



Principles, Interests and Beliefs: Public Opinion on International Aid

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Abstract

Why do some individuals show more support for international aid than others? And are people in donor countries less supportive of the idea of aid than those in recipient countries? These are the primary questions motivating this thesis, and the results can be summarized by four main findings. One is that the level of economic development, which determines a country's status as a potential aid donor, has a strong influence on support for aid, as citizens of more developed countries are considerably less in favor of increasing aid than others are. The second finding is that, among donor countries, the level of development is positively related to several forms of opposition to the donation of aid. This appears partly due to the fact that more developed countries have donated more aid, for a longer period. Respondents in countries that donate more are more likely to find current levels of international aid sufficient, and this may explain part of the between-country differences. In other words, people in donor countries may find the extent of international aid satisfactory at lower levels than those in other countries. Most notably, however, people in more developed countries are more likely to state disinterest as a reason for not supporting aid, and this reason is the only reason that has a clear impact on aggregate levels of support. There is also some evidence that greater donations increase skepticism regarding the impact of aid, but it is not clear that this affects aggregate support. Furthermore, the third finding is that individual beliefs regarding the impact of aid are endogenous to support for aid. While such beliefs appear to influence the support for aid at the individual level, there is also a significant effect of support on the beliefs themselves. The fourth finding is that the negative relationship between economic development and support holds for all but the very least developed countries of the world. It appears that respondents in the latter countries are living under such conditions they lack the critical opinions typically found in more developed countries, making it hard to compare them to those from more developed countries.



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Bio

Jørgen Bølstad (b. 1983) holds an MSc in International Political Economy from the London School of Economics and Political Science (2006-2007) and an MRes in Political Science from the EUI (2007-2008). During his PhD research, he attended the ICPSR Summer Program in Quantitative Research Methods at the University of Michigan and was a Fulbright Scholar at the Department of Government, Harvard University (2010-2011). His research interests lie in comparative politics and international political economy.