Racial Prejudice and Paternalism in Mass Support for Foreign Aid

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Racial Prejudice and Paternalism in Mass Support for Foreign Aid

In recent years, a number of public intellectuals, politicians, and even pop culture icons have waged an increasingly visible debate on the merits of foreign aid. Aid advocates want to increase funding for development assistance in order to “make poverty history,” while critics bemoan wasted tax dollars and even counterproductive outcomes in the fight against underdevelopment (Easterly 2006; Moyo 2009; Sachs 2005). In the throes of this Great Aid Debate, contenders often levy accusations of racial prejudice, attributing problems in the aid regime to chauvinisms of varying kinds. Many aid proponents blame the alleged shortfall in Western funding on racial resentment and, in particular, the widely held mass belief that the non-white, foreign recipients of aid are by nature undeserving or unable to use it effectively (Sachs 2005). In contrast, aid skeptics claim that donor commitments are driven by widespread racial paternalism, whereby recipients are seen as unable to develop without the assistance of white, Western providers (Easterly 2006; Moyo 2009). Overall, it seems that donor country publics are damned if they do and damned if they don’t.

These contradictory accusations highlight the fact that neither side invokes empirical evidence to substantiate its allegation of prejudice. Their charges thus raise an important unanswered question about the motivations behind mass attitudes toward development aid: Does prejudice, of either variety, shape the way people reason about foreign aid? Scholarship in behavioral economics, mass political psychology, the sociology of race, and psychology has produced no evidence regarding the directional impact, if any, of prejudice on mass attitudes toward government assistance for impoverished foreigners. More generally, the aid skeptics’ assertion that racism may manifest itself as paternalism, rather than sheer resentment, has been largely overlooked by scholars of mass prejudice. We request TESS funding to conduct a study of the impact of prejudice on American citizens’ support for foreign aid.
Prejudice: Resentment or Paternalism?

Do racial prejudices make Americans disdainful of foreign aid? Most of the world’s poor are non-white, so there is initial plausibility to this accusation of racial “resentment.”¹ The aid activist community’s leading intellect, Jeffrey Sachs, certainly agrees, attributing “pessimism about Africans’ ability to utilize aid” and the resulting funding shortfall to “an amazing reservoir of deep prejudices” (Sachs 2005: 310). Although no studies provide direct evidence of a causal link between aid funding, or mass support for aid funding, and racial prejudice, Sachs could certainly find support for his allegation in a large scholarly literature on prejudice and mass attitudes toward domestic anti-poverty spending. A number of observational (e.g., Alesina, Glaeser, and Sacerdote 2001) and experimental (e.g., Gilens 1999) studies demonstrate that individuals are less willing to have their tax dollars redistributed to out-group members than to in-group members. American whites, in particular, are often found to be less supportive of government spending programs when the recipients of financial assistance are described as black (Bobo and Kleugel 1993; Feldman and Huddy 2005).²

These findings seemingly suggest that racial resentment is widespread and decreases support for government redistribution to out-groups, and in preliminary analyses of ANES data, we even found a modest correlation ($r = .22$) between resentment toward African Americans and foreign aid opinions.³ But what of the aid skeptics’ accusations of racial paternalism? For several reasons, we expect that paternalism—the belief that a certain group has childlike qualities and is thus helpless, to be pitied, and in need of rescue by the superior intellectual and financial resources of one’s in-group—is more likely to shape mass attitudes when racially distinct foreigners, rather than racially distinct compatriots, are the ostensible beneficiaries of social benefits.

¹ We define “racial resentment” as indignation toward a racial out-group based on its perceived inferiority and unworthiness to receive certain beneficial treatments (Kinder and Sanders 1996).
² These findings are not uncontested. In fact, some experimental studies suggest a greater willingness among whites to offer government assistance to African-Americans than to whites (Sniderman and Piazza 1993; Pager and Freese 2004). Short of making excuses about imperfect survey instruments, scholars have offered no satisfying explanations for this finding (Huddy and Feldman 2009). We suspect paternalism, defined below, might be at work.
³ This is the partial correlation when controlling for partisanship and limiting the sample to non-Blacks. Resentment toward African Americans is an index constructed from the four-item battery used in Kinder and Sanders (1996).
policy. First, research in psychology demonstrates that out-group resentment is often fueled by the perceived threat posed by inter-group conflict over scarce resources, with inter-group contact tending to exacerbate these negative stereotypes (Allport [1954] 1979; Sniderman et al. 2000.) In contrast, a more benevolent prejudice, often manifesting as paternalism, can exist in the absence of competition, threat, and contact (Jackman 1994; Fiske et al 2002). We expect this latter case may hold in foreign aid attitudes since direct contact and economic conflict between funders and beneficiaries are virtually nonexistent.4 Second, coverage of the Third World by Western media tends to focus on sensationalistic stories of violence, disease, and poverty that emphasize helplessness and immiseration and, in doing so, evoke pity and altruism while overlooking victims’ agentic capacities (Ebo 1992; Wainaina 2005). Finally, paternalism toward racially distinct foreigners has a long history, especially by whites directed at Africans. Hegel referred to Africa as the “land of childhood” (Hegel 1837/2007: 91), and Albert Schweitzer, renowned humanitarian to Africa, nonetheless believed “the negro” to be “a child.”5 Indeed, paternalistic considerations were often used to justify the Atlantic slave trade and colonialism (Mamdani 1996).

In short, paternalism weighs heavily in the history of Africa’s relations with the West, and African intellectuals still level charges of paternalism at the West (Ayittey 2005; Moyo 2009; Wainaina 2005). It is thus surprising that the concept has little presence in political psychology work on stereotyping and prejudice.

Experimental Design and Hypotheses

Our experiment is designed to answer the following questions. First, does the race of the purported recipients of foreign aid influence mass support for it, and, if so, what is the direction and magnitude of this race-of-recipient effect? Second, do frames invoking paternalism or resentment also yield effects on mass support for aid and, if so, which of the two frames

4 Technically speaking, foreign aid does feature economic conflict over social expenditures, but in reality this is limited because foreign aid is such a small share of government expenditure. In our experiment, we attempt to limit these concerns by informing our respondents of how miniscule US foreign aid spending is.

5 “The negro is a child, and with children nothing can be done without the use of authority” (quote by Schweitzer in Brabazon 2000: 254).
resonates more with mass publics? Third, assuming there is a race-of-recipient effect (and our pretest shows there is), does paternalism or resentment mediate that effect?

To answer these questions, we propose a $2 \times 4 + 1$ experimental design. Our survey battery would begin with a photo banner and short text that manipulate two dimensions: (1) the race of the foreign aid recipients and (2) the paternalism versus resentment frame. The survey text begins with a sentence that defines and describes foreign aid and then gives an example of the kinds of countries and families to which aid is distributed. The country/family types are experimentally manipulated to be either black Africans or white Eastern Europeans.\(^6\) (Rather than explicitly describing race, the photo banner will convey race by showing a family that fits the profile.\(^7\)) The text then incorporates the four-category second dimension. Respondents in the “paternalism (pro)” treatment will read that an American aid expert is on hand to “teach” the poor how to profitably use the aid, whereas those in the “paternalism (con)” treatment will read that the aid expert sometimes limits the recipients’ choices. For both, the text is reinforced by the addition to the photo banner of a white man with a clipboard standing next to the family. Respondents in the “resentment (con)” and “resentment (pro)” treatments will read text that alters the deservingness of aid recipients and will see not a white aid expert but an electronic gaming toy in one family member’s hand, planting the seed that the family owns luxury items and is thus undeserving. Finally, a control group will not see any photo and not be prompted to think about any specific country or racial group.

We then ask a set of items to gauge the dependent variable of support for foreign aid\(^8\) and to measure possible mediating variables such as resentment (with survey questions modeled on

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\(^6\) The text will hold constant objective need by describing the African and East European recipient states as “countries in which half of the population lives below the global poverty line.”

\(^7\) We photo-shop the pictures so that only heads and skin color are altered.

\(^8\) In asking, we report the fact that foreign aid per American per year is $40. This is (1) to inform respondents of how minimal aid is and thus quell their concerns about economic conflict and (2) to enable us to query exactly how much respondents think the government should devote to foreign aid.
existing racial resentment indicators), paternalism (modeled on existing benevolent prejudice and other paternalism indicators), and perceived need in the target countries.  

We will test for the impact of racial as well as paternalist and resentment frames through the main effects. We will test to see if paternalism and resentment mediate the impact of race both through the interaction effects and through the measured mediators of paternalism and resentment. We hypothesize that (1) respondents will be more supportive of aid to black Africans than to white Eastern Europeans (something we already found in our pretest on college students) and that (2) paternalism both mediates and magnifies this race-of-recipient effect.

Conclusion

This proposed study has numerous intellectual and normative merits. First, it introduces the notion of prejudice-as-paternalism to political psychology. A small literature on the topic does exist in psychology and sociology (Dovidio, Glick, and Rudman 2005; Glick and Fiske 2001; Jackman 1994; Katz and Hass 1988). However, the possibility of prejudice as paternalism, rather than as mere resentment, has had no presence in political psychology studies—a surprising oversight considering the importance of paternalism in North-South relations historically and in other academic disciplines. Second, the literature in political psychology and the sociology of race has overwhelmingly focused on domestic government assistance programs, so an experimental study that manipulates the race of the foreign recipients of government assistance is long overdue. Third, this study is highly interdisciplinary. We borrow concepts and methods from psychology and political behavioralism, yet we also intend to speak to the contenders (most of them economists) in the Great Aid Debate. Fourth, the project’s findings would provide information to activists and politicians about how best to frame aid to skeptical donor publics. Finally, the findings can be cross-checked via observational data. To that end, we are in the process of seeking funding from elsewhere to collect data on voluntary Western charitable giving to Third World humanitarian disasters.

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9 We tweak survey items from Pettigrew and Meertens (1995) and Glick and Fiske (2001).
### Appendix: Proposed Questionnaire

#### Introductory Text (2 × 4 + 1 design)

<table>
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<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Paternalism (Pro) Frame</th>
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<th>Resentment (Pro) Frame</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Africa</strong></td>
<td>Foreign aid is money that the U.S. government sends to poor countries to help them fight poverty. A lot of the aid money that we send overseas goes to poor African countries in which half of the population lives below the global poverty line. The money is often used by poor families like the one pictured above. An American aid expert (like the one pictured above) is often on hand to teach the poor how to use the aid to improve their lives.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Eastern Europe</strong></td>
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(2 units with photo banner)

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10 The overall battery uses up 15 units, which would allow us 1500 respondents. See the power analysis in the reviewers’ appendix.

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Question 1 (1 unit): “Overall, each year the US government gives about $40 of each American’s income to foreign countries. Many people think this is too low, others think it is too high, and still others think it is about right. How much per American do you think our government should spend on foreign aid?”

(1) $0. The U.S. should not give any foreign aid.
(2) $1 to $19. The U.S. should lower the amount by a lot.
(3) $20 to $39. The U.S. should lower the amount by a little.
(4) $40. The current amount is about right.
(5) $41 to $59. The U.S. should raise the amount by a little.
(6) $60 to $79. The U.S. should raise the amount by a lot.
(7) $80 or more. The U.S. should raise the amount by a huge sum.

Paternalism Scale
Question 2 (1 unit): The only way poor countries will grow richer is with financial help from rich countries.

Agree strongly
(1) Agree somewhat
(2) Neither agree nor disagree
(3) Disagree somewhat
(4) Disagree strongly
(5)

Question 3 (1 unit): For various reasons, people in poor countries struggle to act in a way that will make their economies grow.

Agree strongly
(1) Agree somewhat
(2) Neither agree nor disagree
(3) Disagree somewhat
(4) Disagree strongly
(5)

Question 4 (1 unit): I feel sorry for people in poor countries because there is little they can do by themselves to improve their livelihood.

Agree strongly
(1) Agree somewhat
(2) Neither agree nor disagree
(3) Disagree somewhat
(4) Disagree strongly
(5)

Resentment Scale
Question 5 (1 unit): Many of today’s wealthy countries were once poor but worked their way up in the world. People in poor countries should do the same.

Agree strongly
(1) Agree somewhat
(2) Neither agree nor disagree
(3) Disagree somewhat
(4) Disagree strongly
(5)

Question 6 (1 unit): It’s really a matter of some people not trying hard enough. If people in poor countries would only try harder, they could be just as well off as the United States.

Agree strongly
(1) Agree somewhat
(2) Neither agree nor disagree
(3) Disagree somewhat
(4) Disagree strongly
(5)

Question 7 (1 unit): Generations of colonialism and economic exploitation by rich countries have kept poor countries from becoming richer.

Agree strongly
(1) Agree somewhat
(2) Neither agree nor disagree
(3) Disagree somewhat
(4) Disagree strongly
(5)
Question 8 (1 unit): The US has a moral obligation to help foreign poor countries.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Agree strongly</th>
<th>Agree somewhat</th>
<th>Neither agree nor disagree</th>
<th>Disagree somewhat</th>
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Question 9 (1 unit): “Let me ask for your opinion about foreign aid in a slightly different way. What about aid to the poor countries in Africa/Eastern Europe/[none] in which half of the population lives below the global poverty line. Do you think that U.S. spending on foreign aid to poor countries like these should increase, decrease or be kept about the same? If you think it should increase or decrease, please specify by how much.”

| (1) It should decrease to zero. |
| (2) It should decrease a lot. |
| (3) It should decrease a little. |
| (4) It should stay the same. |
| (5) It should increase a little. |
| (6) It should increase a lot. |
| (7) It should increase by a huge sum. |

Question 10 (1 unit): “There are also different opinions about how well foreign aid is used by the poor people it is supposed to benefit. Do you think that foreign aid is used by poor people in Africa/Eastern Europe/[none] to genuinely improve their lives or do they waste it? Please indicate below the amount of all foreign aid that you think is used well.”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>All of it is used well, none of it is wasted</th>
<th>Most of it is used well, a little of it is wasted</th>
<th>Half is used well, half is wasted</th>
<th>A little of it is used well, most is wasted</th>
<th>None of it is used well, all of it is wasted</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(1)</td>
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Finally, we’d like to get your view on what quality of life is like in poor countries. In a typical African/Eastern European/poor country where half of the population lives below the global poverty line, what percent of homes do you think have the following things?

Question 11 (1 unit): Three full meals per day.

| (1) 0% |
| (2) 20% |
| (3) 40% |
| (4) 50% |
| (5) 60% |
| (6) 80% |
| (7) 100% |

Question 12 (1 unit): Indoor plumbing (i.e., flushing toilets and working water faucets).

| (1) 0% |
| (2) 20% |
| (3) 40% |
| (4) 50% |
| (5) 60% |
| (6) 80% |
| (7) 100% |

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Question 13 (1 unit): A car.

(1) 0%  
(2) 20%.
(3) 40%.
(4) 50%.
(5) 60%.
(6) 80%.
(7) 100%.
References


