

Fighting Poverty at Home and Abroad: Explaining Attitudes Towards Redistribution

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Abstract

Why do individuals support redistribution? This paper broadens the scope of the literature on redistribution to include the international context. It investigates whether national borders are barriers to public support for income redistribution, and if so, why. To begin to answer these questions, I fielded two surveys to nationally-representative samples of Americans in February and July of 2013. By experimentally manipulating the nationality of the recipients of a redistributive program, while keeping other program details constant, I am able to isolate the effect of nationality on public support. I find that Americans are significantly less supportive of a program that targets recipients in other countries. While Americans view the foreign poor as needier and more deserving than the domestic poor, they believe the U.S. government has a greater moral obligation to help domestic recipients. Moreover, they view the foreign program as less effective and believe the opportunity costs of funding the foreign program are higher. These mechanisms help explain why Americans support domestic redistribution at higher rates than foreign redistribution.

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1 Introduction

Why do individuals support redistribution? This question has motivated research across many different social science literatures, but has largely been confined to the study of support for domestic welfare programs. In a world in which economic interactions are increasingly globalized however, it is surprising that relatively little attention has been paid to how individuals think about international inequality and foreign redistribution. This paper starts with the observation that there are domestic and foreign redistributive programs that governments can implement to address inequality found both within *and across* national borders. Few scholars, however, have brought these issue areas together to examine whether and how national borders are a barrier to public support for redistribution. I seek to address this gap in the literature through an experimental study of American public opinion.

In the United States, many years of polling data demonstrate the public's aversion to foreign aid. Foreign aid typically receives the lowest levels of public support of any government program and it is often the first program identified for cuts by the public in times of economic crisis (Kinder and Kam, 2009). Domestic welfare programs, however, are also consistently some of the least supported programs. In a recent poll by the Pew Research Center, Americans were asked their spending preferences on 19 policy areas. Of all the spending areas, "aid to world's needy" was the least supported, but "aid to needy in U.S." was also in the bottom five (Pew Research Center for the People & the Press, 2013).

Although domestic and foreign redistribution were both among the least supported, twice as many people wanted to cut foreign aid (48% of respondents) as wanted to cut aid to the domestic poor (24%). What explains this gap? Prior research that compares public support for domestic and foreign aid provides minimal insight into this question. These studies tend to focus on understanding the correlation between support for domestic and foreign aid, while ignoring the fact that there is often a large gap in support between the two. For example,

Lumsdaine (1993) finds a positive correlation between support for domestic and foreign aid and argues that this correlation is driven by an individual’s humanitarianism. Other studies have also noted this positive correlation and suggest that political ideology can explain the relationship (Noël and Thérien, 1995, 2000, 2002, 2008). While this research is innovative in that it investigates support for domestic and foreign redistribution together, its focus on studying the correlation between the two misses the fact that they are often not supported at the same levels.

My study takes a different approach and uses a novel experimental design to precisely identify whether recipient nationality affects individual support for redistribution and the causal mechanisms behind this effect. Across two different survey experiments embedded in nationally representative opinion polls, I find that Americans are significantly less likely to support a foreign aid program than an otherwise similar domestic aid program. On average, the foreign “penalty” is a 15 percentage point drop in support for the program.

To understand why recipient nationality has this effect, I use a new method for causal mediation analysis that can isolate the mechanisms driving this relationship (Imai et al., 2011; Imai and Yamamoto, 2013). The mechanisms fall into three categories: beliefs about institutions, beliefs about recipients, and beliefs about the morality of redistribution. I show that beliefs about institutions and the morality of redistribution, explain most of the effect of nationality on support for redistribution. Specifically, the analysis demonstrates that Americans support domestic aid over foreign aid primarily due to beliefs about the morality of government action: Respondents believe the U.S. government has a greater moral obligation to help the domestic poor than to help the foreign poor. Beliefs about institutions, such as the perceived effectiveness of the aid program and its perceived opportunity costs, also contribute to the negative effect of the treatment. Surprisingly, beliefs about recipients – their need and deservingness – only act as treatment suppressers. In other words, the gap in support between foreign and domestic aid would be *even greater* if not for the fact

that respondents view the foreign poor as more needy and more deserving of assistance than the domestic poor. Taken together, these results suggest that Americans could be more supportive of foreign redistribution than domestic redistribution through channels that bypass government institutions, such as private charity.

The remainder of this paper is organized as follows. I begin by outlining the competing explanations for why the public might support domestic redistribution at higher levels than foreign redistribution. Next, I describe the experimental approach and research design. The following section contains the main results and considers an observable implication of the conclusions drawn from the theory and findings. Finally, I close with steps for future research.

2 Support for Domestic and International Redistribution

Despite differences between domestic and international redistribution, the theories about why people support redistribution are not explicitly context specific.¹ Rather, past research has focused on how individuals think about the recipients of redistribution, the institutions through which redistribution takes place, and the morality of redistribution. These theories could be equally employed as determinants of individual support for either domestic or foreign redistribution. I consider below how they may be useful for explaining the gap in support between the two.

2.1 Beliefs about Recipients

As noted above many different public opinion polls identify a gap in support between foreign and domestic aid. One source of this gap could be that individuals hold different beliefs about the recipients of redistribution across the domestic and international contexts. I draw

¹A similar argument has been made by scholars about the study of interstate and civil war. They note that “theories of conflict focus on phenomena—such as information asymmetries, commitment problems, and issue divisibility—that should explain both conflicts within and between states” (Cunningham and Lemke, 2013).

on three distinct beliefs about recipients that have been shown to be correlated with support for either domestic or foreign redistribution and discuss how variation in how recipients are perceived on each of these concepts could lead to greater (lower) support for domestic (foreign) aid.

Two key characteristics of the recipients of redistribution have been shown to affect individual support for redistributive programs. First, and perhaps most obviously, preferences for redistribution may be driven by the perceived need of recipients (Alesina and Giuliano, 2011). The greater the perceived need of recipients, the more likely individuals should be to support a government program that helps them. Variation in concerns about poverty and inequality have been used to explain support for foreign aid (Noël and Thérien, 2002), cross-country variation in the allocation of foreign aid to recipient countries (Schraeder, Hook and Taylor, 1998), and preferences for other types of foreign policy such as trade (Lü, Scheve and Slaughter, 2012). If individuals view the foreign poor as having less need than the domestic poor, then this might explain some of the gap in support.

Second, prior research shows that individuals deviate from perceived need motivations for supporting redistribution. One of the primary reasons for this deviation is attributed to beliefs about the deservingness of recipients. The deservingness heuristic is grounded in individual evaluations of recipients' responsibility for their economic condition (Gilens, 1999; Alesina and Glaeser, 2004; Alesina and Angeletos, 2005; Bénabou and Tirole, 2006). People make both backward-looking and forward-looking judgments by asking how individuals came to be poor (backward-looking) and whether they will attempt to improve their economic condition in the future (forward-looking) (Petersen et al., 2010). The more individuals believe that the poor are not responsible for their current condition and that they will take responsibility for it in the future, the more they tend to support government assistance programs.

Beliefs about the deservingness of the poor have been shown in a wide variety of contexts

to be a key predictor of support for redistribution (Gilens, 1999; Fong, 2001; Alesina and Giuliano, 2011). Scholars have also demonstrated that variation in these beliefs contribute to the difference between the United States and Europe in the size of the welfare state (Alesina, Glaeser and Sacerdote, 2001; Alesina and Glaeser, 2004; Alesina and La Ferrara, 2005). Americans on average tend to believe the poor are more responsible for their condition, while Europeans tend to think poverty is more the result of bad luck. How beliefs about the deservingness of recipients will vary across the domestic and international contexts is difficult to predict, but if individuals view the domestic poor as more deserving, then this may result in higher support for domestic aid programs.²

Finally, in addition to beliefs about the need and deservingness of recipients, the affinity individuals feel towards others has been shown to influence support for government programs. In particular, prior studies have shown that individuals are more generous and more supportive of government programs that benefit social groups to whom they feel close. Work by Wong (2010) uses survey questions that ask individuals how close they feel to certain groups in order to identify who individuals believe constitute their community. She then shows that there is a positive correlation between these feelings of group closeness and support for government programs that benefit these groups. This research suggests that variation in feelings of closeness or affinity across the domestic and foreign contexts could help to explain the gap in support for foreign aid: feelings of closeness with the domestic poor could drive up support for domestic aid programs.

²On the other hand, Americans may actually view the foreign poor as more deserving than the American poor. Americans may consider that the economies of developing nations have fewer opportunities than the American economy. This may lead Americans to not hold the poor in foreign countries responsible for their economic condition. Indeed, scholars have shown that in some cases Americans believe that there is not much the foreign poor can do to pull themselves out of poverty (Baker and Fitzgerald, 2012).

2.2 Beliefs about Institutions

In addition to beliefs about the recipients of redistribution, beliefs about the institutions through which redistribution takes place could help explain the foreign aid support gap. I focus on two categories in particular. First, beliefs about the effectiveness of redistributive programs may explain some of the gap. While Americans tend to think that both domestic and foreign assistance programs are ineffective at relieving poverty, recent research on attitudes towards foreign aid suggests that perhaps views about foreign aid effectiveness are more negative. Indeed, scholars have noted that the rhetoric surrounding foreign aid in the media is one that constantly points to its ineffectiveness, primarily due to inefficiency created by corruption in recipient countries. A recent cross-national study of attitudes towards foreign aid reveals a strong correlation between beliefs about the effectiveness of foreign aid and aid fatigue (Bauhr, Charron and Nasiritousi, 2013). If individuals in my study are similarly pessimistic about the effectiveness of foreign aid, then this may also contribute to a gap in public support for it.

Second, individuals may be concerned with the opportunity costs of funding redistributive programs. Governments can finance programs in many ways, but in the absence of raising revenue, funding one program can mean cutting another. How might perceptions of opportunity costs vary across the domestic and international contexts? Bechtel, Hainmueller and Margalit (2013) argue that individuals who expect foreign transfers to reduce the money available for domestic priorities will likely oppose foreign redistribution. The perception of reduced domestic spending, or at least forgone domestic spending, was apparent in open-ended pre-test questions on a survey fielded Dec. 2012 to around 1,000 Americans on Amazon Mechanical Turk. This pretest revealed that the most popular explanation for opposing a foreign aid program was belief that the government should be using that money at home. While the opportunity costs in the foreign context seem obvious, the domestic context seems less clear. It is hard to predict how individuals will interpret the opportunity

costs associated with a domestic aid program and the degree to which these perceptions will structure their support for the program. Nevertheless, the high opportunity costs perceived to go along with funding foreign aid, may contribute to the foreign aid support gap.

2.3 Beliefs about Morality

Though beliefs about morality are not often considered to be an important determinant of individual policy preferences, some scholars have argued that they play a role in structuring attitudes towards redistribution. For example, Feldman and Steenbergen (2001) argue that humanitarianism – belief that people have a moral responsibility toward their fellow human beings – is a better predictor of support for domestic social welfare policy than alternative explanations such as egalitarianism. In terms of foreign redistribution, Lumsdaine (1993) argues that support for domestic and foreign redistribution have the same moral determinants and that individuals simply externalize their beliefs about the morality of redistribution in the domestic context to the foreign context. More recently, Van Heerde and Hudson (2010) observe that individual belief that “poverty in developing countries is a moral issue” is one of the strongest predictors of support for foreign aid programs. This prior research provides evidence for the relationship between morality and support for redistribution, but how might beliefs about the morality of redistribution help explain the gap in support between domestic and foreign aid? Instead of thinking about morality broadly conceived, I focus on beliefs about the moral obligation of the government to help the poor. If Americans view the government as having a greater moral obligation to the domestic poor than to the foreign poor, then this could explain some of the gap in support for foreign redistribution.³

³Certainly, cosmopolitan political theorists such as Martha Nussbaum and Peter Singer have also long thought about the morality of redistribution and considered the barriers imposed by national borders (Nussbaum, 2006; Singer, 2002).

3 Experimental Design and Data

Survey experiments have been a popular way to examine the determinants of support for domestic and international redistribution, most notably within the context of studying how the race of recipients influences support for redistributive programs (eg. Gilens (1999) and Baker and Fitzgerald (2012)). My research builds on these previous studies and uses two experiments embedded in nationally representative surveys of Americans to understand the effect of recipient nationality on support for redistribution.⁴ The first experiment I call the Fact Sheet experiment and the second is called the News Article experiment. I discuss both in turn below.

3.1 Fact Sheet Experiment

In the Fact Sheet experiment, survey respondents were given details about a U.S. government redistributive program in the form of a program fact sheet.⁵ In the fact sheet, respondents randomly received information about three different factors — the nationality of recipients (the *Foreign* treatment), their race, and their employment status — for a 2x2x2 factorial design with three independently randomized treatments.⁶ While I focus on the *Foreign* treatment in this paper, I control for the other two treatments in all analyses. The Fact Sheet experiment was embedded in two surveys fielded a week apart to nationally representative samples of 1,000 Americans in February 2013. I pooled responses across both surveys for a total of 2,000 respondents for the first experiment.⁷

⁴All surveys were administered by the polling firm YouGov with the support of the Laboratory for the Study of American Values at Stanford.

⁵The survey vignette can be found in the Appendix.

⁶A binary indicator was created for each treatment. The *Foreign* treatment is coded as 1 if the respondents read about a foreign program and 0 if they read about a domestic program. The binary indicators for the other two treatments are also included in all models, but the results are not reported in this paper.

⁷Although both were omnibus surveys, my experiment was the first set of questions answered by respondents. Therefore, there was no worry that my experiment was contaminated by other survey questions in either survey.

Along with the treatments described above, respondents were provided with additional information in the fact sheet that was held constant across all experimental conditions. The redistributive program was described as a hunger relief program that cost the U.S. government 100 million dollars and helped 75,000 people. The aid was given to the recipients in the form of food packages. All recipients were described as being below the poverty line and respondents read that 60% of recipients were women. The goal behind the constant items was to describe a government assistance program that would be perceived as relatively sympathetic by respondents in either the domestic or foreign context. Indeed, surveys show that Americans tend to be the most sympathetic to foreign humanitarian aid such as hunger relief (Program on International Policy Attitudes, 2001). Thus, the Fact Sheet experiment sets the bar relatively high for finding any effect of recipient nationality on support for redistribution.

After reading the program fact sheet, respondents were asked whether they supported or opposed the program. This question had five response options ranging from “strongly oppose” to “strongly support” with a middle category of “neither support nor oppose”. To aid in the interpretation of my results and for comparability with the News Article experiment, I dichotomized the variable at “somewhat support” in most models. Thus, the values of the dependent variable are 1 for “somewhat support” or “strongly support” and 0 for everything else.⁸ The summary statistics for this variable and the other variables from the Fact Sheet experiment can be found in Table 1.

3.2 News Article Experiment

The second experiment was designed to build on the first experiment.⁹ In the Fact Sheet experiment, the stakes for supporting or opposing the program were relatively low: Respon-

⁸Substantive conclusions do not change with different coding of the dependent variable.

⁹The second experiment was conducted in July of 2013 and fielded to another nationally representative sample of 1,000 Americans.

dents simply read about the program with little political context and offered their opinion on it. To increase the stakes and test the replicability of my results in a different setting, I asked respondents to put themselves in the shoes of lawmakers. To do this, I created a new vignette in the form of a news article.¹⁰ The news article was about a hypothetical government program that U.S. officials might cut. After reading the news article, respondents were then asked whether they thought government officials should cut or should not cut the program. To raise the stakes even further, I doubled the number of people receiving assistance to 150,000¹¹ and also included a photo of the hypothetical aid recipients. Thus, respondents were faced with a difficult decision: whether they should take aid away from the individuals in the photo who represented some of the 150,000 people in poverty receiving assistance from the program.

Within the news article, three factors were again independently randomized for a 2x2x2 factorial design. Respondents were told at random that the recipients were either domestic or foreign (the *Foreign* treatment) and two other treatments not discussed here were also included.¹² The rest of the news article contained similar information to the program fact sheet and this information was also held constant across treatments: Respondents read that the program was a hunger relief program, it cost 100 million dollars, and officials hoped to reach a decision about the program soon.

The dependent variable in the News Article experiment was coded as 1 if respondents said the officials “Should not cut the program” and 0 if they said officials “Should cut the program”. This question was followed by a question that asked how strongly respondents felt that the officials should cut or should not cut the program. From this question, I created a 5-category scale and an 8-category scale. Thus, for both survey experiments, I have a

¹⁰The vignette can be found in the Appendix.

¹¹This also had the added benefit of capturing a more realistic per recipient program expenditure.

¹²The two other treatments were the race of recipients and the delivery method of the aid (in kind or cash transfers). Binary indicators for these treatments are also included in all models.

dichotomous dependent variable measuring aid support as well as a dependent variable with a five categories. Summary statistics for the dependent variable can be found in Table 2 in the Appendix.¹³

3.3 Measuring Causal Mechanisms

In order to understand the causal mechanisms behind the effect of the *Foreign* treatment, I created measures for the beliefs about institutions, beliefs about recipients, and beliefs about the morality of redistribution I proposed to explain the foreign aid support gap. After both survey experiments, respondents answered questions pertaining to each of these proposed mechanisms. The fact sheet or news article continued to appear above each question for respondents to refer to as needed. In the Fact Sheet experiment, these questions measured three beliefs about recipients: perceived need (*Need*), perceived deservingness (*Deserving*), and the likelihood that the recipient will be working in the next year (*WorkNext*); two beliefs about institutions: perceived program effectiveness (*Effective*), and perceived opportunity

¹³To assess the external validity of my dependent variables, I examined how correlated these measures were with other measures of support for redistribution found in my survey. At the end of both surveys, long after the experiment, respondents were also asked to say whether they wanted to increase, decrease, or keep the same spending on foreign aid and domestic welfare, among other programs. In the Fact Sheet experiment, support for the foreign hunger relief program was correlated at .45 with attitudes about spending on foreign aid and in the News Article experiment the correlation was .39. Support for the domestic hunger relief program was also highly correlated with questions about spending on domestic welfare, .40 in the Fact Sheet experiment and .51 in the News Article experiment. These findings provide assurance that my dependent variable correlated with attitudes about domestic and foreign redistribution more generally.

costs (*Tradeoff*); and beliefs about the morality of government action (*Morality*).¹⁴

In the News Article experiment, five of the six questions remained the same and were identically coded. As *WorkNext* proved to be the weakest of the six mechanisms in the Fact Sheet experiment, I dropped it in favor of measuring how close respondents felt to the recipients of the program (*Affinity*).¹⁵ Summary statistics for all the mechanisms can also be found in Tables 1 and 2 in the Appendix. Overall, across experiments, the unweighted means and standard deviations of the dependent variable and mediators look quite similar indicating attitudes that are quite stable across different samples of Americans.

4 Results and Discussion

4.1 Main Effects

To establish whether or not there is a foreign aid support gap, I first needed to estimate the effect of the *Foreign* treatment on support for the aid program. Table 3 contains the coefficients from the probit regression models used to estimate the effect and Figure 1 graphically represents the change in predicted probability of supporting the aid program by the *Foreign*

¹⁴The questions are as follows: *Need*: How many complete meals per day do you think program recipients had before receiving assistance from the U.S. government? less than 1 per day - 3 per day (4-category); *Deserving*: Why do you think most people who receive assistance from this U.S. government program are poor? Use the scale below where 1 is “Because they don’t work hard enough” and 7 is “Because of circumstances beyond their control”. (7-point scale); *WorkNext*: How likely do you think it is that recipients of this U.S. government program will be employed in the next year? Very likely - Not at all likely (4-category); *Morality*: Do you agree or disagree that the U.S. government has a moral obligation to assist the recipients of this program? Strongly agree-Strongly disagree (4-category); *Effective*: How likely do you think it is that this U.S. government program will reduce hunger? Very likely - Not at all likely (4-category); *Tradeoff*: How likely do you think it is that this program will reduce the money available for other U.S. government priorities? Very likely - Not at all likely (4-category). In the analyses that follow, these variables are all dichotomized such that the bottom two categories are 0 and the top two are 1. The measure of deservingness (*Deserving*) has 7 response options and is dichotomized at its mean. Again, this is done for ease of interpretation and the substantive findings do not change if the variables are allowed to vary across their full range.

¹⁵Respondents were asked the following question: How close do you feel, in terms of your ideas and interests, to the recipients of this program? Very close - Not at all close (4-category). This variable was also dichotomized such that the bottom two response categories are coded 0 and the top two are coded 1.

treatment. Ordered probit regressions are provided for comparison and demonstrate that the effect of *Foreign* is robust to different coding of the dependent variable.¹⁶ Table 3 also contains the coefficients from these models as well as the change in predicted probabilities of aid support generated by the treatment in all models.

The results clearly show that the program targeting people in other countries is supported at a far lower rate than the program for Americans. In the Fact Sheet experiment, 48.2% of respondents said they would support the domestic program, while only 38% offered their support for the international program. The reduction of support is a statistically significant 10.2 percentage points with a 95% confidence interval of -14.5 to -6 percentage points. In the News Article experiment, the results were even stronger. 64.6% of respondents supported the domestic aid program while 44.4% supported the foreign program. This gap is double the size of the gap in the first experiment at -20.2 percentage points with a -25.8 to -.14.4 confidence interval. While the percentage of respondents supporting the foreign program is relatively similar across studies, the percentage supporting the domestic program is much higher in the News Article experiment.

One plausible explanation for this difference is in the framing of the policy decision respondents were asked to make in the News Article experiment. Respondents were asked to consider a *current* program that U.S. officials were potentially going to cut. They were then asked whether they thought these officials should cut the program. In the Fact Sheet experiment on the other hand, they were simply asked whether they supported or opposed the program they read about on the fact sheet. Prior research has demonstrated that individuals have a bias towards the status quo and thus, might prefer to keep a current program,

¹⁶With any experimental research design, it is good practice to test for balance across experimental groups on key pre-treatment variables. For the Fact Sheet experiment, no significant imbalances were uncovered. The randomization in the News Article experiment, however, did fail to achieve balance on the 5-point ideology scale and religiosity. The group that received the foreign treatment was more conservative and more religious than the domestic treatment group and this difference was statistically significant as tested by OLS regressions of the ideology and religiosity variable on the foreign treatment. Thus, the ideology and religiosity of respondents is controlled for in all of the News Article models.

especially if they are put in the position of deciding whether or not to cut it (Hansen, 1998). Interestingly, if it is indeed status quo bias that explains why the *Foreign* treatment has such a large effect in the News Article experiment, then this bias seems to mostly influence support for the domestic program and not support for the foreign program.

4.2 Causal Mechanisms

The above analysis allowed me to uncover the gap in support between domestic and foreign aid, but it did not allow me to say why this gap exists. To examine why the *Foreign* treatment affected support for redistribution, I used causal mediation analysis in order to identify the indirect effects or average causal mediated effects (ACME) of *Foreign* that work through each of the proposed mediators. I followed recent work by Imai et al. (2011) and Tomz and Weeks (2013) who argue for the usefulness of this methodology for examining the mechanisms behind treatment effects. Specifically, I used the algorithm detailed in Imai, Keele and Tingley (2010) for estimating the ACME for each mediator.¹⁷ The algorithm is outlined below.

1. Model Aid Support and Mediators letting Y_i be Aid Support, T_i be *Foreign*, M_i be the mediator of interest, W_i be a vector containing the other mediators, and X_i be a vector of pre-treatment respondent characteristics.
 - Mediator model: $p(M_i | T_i, X_i)$
 - Aid Support model: $p(Y_i | T_i, M_i, W_i, X_i)$
 - Use any model form to estimate. In this paper, all models are probit regressions.
2. Predict mediator for both treatment values ($M_i(1), M_i(0)$)
3. Predict Aid Support by first setting $T_i = 1$ (foreign) and $M_i = M_i(0)$, and then $T_i = 0$ (domestic) and $M_i = M_i(1)$
4. Compute the average difference between the two outcomes to obtain the estimate of the ACME.

¹⁷While this method is proposed for the study of a single mediator, Imai and Yamamoto (2013) show that this algorithm can be used to identify the indirect effects of multiple, causally independent mediators as well.

5. Use Monte-Carlo simulations to estimate uncertainty.

Based on the algorithm, in order to estimate each ACME, one must first model the effect of *Foreign* on each mediator and model the outcome (Aid Support) as a function of the mediators and *Foreign*. To do the former, I used probit regressions and estimated the change in predicted probability of each mediating variable induced by the *Foreign* treatment.¹⁸ The results provide insight into how beliefs about recipients, institutions, and the morality of redistribution vary across the domestic and international contexts. Respondents perceived foreign recipients to be more needy than domestic recipients and also more deserving. However, respondents also thought the U.S. government was less morally obligated to help foreign recipients and that the opportunity costs of funding the foreign aid program were higher. The change in predicted probability for each of these mediators (*Need*, *Deserving*, *Morality*, and *Tradeoff*) was around 10 percentage points or greater in both studies. Respondents also felt less close (*Affinity*) to the foreign recipients and thought the foreign program would be less effective (*Effective*). While the treatment effect on *Effective* was in the expected direction, the magnitude was somewhat surprising. Across studies, the effect of *Foreign* on perceptions of program effectiveness was negative but only generated between a 5 and 8 percentage point gap — indicating that both domestic and foreign aid programs have somewhat similar reputations for effectiveness.

The next step to estimating the ACME for each mediator was to estimate the effect of the mediators on support for the aid program. These results are located in Table 6. Four of the mediators achieved standard levels of statistical significance in the Fact Sheet experiment,

¹⁸The probit models for each of the mediators can be found in Tables 4 and 5 and the substantive effects of the treatment are contained in Figures 2 and 3. Across experiments, *Foreign* had a similar effect on nearly all of the mediators in the study. The direction of the *Foreign* effect was identical for all mediators, while the size of the effect varied somewhat. Specifically, the *Foreign* treatment had a consistent, large effect on *Need*, *Tradeoff*, and *Morality* in both studies, while the size of the effect on *Deserving* varied a bit more. The treatment had the smallest effect on *Effective*, but it was nevertheless statistically significant in both studies. *WorkNext* was ruled out as a mediator in the Fact Sheet study as the *Foreign* treatment had no significant effect on it. The treatment did have a significant effect on the replacement mediator, *Affinity*, and the substantive effect was quite large.

while all but *Affinity* achieved significance in the News Article experiment. Across both experiments, all of the measures of beliefs about institutions and beliefs about morality achieved statistical significance. *Morality* and *Effective* were highly, positively correlated with aid support, while *Tradeoff* was negatively correlated with support. These results demonstrate that the more a respondent feels that the government is morally obligated to help the recipients and the more effective they believe the program will be the more likely they are to support it. Conversely, the higher the opportunity costs they perceive, the less likely they are to support the program.

The only belief about recipients to consistently achieve significance was the perceived deservingness (*Deserving*) of the recipients. The more deserving the recipients were perceived to be, the more likely respondents were to support the program. In the News Article experiment the perceived need (*Need*) of the recipients was also highly correlated with aid support. The more needy the respondents viewed the recipients as being, the more likely they were to support the aid program. Neither *WorkNext* nor *Affinity*, were significant predictors of aid support, further throwing into question their likelihood as causal mechanisms behind the effect of recipient nationality on support for redistribution.

The largest substantive effects were also among the mediators relating to beliefs about institutions and the morality of redistribution. Those respondents who agreed that the U.S. government was morally obligated to provide assistance to the recipients of this program were around 45 percentage points more likely to support the aid program than those that disagreed. The effect of effectiveness was not as large but still quite substantial. Those respondents who thought the program was likely to reduce hunger were around 30 percentage points more likely to support the aid program than those who thought the program was not likely to reduce hunger. Finally, respondents who perceived higher opportunity costs were around 15 percentage points less likely to support the program. Again, of the beliefs about recipients, only deservingness achieved statistical significance across studies. Believing that

recipients were poor because of circumstances beyond their control increased support for aid by around 10 percentage points in both studies.

Including the mediators in the models of aid support also had an interesting effect on the direct effect of the *Foreign* treatment on support for redistribution. In the first study, the effect of *Foreign* is no longer significant at traditional levels, indicating that the mechanisms are explaining most of the effect of the treatment. In the News Article experiment, however, the effect remains highly significant, indicating that the effect of the *Foreign* treatment is not fully explained by the proposed mediators. The substantive effect is cut in half, however, with the percentage of respondents supporting the domestic aid program at 58.9% and the percentage supporting the foreign program at 50%. Again, the robustness of the direct effect of the *Foreign* treatment could be related to the status quo bias that potentially produced the large initial gap in support.

Finally, putting the two steps together allows me to estimate the indirect effect of *Foreign* that goes through each of the mediators. These indirect effects can be found in Table 7. Across both experiments, beliefs about the morality of government action explain the largest part of the treatment's effect on aid support. In the Fact Sheet experiment, the ratio of the indirect effect of *Morality* to the total effect of the treatment is .70 and in the News Article experiment the ratio of the indirect effect to the total effect is .38. These indirect effects were each large and statistically significant. The mediators representing beliefs about institutions, *Effective* and *Tradeoff*, were also statistically significant across both experiments though substantively less important than *Morality*. Finally, beliefs about recipients explained little of the effect of the *Foreign* treatment on support for aid. To the extent that they contributed any indirect effect, it was inconsistent with the direction of the direct effect of the treatment. This means that in the case of the Fact Sheet experiment, *Deserving* acts a treatment suppressor: That is to say that the *Foreign* treatment effect would be even more strongly negative if not for the fact that respondents view the foreign poor as

more deserving than the domestic poor. Similarly in the News Article experiment, *Need* is an inconsistent mediator: The gap in support between domestic and foreign redistribution would be even larger if not for the fact that respondents view the foreign poor as more needy than the domestic poor.

4.3 Implication of the Causal Mediation Analysis

The above causal mediation analysis demonstrated that beliefs about institutions and the morality of government action were the most important causal channels through which recipient nationality affected aid support. Another test of these causal pathways beyond the mediation analysis would be to test an observable implication of the results. One plausible observable implication of my results is that a private charity option could eliminate the causal channels of *Morality*, *Effective*, and *Tradeoff*. Examining the effect of recipient nationality on private charitable contributions is also substantively interesting as it is well known that private levels of charitable giving among Americans, both domestically and internationally, are quite high even if public forms of redistribution are considered to be somewhat less generous compared to other developed nations (eg. Alesina and Glaeser (2004) and Lumsdaine (1993)).

To test whether the *Foreign* treatment has a similar effect on private giving, I asked an additional follow-up question in the survey containing the News Article experiment. After reading the news article about the government hunger relief program, I told respondents the following:

“U.S. officials are also considering letting Americans donate up to \$100 to help fund this government hunger relief program. Of course, there are private charity organizations that also have hunger relief programs. If you had the choice between donating to this U.S. government program, an identical program run by a private charity organization, or keeping some for yourself, how would you divide your \$100? Please indicate the dollar amount using

the sliders. Answers must total \$100.”

I created three different variables from the responses to the above question: the proportion donated to the government, the proportion donated to the charity, and the proportion kept. On average, respondents donated 18% of their hundred dollars to the government program, 43% to the charity program and kept 39% for themselves. However, an interesting feature of the data is the number of individuals who chose to give nothing to the government program. Of the 997 respondents who answered the question, two-thirds chose to give nothing to the government program.¹⁹

With this high number of 0s in the data, modeling the effect of the *Foreign* treatment proved difficult. For proportions data like this, the literature suggests using seemingly unrelated regression analysis (Tomz, Tucker and Wittenberg, 2002). However, the method requires applying a logistic transformation to the data and is thus inappropriate for my data in which the responses are heavily skewed to zero (Papke and Wooldridge, 1996). Alternative methods for proportional data that include 0s and 1s are the fractional logit and the zero-one-inflated-beta. Both require different theoretical assumptions about the data generating process. The fractional logit assumes that each data point on the unit interval was generated using the same process (Papke and Wooldridge, 1996). The zero-one-inflated-beta model, on the other hand, assumes that the process generating the zeros and/or ones was different from the process generating the values in between (Cook, Kieschnick and McCullough, 2008). In terms applicable to my data, the question is whether the decision to give anything at all is different from the decision of how much to give.

While I do not have any a priori assumptions about the data generating process, it does seem likely given the large number of 0s in the government donation data, that the decision of whether to give anything at all was important. Therefore, I model the effect of *Foreign* on the donations data using the zero-one-inflated-beta model. Based on the results presented

¹⁹Summary statistics for these variables are available in Table 8.

here and the theory described above, I expect the *Foreign* treatment to affect a respondent's decision to donate to the government program and possibly also to affect how much to give to the government program. In the first case, I expect individuals in the foreign condition to be less likely to donate to the government program than those in the domestic condition. I also expect those in the foreign treatment group to be less generous should they decide to donate than those in the domestic treatment group. Conversely, the *Foreign* treatment should have no effect on either the decision to give to the private charity program or on how much to give if the mechanisms above are indeed those driving the effect of recipient nationality on support for redistribution.

Table 9 contains the results from the zero-one-inflated-beta models of the donations to the government and to the charity program.²⁰ I modeled both the decision to give and the decision of how much to give as a function of the nationality treatment and controlled for the other treatments.²¹ Both the coefficients and marginal effects of the nationality treatment are provided in the table. As can be seen in the table, *Foreign* has a significant effect on whether respondents give anything to the government program, but has no effect on the amount given. The effect of *Foreign* is to reduce the probability of donating to the foreign program by 8 percentage points compared to the domestic program. By contrast, and in support of the theory presented here, recipient nationality has no significant effect on either the decision to give or how much to give to the private charity organization.

These results support the idea that the foreign aid support gap is primarily due to perceptions of the moral obligation of the government, the opportunity costs of funding foreign programs, and the perceived effectiveness of the programs. The fact that there is no effect of the *Foreign* treatment on support for the private charity organization suggests

²⁰The model was executed in STATA using the user-generated module ZOIB (Buis, 2010).

²¹The zero-one-inflated-beta model also models the probability of having the value 1. I do not have a theoretical expectation for modeling the 1s in the data, and therefore only a constant term is estimated for this part of the equation.

that when these mechanisms are neutralized, recipient nationality is as well. Finally, one might have expected *Foreign* to have a positive effect on donations to the private charity organization. Recall that the beliefs about recipients that mattered most were their perceived need and deservingness; characteristics that could have resulted in an increase of donations to the private charity program under the foreign condition. However, the fact that no significant relationship was found suggests that beliefs about recipients may indeed have only a minor role in explaining the gap in support for foreign redistribution.

5 Conclusion

This study advances both the academic literature on support for redistribution and has practical implications for policy makers. First, it demonstrates that individuals are more supportive of domestic aid than foreign aid and that this difference cannot result from misperceptions of the cost, type, or form that foreign aid takes. Much of the literature on foreign aid preferences contains caveats to any discovery noting that individuals are misinformed about foreign aid. In the experimental setting discussed here, however, where information about the program was carefully controlled, individuals still prefer domestic aid to foreign aid.

Second, I presented robust evidence that shows that the reason behind this difference in support is primarily due to beliefs about institutions and the morality of government action. Across both experiments, I found that the *Foreign* treatment primarily affected aid support by changing the way individuals viewed the morality of government action, the opportunity costs of the program, and the perceived effectiveness of it. Beliefs about recipients, on the other hand, appeared to explain little of the effect of the treatment on the outcome. To the extent that they did, they acted as treatment suppressors. These results imply that the gap in support for foreign aid could be even larger if individuals did not view the foreign

poor as more needy and more deserving of aid. Finally, I confirmed the importance of these mechanisms by testing an observable implication of the results.

In addition to these contributions to the redistribution literature, this study has policy implications, especially as it relates to elite rhetoric about foreign aid. Van der Veen (2011) argues that the different frames used by elites to discuss foreign aid can explain some of the cross-national variation in foreign aid policies. He also notes that public opinion can be used to identify which frames appear to be active in the minds of the general public. This study would suggest that the frames of morality, effectiveness, and opportunity costs are the most influential in determining public support for redistribution. My research shows that elites that wish to promote foreign aid to the public must do so by increasing the public's belief in the morality and effectiveness of foreign aid and assuage any budgetary concerns.

6 Appendix

6.1 Tables

Table 1: Summary Statistics, Fact Sheet

Variable	Mean	Std. Dev.	Min.	Max.	N
Aid	3.087	1.376	1	5	2000
Need	3.051	0.944	1	4	1999
Deserving	4.856	1.703	1	7	2000
WorkNext	2.139	0.872	1	4	1999
Effective	2.415	0.953	1	4	1999
Tradeoff	2.814	1.007	1	4	2000
Morality	2.482	1.04	1	4	1999

Table 2: Summary Statistics, News Article

Variable	Mean	Std. Dev.	Min.	Max.	N
Aid	3.174	1.565	1	5	985
Need	2.94	0.962	1	4	1000
Deserving	4.838	1.693	1	7	1000
Affinity	2.412	0.919	1	4	999
Effective	2.429	0.953	1	4	999
Tradeoff	2.675	1.027	1	4	1000
Morality	2.664	1.114	1	4	998

Table 3: Effect of *Foreign* on Support for Redistribution

	Coefficients	Change in Probabilities				
		1	2	3	4	5
Binary DV (<i>Fact Sheet</i>)	-0.26*** (0.06)	-0.10				
Ordered DV (<i>Fact Sheet</i>)	-0.36*** (0.05)	0.10	0.04	0.01	-0.04	-0.10
Binary DV (<i>News Article</i>)	-0.63*** (0.09)	-0.20				
Ordered DV (<i>News Article</i>)	-.58*** (0.07)	0.14	0.04	0.01	-0.02	-0.17

*** $p < 0.01$, ** $p < 0.05$, * $p < 0.1$

Note: The table reports the probit and ordered probit coefficient estimates of the *Foreign* treatment (domestic=0, foreign=1) for the binary and ordered dependent variables respectively. Higher values of the DVs are equal to greater support for the aid program. Change in predicted probabilities calculated by shifting from the domestic treatment to the foreign treatment. All models include control variables for the other two treatments. Models of the News Article dependent variables also include controls for ideology and religiosity to correct for treatment imbalance. Heteroskedastic - consistent robust standard errors are in parentheses. Constant terms and cut points were estimated in each model but not reported in the table. All results are unweighted.

Table 4: Effect of *Foreign* on Mediators, Fact Sheet

	Need	Deserving	WorkNext	Morality	Effective	Tradeoff
Foreign	0.56*** (0.063)	0.42*** (0.057)	-0.06 (0.059)	-0.46*** (0.057)	-0.19*** (0.056)	0.37*** (0.058)
Observations	1,999	2,000	1,999	1,999	1,999	2,000
Pseudo R2	0.04	0.02	0.03	0.02	0.00	0.02

*** $p < 0.01$, ** $p < 0.05$, * $p < 0.1$

Note: The table reports the probit coefficient estimates for each variable and their heteroskedastic - consistent robust standard errors in parentheses. A constant term and controls for the other two treatments are included in each model but not reported in the table. All results are unweighted.

Table 5: Effect of *Foreign* on Mediators, News Article

	Need	Deserving	Affinity	Morality	Effective	Tradeoff
Foreign	0.36*** (0.093)	0.23** (0.090)	-0.34*** (0.087)	-0.55*** (0.092)	-0.18** (0.088)	0.47*** (0.087)
Observations	915	915	914	913	914	915
Pseudo R2	0.07	0.13	0.08	0.20	0.13	0.09

*** $p < 0.01$, ** $p < 0.05$, * $p < 0.1$

Note: The table reports the probit coefficient estimates for each variable and their heteroskedastic - consistent robust standard errors in parentheses. A constant term and controls for the other two treatments are included in each model but not reported in the table. These models also include controls for ideology and religiosity to correct for treatment imbalance. All results are unweighted.

Table 6:
Effect of Mediators on Support for Redistribution

	<i>Fact Sheet</i>	<i>News Article</i>
Foreign	-0.09 (0.078)	-0.47*** (0.122)
Need	0.09 (0.090)	0.51*** (0.140)
Deserving	0.34*** (0.080)	0.23* (0.133)
WorkNext	0.11 (0.084)	
Affinity		0.15 (0.126)
Morality	1.13*** (0.084)	1.49*** (0.139)
Effective	0.88*** (0.080)	0.61*** (0.130)
Tradeoff	-0.27*** (0.079)	-0.84*** (0.125)
Observations	1,815	906
Pseudo R2	0.37	0.54

*** $p < 0.01$, ** $p < 0.05$, * $p < 0.1$

Note: The table reports the probit coefficient estimates for each variable and their heteroskedastic - consistent robust standard errors in parentheses. A constant term and indicators for each treatment are included in each model but not reported in the table. Both models also include control variables for education, gender, ideology, age, religiosity, employment status, party id, and race. All results are unweighted.

Table 7: Indirect Effects of *Foreign* treatment

	Fact Sheet ACME	ACME/Total	News Article ACME	ACME/Total
Need	0.3 (-0.3, 1.0)	-.03	0.7* (0.1, 1.6)	-.04
Deserving	1.3* (0.6, 2.2)	-.13	0.2 (-0.1, 0.7)	-.01
WorkNext	-0.1 (-0.4, 0.4)	.01		
Affinity			-0.5 (-1.3, 0.3)	.03
Morality	-7.0* (-9.0, -5.0)	.70	-7.6* (-10.7, -5.0)	.38
Effective	-2.3* (-3.7, -1.0)	.23	-1.3* (-2.5, -0.4)	.07
Tradeoff	-0.8* (-1.5, -0.3)	.08	-2.6* (-4.1, -1.3)	.10
Total Indirect	-8.6		-11.1	

* $p < 0.05$

Note: The table reports the indirect effects as the percentage point change in the outcome produced by the treatment that goes through each mediator. The 95% confidence interval for each indirect effect is reported in parentheses. The ratio of each indirect effect to the total effect of the treatment is also reported. These effects were estimated using the “medeff” package in STATA created by Raymond Hicks and Dustin Tingley (2011). Parameter uncertainty was estimated using quasi-Bayesian approximation and the number of simulations was set at 2,000.

Table 8: Proportions Donated Summary Statistics

Variable	Mean	Std. Dev.	Min.	Max.	N
Government	0.181	0.288	0	1	997
Charity	0.431	0.393	0	1	997
Kept	0.388	0.427	0	1	997

Table 9: Effect of *Foreign* on Program Donations

	Coefficients	Marginal Effect of Nationality
Gov Give	-0.40*** (0.16)	-8
Gov Amount	0.05 (0.10)	-2
Charity Give	0.19 (0.16)	5
Charity Amount	-0.02 (0.09)	-1

*** $p < 0.01$, ** $p < 0.05$, * $p < 0.1$

Note: The table reports the coefficient estimates and marginal effects of the *Foreign* treatment (domestic=0, foreign=1) from a zero-one-inflated-beta model. Marginal effects for Gov Give and Charity Give represent the percentage point change in likelihood of giving to the programs. Marginal effects for the amount represent the percentage point change in the proportion given. Marginal effects calculated by shifting from the domestic treatment to the foreign treatment. All models include controls for the other two treatments and a control for ideology and religiosity to correct for treatment imbalance. Heteroskedastic - consistent robust standard errors are in parentheses. All results are unweighted.

6.2 Figures

Figure 1: Main Effects of *Foreign* Treatment on Aid Support

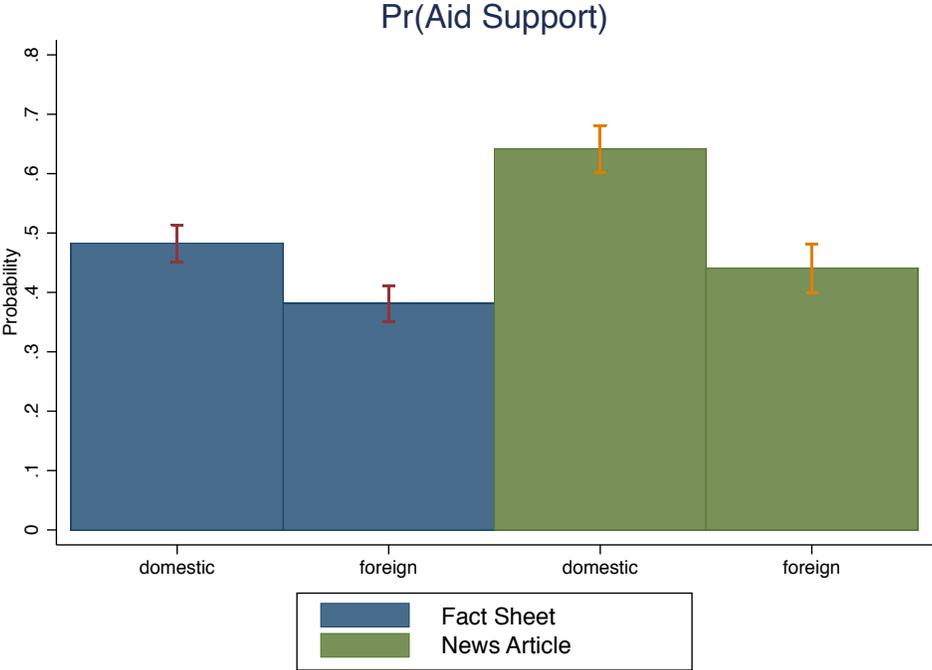


Figure 2: Effects of *Foreign* Treatment on Mediators, Fact Sheet

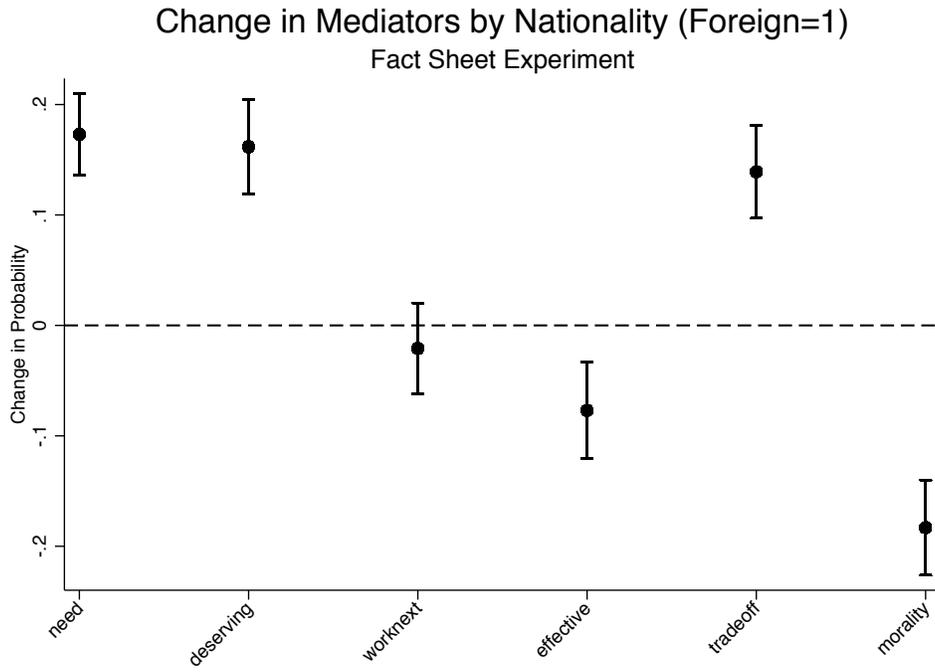
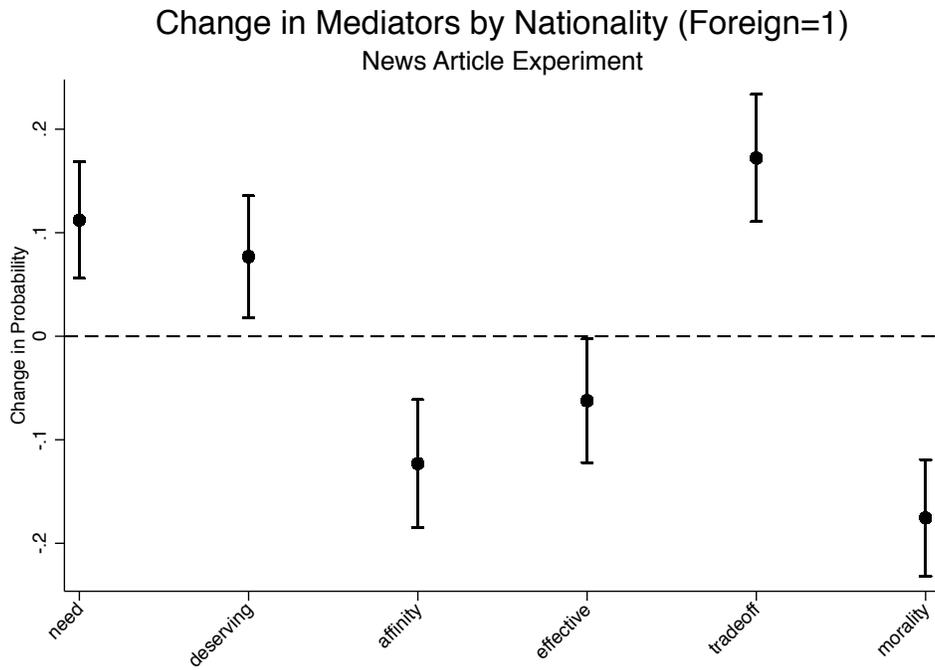


Figure 3: Effects of *Foreign* Treatment on Mediators, News Article



6.3 Experimental Vignettes

Vignette: Fact Sheet

U.S. GOVERNMENT PROGRAM TO REDUCE HUNGER IN [OTHER COUNTRIES/THE UNITED STATES]

Program Fact Sheet

Program Description

- The U.S. government provides food packages to supplement the diet of program recipients.
- The cost of the program is \$100 million and it helps around 75,000 people in [other countries/the United States] meet their dietary needs.

Recipient Background

- All recipients are below the poverty line.
- 60% of recipients are women.
- Most recipients [do not work/are working].
- [80% of recipients are black, 9% are white, 11% are of another racial background/
80% of recipients are white, 9% are black, 11% are of another racial background].

Vignette: News Article

U.S. Officials May Cut Government Hunger Relief Program Program Gives [Cash / Food] To [Poor Americans / The Poor Overseas]

WASHINGTON, D.C. –U.S. government officials are considering cutting a government hunger relief program. It helps 150,000 people living below the poverty line in [the United States / other countries]. Through the program, the U.S. government distributes [cash / food packages] to program recipients. It costs the U.S. government \$100 million each year. Officials hope to reach a decision about the program soon.



People at program distribution center. Photo: AGP news

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