) just as it impacts opinions about foreign policy (Green-Riley & Leber, 2023; Nincic & Nincic, 2002). While White Americans are more likely to identify with the American “in group” and be attached to high US status, Black Americans should be more likely to identify with the “out group” and integrate negative information about the US into their perception of US status. Specifically, we find that aid from India significantly decreases Black respondents’ ratings of US status but has no effect on White respondents. Black respondents are much more likely than White respondents to decrease the status of the US relative to India. These patterns are suggestive of differential attachment to international hierarchies amongst low-nationalist individuals, liberals, and Black individuals. Further study, in line with Lobo and Brutger (2023), should work to uncover the mechanisms through which some individuals update status perceptions, and why some do not.

Second, we raise questions about how our theoretical framework holds across issue areas and global circumstances. We must theorize about the scope conditions of effective status- actions or in other words, *what type of actions are most likely to elicit relative status updating?* Implicit in our justification of the Covid case is the emergency context. Because the context was unusual, we speculated that this scenario was most likely to provide new information on which to update. We also expected our results to be more pronounced for unusual donors (China and India). Generalizing this reasoning suggests that for the kind of low-cost symbolic actions we explore, status actions are most likely to elicit relative changes, especially for non-acting states, when the action is against type. Future work should also focus on disaggregating how initial starting points in international hierarchy matter for status-updating on certain issues. Our speculation that aid from the UK is insignificant because the UK is already a high-status well-known donor state accords with Guzman (2008)’s larger insight that the degree of updating following state action is conditional on a state’s prior reputation in that issue area.

We offer initial evidence from a second survey, described in full in Appendix F.1, where we randomize information on the reception of election monitors for the 2020 US national election. While sending election monitors can be status enhancing by virtue of a demonstrated commitment to democracy (Bush, 2011), receiving election monitors can imply problems in domestic electoral institutions. As the original “beacon on a hill” for democratic principles, the US is not a typical recipient of election monitors. Specifically, we randomize whether respondents receive information about election monitors in the US from South Africa, the UK, or the UN, hypothesizing that South Africa is an unusual sender and thus most likely to elicit updating. We find patterns consistent with our theory of relational status—both the US and China decrease in status relative to South Africa when South Africa sends election

monitors to the US. These results highlight two important patterns: first, in line with our main results, status moves in both individual and relative directions when international actions are taken. Second, while our reanalyses demonstrate that status updating can occur under more mundane circumstances, atypical actions by atypical parties are more likely to generate significant effects.

Finally, we propose three types of network dynamics in our framework and push future work to theorize about when each type of dynamic is most likely to manifest. A crucial first step in this agenda is to deepen our understanding of how individuals and states identify relevant targets. *To whom do status actions spillover?* One proposition that comes out of the literature is that the presence or absence of relative status changes for non-acting states should depend on whether observers see actions as relevant to a comparison state. Psychologically, limitations on information processing make categorization a useful heuristic for individuals evaluating complex phenomena, like international status (Taylor, 1981). This cognitive shortcut should be especially important in evaluating subjects on which an individual has less information (Gray & Hicks, 2014). The status literature is thus full of references to “peer groups,” “status communities” and “reference groups.” Frank (1985) goes so far as to say that status is local. Empirically, Renshon (2017) finds that hierarchies at the local level inspire greater competition. Our findings similarly suggest peer effects whereby China and India, both emerging donors, experience positive treatment effects when the other sends aid. The US and the UK, both established donors, also see their relative status move in the same (negative) direction. Thus, the status actions of state A should be more likely to update status perceptions of state B (in a positive or negative way) when they are considered to a part of the same status community. This makes understanding ingroups and outgroups at the international level a priority.

For example, in our main survey we included an additional treatment arm that primed respondents about India and China’s histories as former aid recipients.¹⁶ We expected additional information on prior development status to increase the effect of the aid treatment. However, as we report in Appendix C, we find that priming respondents about India and China’s former recipient status has little effect. This suggests that respondents already know that China and India are in a common group of emerging donors.

We also suggest an alternative means of determining status communities. We field an additional survey in Kosovo, where we ask respondents to rate a country’s respect (Kosovo or Venezuela) and then name three countries of similar status. We describe the survey and sample in F.2 and emphasize the additional benefit to analyzing data from non-US samples. As we expected, when Kosovan respondents rate either Kosovo or Venezuela highly, they list Switzerland, the US, Canada, and other “high respect” states. Conversely, and consistent with our inductive hypotheses, developing countries, such as Ghana, India, and Algeria, and global rivals to the US, such as China and Russia, are considered to be less-respected peers. European

¹⁶ In the main analysis, we group China-prime and India-prime respondents with the China-control and India-control respondents. The main results are robust the exclusion of primed subjects.

countries are more commonly identified as peers of Kosovo, while oil-producing states are more common peers of Venezuela. Further research is needed to understand the circumstances and situations under which countries are or are not considered by members of the same peer group, but preliminary results point to a consistent framework whereby categorization plays an important role in status evaluation.

8 Conclusion

Our original survey results reaffirm the relationship between foreign aid and international status, but, in line with findings from our replication studies, we offer important caveats. While new donors can improve their status through donating foreign aid, their status may not improve relative to all other states in the international system. We offer evidence that, at least in the case of small acts, states' status-changing actions may have more enhanced or more limited implications than has been previously documented. Status actions reverberate through the international system in many ways and our framework enumerates three potential channels through which these ripple effects can occur. While these pathways are neither exhaustive nor mutually exclusive, we demonstrate how the measures we use impact the conclusions we draw about international status change.

Our analyses only scratch the surface of what it means for status to be a relative and peer-referent concept. We establish that status-enhancing actions are referential, but individual and relative status implications do not always flow in the same direction. State actions impact the status of some third-party states but not others. While we provide a novel framework, we also point to the need for additional theorizing.

We offer initial evidence of circumstantial relative status in our main survey, reanalyses of additional surveys, and in two additional original surveys. Across all of these experiments, we find that status groupings are particularly important units of analysis. This lends credence to previous work on status competition *within* communities (rather than *across* them) (Rathbun et al., 2021; Renshon, 2017). We thus set forth a robust research agenda about how and *for whom* status changes. Future work can and should theorize about the bounds and fluidity of peer communities under various circumstances. We encourage researchers to pursue an agenda that centers around relative status and its capacity to change the international system.

For policymakers, the importance of peer groups generates clear prescriptions. For example, motivating states to engage in greater commitment to human rights may be less productive if the Scandinavian countries are the standard to which states expect to be compared. For states outside of this group, changes in their status won't be comparable to Norway and those efforts may therefore seem fruitless. However, generating new types of peers may be one means of encouraging status competition. For example, in the wake of the January 6th right-wing attack on the US Capitol, pundits and experts alike lamented the US' 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, a state which might not normally be included amongst the US's peer nations. Policymakers should pay attention to targeted comparisons and the potential reshaping of peer groups to generate pressure for policy change.

Finally, the relative success of atypical actions by atypical parties in changing their own status and the status of associated states suggests a new weapon of weak states. While weak states are subject to power imbalances in the international system, symbolic actions that target peer states may offer opportunities for advancement in the international system. However, these changes may be limited to within a group of related countries. Understanding the conditions under which status changes affect states *beyond* a given peer community could offer even greater leverage to weak states in international relations.

Supplementary Information The online version contains supplementary material available at <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11558-024-09543-6>.

Acknowledgements We thank the Yale International Relations Workshop, the University of Mississippi IR/Comparative Reading group, participants at the PEIO (2021), ISA (2021, 2022), SoWEPS (2021), and VIPES (2021) conferences, P. Aronow, Katharine Baldwin, Sarah Bush, Stephen Chaudoin, Richard Clark, Alex Coppock, Alex Debs, Angele Delevoye, Marina Duque, Michael Goldfien, Tobias Heinrich, Connor Huff, Tyler Pratt, and Dana Stuster for their generous support and feedback. This study was funded in part by the Yale Cooperative Lucid Survey.

Data availability The datasets generated by the survey research during and analyzed during the current study are available in the Dataverse repository and the Review of International Organizations' web page. The Online Appendix is also available on the Review of International Organizations' web page.

Declarations

Conflict of interest The authors have no relevant financial or non-financial interests to disclose.

Open Access This article is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License, which permits use, sharing, adaptation, distribution and reproduction in any medium or format, as long as you give appropriate credit to the original author(s) and the source, provide a link to the Creative Commons licence, and indicate if changes were made. The images or other third party material in this article are included in the article's Creative Commons licence, unless indicated otherwise in a credit line to the material. If material is not included in the article's Creative Commons licence and your intended use is not permitted by statutory regulation or exceeds the permitted use, you will need to obtain permission directly from the copyright holder. To view a copy of this licence, visit <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>.

References

- Anderson, C., Hildreth, J. A., & Howland, L. (2015). Is the desire for status a fundamental human motive? A review of the empirical literature. *Psychological Bulletin*, *141*(3), 574–601.
- Arnson, C., Daly, R., & Hamilton, D. (2021). The World's reaction to the events of January 6. *Wilson Center*. <https://www.wilsoncenter.org/article/worlds-reaction-events-january-6th>. Accessed 1 Sept 2023
- Asmus, G., Fuchs, A., & Müller, A. (2017). BRICs and Foreign Aid. *AidData Working Paper*.
- Asmus, G., Eichenauer, V. Z., Fuchs, A., & Parks, B. (2021). Does India use development finance to compete with China? A Subnational Analysis. *Working Paper*.

- Baker, A. (2015). Race, paternalism, and foreign aid: Evidence from US public opinion. *American Political Science Review*, 109(1), 93–109.
- Barnhart, J. (2016). Status competition and territorial aggression: Evidence from the scramble for Africa. *Security Studies*, 25(3), 385–419.
- Barnhart, J. (2017). Humiliation and third-party aggression. *World Politics*, 69(3), 532–568.
- Barnhart, J. (2020). *The consequences of humiliation: Anger and status in world politics*. Cornell University Press.
- BBC News. (2018). The World is laughing at Us' says trump. <https://www.bbc.com/news/av/world-us-canada-42968940>. Accessed 1 Sept 2023
- Bermeo, S. (2018). *Targeted development: Industrialized country strategy in a globalizing world*. Oxford University Press.
- Blair, R. A., Marty, R., & Roessler, P. (2022). Foreign aid and soft power: Great power competition in Africa in the Early 21st century. *British Journal of Political Science*, 52(3), 1355–1376.
- Blarel, N. (2012). India's soft power: From potential to reality? *IDEAS Reports*.
- Brinkley, J., & Smith, C. S. (2005). Offers pour in, but the US is unprepared. *The New York Times*. <https://www.nytimes.com/2005/09/08/us/storm-and-crisis-foreign-aid-offers-pour-in-but-the-us-is-unprepared.html>. Accessed 1 Sept 2023
- Brooks, S. M., Cunha, R., & Mosley, L. (2015). Categories, creditworthiness, and contagion: How investors' shortcuts affect sovereign debt markets. *International Studies Quarterly*, 59(3), 587–601.
- Brutger, R., & Kertzer, J. (2018). A dispositional theory of reputational costs. *International Organization*, 72(3), 693–724.
- Brutger, R., & Rathbun, B. (2021). Fair play?: Equity and equality in American attitudes towards trade. *International Organization*, 75(3), 880–900.
- Bueno de Mesquita, B., & Smith, A. (2007). Foreign aid and policy concessions. *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, 51(2), 251–284.
- Bush, S. S. (2011). International politics and the spread of quotas for women in legislatures. *International Organization*, 65(1), 103–137.
- Bush, S. S., & Zetterberg, P. (2020). Gender quotas and international reputation. *American Journal of Political Science*, 65(2), 326–341.
- Carnegie, A., & Dolan, L. (2020). The effects of rejecting aid on recipients' reputations: Evidence from natural disaster responses. *The Review of International Organizations*, 16(3), 495–519.
- Custer, S., Russell, B., DiLorenzo, M., Cheng, M., Ghose, S., Sims, J., Turner, J., & Desai, H. (2018). Ties that bind: Quantifying China's public diplomacy and its 'Good Neighbor' Effect. <http://docs.aiddata.org/ad4/pdfs/TiesThatBind-FullReport.pdf>
- Dafoe, A., Renshon, J., & Huth, P. (2014). Reputation and status as motives for war. *Annual Review of Political Science*, 17, 371–393.
- Dickson, P. (2007). Sputnik's impact on America. *PBS*. <https://www.pbs.org/wgbh/nova/article/sputnik-impact-on-america/>. Accessed 1 Sept 2023
- Dietrich, S., Mahmud, M., & Winters, M. S. (2018). Foreign aid, foreign policy, and domestic government legitimacy: Experimental evidence from Bangladesh. *The Journal of Politics*, 80(1), 133–148.
- Dolan, L. (2020). Rethinking foreign aid and legitimacy: Views from aid recipients in Kenya. *Studies in Comparative International Development*, 55, 143–159.
- Dreher, A., Nunnenkamp, P., & Thiele, R. (2008). Does US Aid buy UN general assembly votes? A disaggregated analysis. *Public Choice*, 136(1), 139–164.
- Dreher, A., Nunnenkamp, P., & Thiele, R. (2011). Are 'New' donors different? Comparing the allocation of bilateral aid between nonDAC and DAC donor countries. *World Development*, 39(11), 1950–1968.
- Duque, M. G. (2018). Recognizing international status: A relational approach. *International Studies Quarterly*, 62(3), 577–592.
- Eichenauer, V. Z., Fuchs, A., & Brückner, L. (2021). The effects of trade, aid, and investment on China's image in Latin America. *Journal of Comparative Economics*, 49(2), 483–498.
- Ettinger, K. E. (1946). Foreign propaganda in America. *Public Opinion Quarterly*, 10(3), 329–342.
- Fiske, S. T., Xu, J., Cuddy, A. C., & Glick, P. (1999). (Dis)respecting versus (Dis)liking: Status and interdependence predict ambivalent stereotypes of competence and warmth. *Journal of Social Issues*, 55(3), 473–489.
- Fiske, S. T., Cuddy, A. J. C., & Glick, P. (2007). Universal dimensions of social cognition: Warmth and competence. *Trends in Cognitive Science*, 11(2), 77–83.

- Frank, R. (1985). *Choosing the right pond: Human behavior and the quest for status*. Oxford University Press.
- Gilpin, R. (1983). *War and change in world politics*. Cambridge University Press.
- Goldsmith, B. E., & Horiuchi, Y. (2012). In search of soft power: Does foreign policy opinion matter for US foreign policy? *World Politics*, 64(3), 555–585.
- Goldsmith, B. E., Horiuchi, Y., & Wood, T. (2014). Doing Well by doing good: The impact of foreign aid on foreign public opinion. *Quarterly Journal of Political Science*, 9(1), 87–114.
- Gray, J. (2013). *The company states keep: International economic organizations and investor perceptions*. Cambridge University Press.
- Gray, J., & Hicks, R. P. (2014). Reputations, perceptions, and international economic agreements. *International Interactions*, 40(3), 325–349.
- Green-Riley, N., & Leber, A. (2023). Whose War is it Anyway? Explaining the Black-White Gap in Support for the Use of Force Abroad. *Security Studies*, 32(4–5), 811–845.
- Guzman, A. T. (2008). *How international law works: A rational choice theory*. Oxford University Press.
- Hafner-Burton, E., & Montgomery, A. (2006). Power positions: International organizations, social networks and conflict. *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, 50(1), 3–27.
- Herrmann, R. K., Voss, J. F., Schooler, T. Y. E., & Ciarrochi, J. (1997). Images in international relations: An experimental test of cognitive schemata. *International Studies Quarterly*, 41(3), 403–433.
- Honig, D., & Weaver, C. (2019). A race to the top? The aid transparency index and the social power of global performance indicators. *International Organization*, 73(3), 579–610.
- Hopkins, V. (2016). Let them eat Alexander the great statues. *Foreign Policy*, 19. <https://foreignpolicy.com/2016/06/19/let-them-eat-alexander-the-great-statues-skopje-2014-macedonia-colorful-revolution/>. Accessed 1 Sept 2023
- Huberman, B. A., Loch, C. H., & Onculer, A. (2004). Status as a valued resource. *Social Psychology Quarterly*, 67(1), 103–114.
- Huddy, L. (2003). *Oxford Handbook of political psychology*. Oxford University Press. Chap. Group Identity and Political Cohesion.
- Jervis, R. (1989). *The logic of images in international relations*. Columbia University Press.
- Kafura, C. (2023). Americans feel more threat from China now than in past three decades. *The Chicago Council on Global Affairs*. <https://globalaffairs.org/research/public-opinion-survey/americans-feel-more-threat-china-now-past-three-decades>. Accessed 1 Sept 2023
- Katzenstein, P., & Seybert, L. (Eds.). (2018). *Protean power: Exploring the uncertain and unexpected in world politics*. Cambridge University Press.
- Kayser, M. A., & Peress, M. (2012). Benchmarking across borders: Electoral accountability and the necessity of comparison. *American Political Science Review*, 106(3), 661–684.
- Kelley, J. G. (2017). *Scorecard diplomacy: Grading states to influence their reputation and behavior*. Cambridge University Press.
- Kelley, R. D.G., & Esch, B. (1999). Black like mao: Red China and black revolution. *Souls: Critical Journal of Black Politics & Culture*, 1(4), 6–41.
- Keohane, R. O. (2010). The economy of esteem and climate change. *St Antony's International Review*, 5(2), 16–28.
- Kertzer, J. D. (2020). Re-assessing elite-public gaps in political behavior. *American Journal of Political Science*, 66(3), 539–553.
- Kinder, D., & Sanders, L. (1996). *Divided by color: Racial politics and democratic ideals*. Chicago University Press.
- Kinne, B. J. (2014). Dependent diplomacy: Signaling, strategy, and prestige in the diplomatic network. *International Studies Quarterly*, 58(2), 247–259.
- Kitagawa, R., & Chu, J. A. (2021). The impact of political apologies on public opinion. *World Politics*, 1–41.
- Koch, J. (2019). Racial minorities' trust in government and government decision makers. *Social Science Quarterly*, 100(1), 19–37.
- Kuusik, R. (2006). Estonia's development cooperation: Power, prestige, and practice of a new donor. *The Estonian Foreign Policy Yearbook*.
- Kuziemko, I., & Werker, E. (2006). How much is a seat on the United Nations Security Council Worth? Foreign aid and bribery at the United Nations. *Journal of Political Economy*, 114(5), 905–930.
- Lake, D. (2009). Relational authority and legitimacy in international relations. *American Behavioral Scientist*, 53(3), 331–353.

- Larson, D. W., & Shevchenko, A. (2010). Status seekers: Chinese and Russian responses to US primacy. *International Security*, 34(4), 63–95.
- Leighley, J., & Vedlitz, A. (1999). Race, ethnicity and political participation: Competing models and contrasting explanations. *Journal of Politics*, 61(4), 1092–1114.
- Lobo, D., & Brutger, R. (2023). *Fairness According to Whom?: Divergent Perceptions of Fairness Among White and Black Americans and its Effect on Trade Attitudes*. Tech. rept. Working Paper.
- MacDonald, P., & Parent, J. (2021). The status of status in world politics. *World Politics*, 73(2), 358–391.
- Masaharu, S. (1999). 'Negro propaganda operations': Japan's short-wave radio broadcasts for world war II black Americans. *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television*, 19(1), 5–26.
- Mattingly, D.C., & Sundquist, J. (2023). When does public diplomacy work? Evidence from China's "wolf warrior" diplomats. *Political Science Research and Methods*, 11(4), 921–929.
- McKinley, R. D., & Little, R. (1977). A foreign policy model of US bilateral aid allocation. *World Politics*, 30(1), 58–86.
- Milner, H. V., Nielson, D. L., & Findley, M. G. (2016). Citizen preferences and public goods: Comparing preferences for foreign aid and government programs in Uganda. *The Review of International Organizations*, 11(2), 219–245.
- Morse, J. C. (2019). Blacklists, market enforcement, and the global regime to combat terrorist financing. *International Organization*, 73(3), 511–545.
- Morse, J., & Pratt, T. (2022). Strategies of contestation: International law, domestic audiences and reputation management. *Journal of Politics*, 84(4), 2080–2093.
- Murray, M. (2019). *The struggle for recognition in international relations: Status, revisionism and rising powers*. Oxford University Press.
- Mutz, D. C., & Lee, A.-Y. (2020). How much is one American worth? How competition affects trade preferences. *American Political Science Review*, 114(4), 1179–1194.
- N1 Belgrade. (2021). Serbia's Vucic: Communist Party Turns China into Superpower. <https://rs.n1.info.com/english/news/serbias-vucic-communist-party-turns-china-into-superpower/>. Accessed 1 Sept 2023
- Nelson, T., & Kinder, D. (1996). Issue frames and group-centrism in American public opinion. *Journal of Politics*, 58(4), 1055–1078.
- Nincic, M., & Nincic, D. J. (2002). Race, gender and war. *Journal of Peace Research*, 39(5), 547–568.
- Pettit, N., & Lount, R. (2010). Through whose eyes? The impact of identification on judgments of group status. *Group Processes & Intergroup Relations*, 14(4), 533–547.
- Pettit, N., Sivanathan, N., Gladstone, E., & Marr, J. C. (2013). Rising stars and sinking ships: Consequences of status momentum. *Psychological Science*, 24(8), 1579–1584.
- Powers, R., & Renshon, J. (2023). International status concerns and domestic support for political leaders. *American Journal of Political Science*, 67(3), 732–747.
- Pratt, T. (2018). Deference and hierarchy in international regime complexes. *International Organization*, 72(3), 561–590.
- Presidential Debate Commission. (2008). *First McCain-Obama Debate*. <https://www.debates.org/voter-education/debate-transcripts/2008-debate-transcript/>. Accessed 1 Sept 2023
- Price, G. (2004). India's aid dynamics: From recipient to donor. *Asia Programme Working Papers - Chatham House*.
- Rathbun, B., Rathbun, N. S., & Pomeroy, C. (2021). No fair!: distinguishing the pursuit of status and equity in international relations. *International Studies Quarterly*, 66(1).
- Renshon, J. (2016). Status deficits and war. *International Organization*, 70(3), 513–550.
- Renshon, J. (2017). *Fighting for status: Hierarchy and conflict in world politics*. Princeton University Press.
- Renshon, J., Dafoe, A., & Huth, P. (2018). Leader influence and reputation formation in world politics. *American Journal of Political Science*, 62(2), 325–339.
- Rhee, K., Crabtree, C., & Horiuchi, Y. (2023). Perceived motives of public diplomacy influence foreign public opinion. *Political Behavior*, 1–21.
- Rudnitsky, J. (2020). Putin sends military plane with coronavirus aid to help US. *Bloomberg*. <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2020-04-01/putin-sends-military-plane-with-coronavirus-aid-to-help-u-s>. Accessed 1 Sept 2023
- Shambaugh, D. (2015). China's soft-power push: The search for respect. *Foreign Affairs*, 94(4), 99–107.
- Shesgreen, D., & Hjelmgard, K. (2020). Facing a crisis that rivals pearl harbor, world's superpower pleads for coronavirus aid. *USA Today*. <https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/world/2020/04/07/coronavirus-world-power-pleads-aid-death-toll/5113538002/>. Accessed 1 Sept 2023

- Smeltz, D., Daalder, I., Friedhoff, K., Kafura, C., & Helm, B. (2020). Divided we stand: Democrats and republicans diverge on US foreign policy. *The Chicago Council on Global Affairs*, 2020–12.
- Smith, K., Fordelone, T. Y., & Zimmerman, F. (2010). Beyond the DAC: The Welcome Role of Other Providers of Development Co-operation. *DCD Issues Brief*, May.
- Tajfel, H., & Turner, J. (1979). *Organizational identity: A reader*. Oxford University Press. Chap. An Integrative Theory of Intergroup Conflict.
- Taylor, S. (1981). *Cognitive process in stereotyping and intergroup behavior*. Lawrence Erlbaum Associates. Chap. A Categorization Approach to Stereotyping.
- Ternowski, J., and Orr, L. (2022). A note on increases in inattentive online survey-takers since 2020. *Journal of Quantitative Description: Digital Media 2*
- Tomz, M. (2012). *Reputation and international cooperation: Sovereign debt across three centuries*. Princeton University Press.
- Troianovski. (2020). *Turning the tables, Russia sends virus aid to U.S.* The New York Times. <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/04/02/world/europe/coronavirus-us-russia-aid.html>. Accessed 1 Sept 2023
- Urdinez, F. (2023). Undermining US reputation: Chinese vaccines and aid and the alternative provision of public goods during COVID-19. *The Review of International Organizations*.
- Viskupič, F. (2020). More valuable than blood and treasure? Experimental evidence on the impact of status on domestic preferences for military intervention. *Peace Economics, Peace Science and Public Policy*, 26(4).
- Wellner, L., Dreher, A., Fuchs, A., Parks, B. C., and Strange, A. (2024). Can Aid Buy Foreign Public Support? Evidence from Chinese Development Finance. *Economic Development and Cultural Change*. Forthcoming.
- Wohlforth, W. C. (1998). Honor as interest in russian decisions for war. In E. Abrams (Ed.), *Honor among Nations: Intangible interests and foreign policy*. Ethics and Policy Center.
- Wolf, R. (2011). Respect and disrespect in international politics: The significance of status recognition. *International Theory*, 3(1), 105–142.
- Woods, N. (2008). Whose aid? Whose influence? China, emerging donors and the silent revolution in development assistance. *International Affairs*, 84(6), 1205–1221.

Publisher's Note Springer Nature remains neutral with regard to jurisdictional claims in published maps and institutional affiliations.