Politicizing Foreign Aid: A Review of Political Partisanship's Impact on Foreign Aid Flows

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Abstract This study examines the domestic factors influencing U.S. foreign aid disbursements, the largest global donor. We challenge existing theories that emphasize domestic political influences, such as partisanship and economic conditions, by replicating and extending the study by Tingley (2010). Unlike previous research focusing on aid effectiveness or recipient selection, we analyze how the U.S. domestic political and economic environment impacts foreign aid. Using a time-series dataset (1990-2018), we find no significant support for the hypothesis that domestic political factors, such as partisanship and legislative polarization, influence aid disbursements. These findings suggest that trade dynamics and international relations play a more significant role in U.S. foreign aid disbursements than previously thought. Future research should explore aid commitments and the impact of major geopolitical events to better understand the complexities of foreign aid distribution.

Introduction

Foreign aid serves as a crucial income source for developing countries. In 2023 alone, approximately $245 billion[1] was disbursed to these nations to address various needs, including promoting economic development, mitigating humanitarian crises, and supporting governance and institution-building (Carnegie & Marinov, 2017; Headey, 2007; Jones & Tarp, 2016; Karras, 2005). However, while the overall aid to nations has seen a steady increase since 1960, aid disbursements from donors fluctuate frequently. While scholars have long aimed to ascertain this variation in aid disbursements, many have taken a cross-country approach or focused on analyzing aid disbursements before and after the Cold War. While these studies have been invaluable in providing further insight into the factors influencing aid disbursement patterns, with many suggesting that partisanship and ideology play significant roles in foreign aid disbursements, they may not fully capture contemporary foreign aid dynamics. Therefore, our objective is to analyze the factors driving foreign aid disbursements, particularly from the United States (US), the largest donor of foreign aid, accounting

. For the online appendix and other supplementary information for this article, please use this link: https://tinyurl.com/2bj4d7ju

1. For a visual on foreign aid disbursements since 1960, see Figure A1.

for approximately 21 percent of foreign aid disbursements in 2023.[2] This paper presents new evidence suggesting that US foreign aid disbursements are unlikely to be affected by domestic factors.

The existing literature on aid effectiveness and allocation can be best split into two separate, but perhaps not mutually exclusive, areas. To begin, there exists scholarship that examines how the dynamics between donor and recipient countries impact foreign aid allocation (e.g., Alesina & Dollar, 2000; Clemens, Radelet, & Bhavnani, 2004; Dreher et al., 2018; McKinlay & Little, 1977). Specifically, scholars have analyzed how political alignment (e.g., Alesina & Dollar, 2000; Raess, Ren, & Wagner, 2022), former colonial ties (e.g., Alesina & Dollar, 2000), the effectiveness of the aid (Boone, 1996; Dreher et al., 2019), and a donor's foreign policy interests all shape aid disbursement (e.g., Bermeo, 2017; Dreher et al., 2018; McKinlay & Little, 1977). The other substantial body of scholarship has suggested that domestic political factors play a significant role in foreign aid disbursements (e.g., Carcelli, 2021; Fleck & Kilby, 2001; Rieselbach, 1966; Thérien & Noël, 2000; Tingley, 2010). Specifically, scholars have identified that partisanship/ideology (e.g., Tingley, 2010; Milner & Tingley, 2010), legislative polarization/dysfunction (e.g., Carcelli, 2021; Friedrichs & Tama, 2022), government approval (e.g., Chen & Han, 2021), and re-election prospects (e.g., Milner & Tingley, 2010; Fenno, 1977) all significantly shape foreign aid disbursement. This specific area of the literature holds particular importance for the US, notably due to the escalating polarization and partisanship observed among political elites in the US Congress (Lewis et al., 2024). That said, while this scholarship identifies that partisanship and ideology strongly impact foreign aid disbursements, Tama (2023) finds that bipartisanship was frequently evident in foreign aid policy in the US Congress during the Trump Administration.

Given that the scholarship is still not unified in explaining the most impactful variables that influence foreign aid, this essay aims to re-explore the domestic politics hypothesis by replicating and extending Tingley's (2010) article. Tingley's analysis of data from 18 nations spanning from 1971 to 2002 demonstrates that partisanship (i.e., a party's liberal-conservative stance) significantly shapes foreign aid efforts. Specifically, Tingley's baseline findings suggest that governments tend to reduce foreign aid efforts as they become more conservative, with this effect being pronounced in aid to poorer developing countries. Tingley argues this is because conservative governments view aid as unnecessary government interference that increases bureaucracy, taxes, and dependence on the donor nation, and believe that private investments could more efficiently address the needs of recipient countries. While Tingley (2010) makes significant contributions to the scholarship regarding cross-sectional analysis of factors influencing aid disbursements, there are some aspects of his study that can be further expanded, which we aim to address.

2. For a visual on US foreign aid disbursements as a percentage of total disbursements since 1960, see Figure A2.

First, while cross-sectional analysis enhances generalizability, there is a need to further analyze domestic dynamics within specific countries, rather than solely relying on cross-sectional data. Therefore, we ground our analysis in the US. By limiting the scope of the analysis to the US, this study can better ascertain the impact of domestic political variables on the large distribution of foreign aid. Second, there is a need for more comprehensive analyses that incorporate a broader range of political variables, including those related to domestic political structures. By focusing on the US, we can utilize available ideological data for political elites (both in Congress and the President). Additionally, given the significant variation in the process of foreign aid distribution, focusing on a single country can provide clearer insights into the true variables that impact foreign aid distribution. Lastly, given the varying explanations of what impacts foreign aid, there is a need to synthesize much of the existing literature's theoretical mechanisms to ascertain the significance of the identified domestic variables that influence foreign aid disbursements.

This essay proceeds as follows. First, we introduce our theoretical framework, which extends Tingley's (2010) original theory by incorporating additional theoretical and causal mechanisms from existing literature. Next, we discuss our replication of Tingley's (2010) study, using his data and methods. This is followed by an explanation of our extensions to Tingley's (2010) data and a description of our empirical methodology. We then present our findings. Finally, we conclude with a discussion of the policy implications of this research and offer concluding remarks.

Theory

To address the aforementioned puzzle and gaps in the existing literature, this scholarship expands on a foundation of research exploring the influence of domestic political factors on foreign aid disbursements. Focusing on the central themes of economic factors and political ideology, we aim to synthesize this literature to identify the most significant mechanisms shaping contemporary foreign aid flows in the US. To achieve this, we extend Tingley's (2010) theoretical explanations to encompass those found within contemporary literature. In line with the scholarship analyzing how domestic political factors impact foreign aid, we make two arguments. First, we argue that economic factors, specifically economic growth and trade, significantly impact foreign aid disbursements (H1a and H1b). Second, we argue that ideological factors, including conservatism and polarization, also play a crucial role in shaping foreign aid policies (H2a and H2b). For clarity, we divide this section into three parts. First, we discuss Tingley's theoretical framework as it pertains to foreign aid efforts. Second, we will discuss the ideological hypotheses, focusing on the impact of conservatism and political polarization on foreign aid decisions. Third, we will discuss the economic hypotheses, examining how economic growth and trade influence foreign aid disbursements.

Tingley (2010) Theory. Tingley's (2010) article relies on one hypothesis: increases in government conservatism lead to decreases in foreign aid efforts. The

argument here is that conservative (Republican) governments are less likely to give foreign aid for three main reasons. First, foreign aid represents government interference in both donor and recipient economies. Conservatism in many countries, particularly in the US, advocates for a limited and relatively small government. Core Republican values in the US generally oppose government intervention, favor lower taxes, and advocate for reduced government spending (e.g., Cronin & Fordham, 1999; Milner & Tingley, 2010). Foreign aid violates these values as it involves the redistribution of resources by the government to non-citizens, usually requiring increased taxes and government spending. Second, in a similar vein, conservatives are less likely to believe that foreign aid benefits the US. This is not only because conservatives believe that private investment (without government involvement) would be more effective, but also because conservatives generally hold nationalist views and often perceive the world order as a zero-sum game (Daniel, 2022; Ford & Goodwin, 2017; Pryke, 2012; Tamir, 2019).

On the other hand, liberal (Democratic) governments are inclined to hold more favorable views of foreign aid. First, in contrast to the anti-government stance of conservatives, liberals advocate for an active role of the state in economic affairs, aiming for egalitarian outcomes and increased government involvement in the economy. This aligns with the notion that addressing global issues, including poverty and instability, can ultimately benefit the US by promoting global security, enhancing soft power, and generating positive economic effects (Bell, 2014; Moravcsik, 2009). Second, liberals believe that foreign aid can effectively address market failures, particularly in providing public goods in developing nations. This approach counters the laissez-faire nature of conservatism, as core liberal beliefs emphasize the necessity of government involvement in providing social safety nets and promoting higher levels of economic cooperation (Boyd, 1988; Steinberg & Saideman, 2008). In sum, regardless of a government's international position, liberal economic beliefs often translate into greater support for foreign aid.

> **H1** (*replication*): Increased government conservatism will lead to decreases in foreign aid efforts.

Ideological Hypothesis. Extending Tingley's (2010) theoretical framework, recent scholarship has identified the impacts of legislative polarization on foreign aid. Specifically, Carcelli (2021) has noted that increased legislative polarization prevents Congress from passing traditional foreign aid legislation, leading to the incorporation of foreign aid appropriations into omnibus spending bills. In this unorthodox legislative environment, legislators add provisions called free-rider limitations, which are introduced to navigate congressional polarization and ensure that specific legislative goals are met despite broader gridlock. For example, in highly polarized environments, Congress may include riders specifying the countries and types of aid allowed, effectively using appropriations bills to legislate foreign policy indirectly.

However, extending this scholarship, we suggest that as legislative polarization

increases in Congress, leading to increased dysfunction and gridlock, the number of appropriations overall will decrease. Relying on existing scholarship, researchers have found that polarization directly leads to a decrease in the total amount of legislation, as legislators become more extreme and unwilling to collaborate on bipartisan initiatives (Sinclair, 2008; Theriault, 2008; Woon & Cook, 2015). This is primarily due to the impacts of unorthodox lawmaking, where legislators are rewarded for voting in line with party policies and punished for cooperating with the opposition, both by their constituencies and party elites (e.g., Sinclair, 2008, 2017; Theriault, 2008). Furthermore, returning to the aforementioned core values of conservatism versus liberalism, and given the economic nature of foreign aid, such aid is more likely to face increased scrutiny in more ideologically extreme and polarized environments. As a result, unless foreign aid can be attached to larger omnibus appropriations, the likelihood of passage for stand-alone foreign aid legislation is significantly decreased, leading to lower overall foreign aid appropriations.

> **H2:** As legislative polarization increases, foreign aid disbursement will decrease.

Economic Hypotheses. The final hypotheses in this theoretical discussion concern how domestic factors impact foreign aid disbursements. While Tingley (2010) does control for economic factors, the main focus of his theoretical framework and results are regarding the ideological impacts of foreign aid. Aiming to fill this theoretical gap, we provide an alternative argument to the ideological hypotheses, suggesting that economic factors are what impact foreign aid disbursements. First, we argue that as economic conditions deteriorate in donor nations, the less likely they are to give aid, especially in democracies like the US. This is because if a country is experiencing poor economic conditions, the domestic constituency will place legislators under higher scrutiny, pressuring them to focus on domestic issues prior to international issues. We argue that legislators are likely to bend to this constituency pressure to mitigate the risks of losing re-election, leading to decreased spending on foreign aid.

> **H3**: Poor economic conditions (decreased GDP growth) lead to decreased foreign aid spending.

To capture additional economic factors that may impact foreign aid disbursements, we argue that increased trade (imports + exports) will lead to increased foreign aid disbursements, especially for economies that are heavily dependent on imports, such as the United States. High-trade donor economies are more likely to increase foreign aid because it aligns with their economic interests. For example, if country A (e.g., United States) imports a significant amount of products from country B (e.g., Mexico), and country B experiences a serious natural disaster, country A is likely to provide increased foreign aid to prevent economic destabilization in country B. This is because economic instability in a key trading partner can negatively affect country A's

economy. Similarly, if country A exports a substantial amount of products to country B, it has an incentive to provide more foreign aid to promote economic development in country B. This aid can encourage increased spending on country A's products, thereby benefiting country A's economy. In other words, we hypothesize that the level of trade between donor and recipient countries can significantly influence foreign aid disbursements, with high-trade donor economies more inclined to provide aid to safeguard and enhance their economic interests.

H4a: Increased trade openness (imports + exports/GDP) in donor nations will lead to increased foreign aid disbursements.

H4b: Increased imports will lead to increased foreign aid disbursements.

Replication

To empirically quantify his hypothesis (**H1**), Tingley (2010) uses an Ordinary Least Squares (OLS) regression analysis to evaluate the relationship between the independent variable, government ideology (*IdeoAll*), and the dependent variables, foreign aid disbursements. Tingley employs fixed effects, which control for unobservable variables that are constant over time but vary between countries, thereby accounting for unobserved heterogeneity that could potentially bias the results. He also clusters standard errors by country, which helps to account for autocorrelation and heteroskedasticity within each country. Furthermore, Tingley uses first differences estimations to analyze changes in government ideology and aid effort over time. Finally, Tingley employs simulation results to assess the robustness of the statistical model; however, these simulations are not thoroughly discussed or included in his replication materials.

Overall, in our replication of Tingley's study, we found some discrepancies in the results, particularly with the *GDPGrowth* variable, which was significantly larger in our analysis compared to Tingley's original data. This difference likely stems from a previously acknowledged error in Tingley's dataset, which he noted might affect outcomes. After the original article was published, Tingley issued an erratum outlining the issues in his dataset and how they affected the results. The error was caused by counting some forms of foreign aid twice when calculating the recipient states. While Tingley re-ran the regression models using the amended data to adjust for this inaccuracy and posted the results in the erratum, he did not make the corrected data publicly available, and we were unable to acquire it from him. As a result, our replication is based on his original dataset since we do not have access to the corrected version.

However, despite these variations, our findings were mostly consistent with Tingley's (2010) results, particularly in the significance of control variables. For the portion we chose to replicate, we focused on Tables 1 and 2, covering dependent

variables such as Total Aid, Multilateral Aid, LDC/OLIC,[3] and LMIC/UMIC.[4] Our replication results are reported in Tables A1 and A2 and Figure A3. While we did not obtain the exact same results as those published in Tingley (2010), we are highly confident that our replication results are accurate and reflective of the true effects, considering the noted data issues in Tingley's original study.

Extension: Variables and Model Specifications

To test the statistical significance of our hypotheses (**H1**-**H4**), we have extended much of Tingley's (2010) initial dataset. Our extended dataset spans from 1990 to 2018, covering 28 years, similar to Tingley's 31-year dataset, which spans from 1971 to 2002. Additionally, rather than conducting a cross-country analysis as Tingley did, our data focuses on the US. This provides three significant benefits: First, a US study benefits from highly accurate legislator/presidential ideological data. Second, a single-country case study provides further insight into domestic institutional and constituency impacts on foreign aid disbursements. Third, the US is consistently the largest provider of foreign aid, so the results of a case study on the world's largest aid distributor would have significant implications.

Variables. Regarding the variables employed in our study, we decided to exclude five variables, *D.RTCABCUM*, *D.LTCABCUM*, *IdeoAll*, *ColdWar*, and *Generosity*, due to their irrelevance to our analyses. Specifically, first, we do not use *D.RTCABCUM* or *D.LTCABCUM* because these variables represent the change in the cumulative percentage of cabinet seats held by conservative/liberal parties. In the US, cabinet seats are assigned by the President, so changes in cabinet seats should be highly correlated with Presidential ideology. Second, we decided not to use the *IdeoAll* measure, instead favoring the *IdeoGov* measure, as the US is a two-party system, and *IdeoAll* calculates the ideological score for all parties in an election, weighting each party's ideology by their percentage of the total vote. Third, we do not use the *ColdWar* variable because our data starts in 1990. We instead replace this variable with a *Post_911* variable. Finally, we decided not to use the *Generosity* variable, which quantifies the extent of a country's welfare policies, reflecting the level of social benefits provided to citizens. In the US, there was minimal variation in this data, so we decided to omit it.

That said, we do rely on three of the same variables that Tingley uses: *IdeoGov*

3. Least Developed Countries/Other Low-Income Countries.
4. Lower Middle-Income Countries/Upper Middle-Income Countries.

(*P_Ideology*),[5] *GDPGrowth*,[6] and *Openness*.[7] This is because these variables assist in answering our two arguments by examining some of our hypotheses. Specifically, regarding the ideological argument, the *P_Ideology* variable represents the ideological score of the President, which is used to examine how the executive ideological score impacts foreign aid disbursements (**H1**). Second, regarding the economic argument, we continue to use the *GDPGrowth* and *Openness* variables. The *GDPGrowth* variable will capture how the domestic economic environment in the donor nation changes foreign aid disbursements (**H3**). Additionally, the *Openness* variable captures how trade influences foreign aid output (**H4**).

What is more, to control for potential confounding variables while also adding variables identified as significant by existing literature, we extended Tingley's (2010) dataset to include seven new variables: *C_Polarization*,[8] *Imports*,[9] *Impending_Elec*,[10] *Gov_Approval*,[11] *Divided_Gov*,[12] *Post_911*,[13] and *Interaction*. First, to address the theoretical argument outlined in **H2**, we employ *C_Polarization* to ascertain the impacts of legislative polarization on foreign aid efforts. Second, we include the variable Imports to address **H4b**, which suggests that as aid disbursements increase, nations aim to mitigate disruptions to the trading system by increasing imports. The remaining four variables, *Impending_Elec*, *Gov_Approval*, *Divided_Gov*, and *Post_911*, are control variables. First, we control for impending elections (*Impending_Elec*) because we expect foreign aid disbursements to decrease closer to an election, as legislators aim

5. While Tingley (2010) uses the *IdeoGov* variable, we aim to avoid severe statistical complexities, such as the operationalization of factor analysis, using the Comparative Manifestos Project (CMP). Consequently, we replace this variable with the *P_Ideology* variable, which measures presidential ideology constructed from DW-NOMINATE scores, ranging from -1 (most liberal) to 1 (most conservative). Although this measure differs from the original, DW-NOMINATE is arguably a more accurate measure of ideology.

6. This data is taken directly from the World Bank and represents the annual GDP growth (percentage change).

7. This variable expands on Tingley's (2010) method of creating Openness. Openness = the US imports + exports / GDP. Import/Export data is acquired from the Correlates of War data for years before 2014 and Trade.gov data from years 2014 onward.

8. This variable represents polarization, calculated as the absolute difference in the median legislator ideology between the Republican and Democratic parties. The calculation is based on data from both the Senate and the House of Representatives. All other parties, including independents who may caucus with a larger party, were excluded from the analysis.

9. This variable represents the total amount of imports to the US. Import/Export data is acquired from the Correlates of War data for years before 2014 and Trade.gov data from years 2014 onward.

10. This is a binary variable coded as 0 if there is no general election during that year, and 1 if there is.

11. This is an aggregate variable that represents the average public approval ratings for both the US Congress and the Presidency over the period from 1990 to 2018. The Congressional approval ratings are sourced from a series of Gallup Surveys specifically focused on the legislative branch, with each rating averaged per Congressional session to maintain consistency with the chosen unit of analysis. Similarly, Presidential approval ratings are compiled from Gallup Surveys available through the American Presidency Project.

12. This is a binary variable coded as 0 if the government is divided, meaning Republicans hold either one chamber of Congress and the Democrats hold the other, or the President is of the opposite party. It is coded as 1 if the government is unified, indicating that all chambers and the president are controlled by one party.

13. This is a binary variable coded as 0 for 2001 and prior, and 1 for 2002 and beyond.

to maintain a face of fiscal responsibility under increased scrutiny from constituencies (Lowry, Alt, & Ferree, 1998; Milner & Tingley, 2010). Second, we control for divided government (*Divided_Gov*) to analyze its impacts, as some scholars suggest it leads to decreased legislative productivity, potentially resulting in fewer foreign aid legislation (e.g., Friedrichs & Tama, 2022; Saeki, 2009). Third, as Tingley (2010) controlled for *ColdWar*, we control for Post-9/11 (*Post_911*) because some scholars suggest aid disbursements fell after the Cold War but increased during the War on Terror. Fourth, we include an interaction term (*Impending_Elec*Gov_Approval*) to examine whether the combination of lower government approval and an impending election affects aid disbursements.

The Model and Specifications. To evaluate the statistical significance of our variables, we conduct an OLS regression analysis, considering the continuous nature of our dependent variables. We run a total of 16 models for the main analysis: four models each for the dependent variables *Total_Aid*, *Total_Multilateral*, *LDC_OLIC*, and *LMIC_UMIC*.[14] The first model for each dependent variable includes only the variables replicated from Tingley (2010): *Pres_Ideo*, *Openness*, and *GDPGrowth*. The second and third models incorporate all additional variables (*Divided_Gov*, *Post_911*, *C_Polarization*, *GDPGrowth*, *Impending_Elec*, *Gov_Approval*) with the exception of the inclusion of the *Openness* (*Imports*) and the exclusion of the *Imports* (*Openness*) variable for the second (third) model. The regressions with the fourth model for each dependent variable include the Interaction variable (*Impending_Elec*Gov_Approval*) and exclude the *Impending_Elec* and *Gov_Approval* variables to eliminate any multicollinearity. The fourth model results can be found in the appendix.

Extension Results and Discussion[15]

Returning to our first hypothesis (**H1**), replicating Tingley's (2010) hypothesis, we move to reject this hypothesis. In the vast majority of the models, there was no significant relationship between executive ideology and aid efforts. Furthermore, in many of these models, the coefficient is in the opposite direction, suggesting that as executives become more conservative, the US gives more aid. This pattern holds constant in our models with additional variables and even in the replication model (Model 1), indicating that contemporary US foreign aid disbursement is not based on partisan leaning, offering opposing results from Tingley (2010).

Regarding our second hypothesis (**H2**), which argues that increased legislative polarization leads to decreased foreign aid disbursements, extending scholarly works

14. For a visual on aid disbursed by type, see Figure A4.
15. Results for this section are reported in Table 1 and Table 2.

Table 1: Total & Multilateral Aid Distribution

	Dependent variable:					
	Total_Aid			Total_Multilateral		
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
Pres_Ideo	0.109	-0.033	-0.113	0.085	-0.037	-0.111
	(0.130)	(0.092)	(0.087)	(0.133)	(0.094)	(0.091)
Divided_Gov		0.013	0.085		-0.010	0.069
		(0.090)	(0.081)		(0.091)	(0.085)
Post_911		0.647***	0.401**		0.631***	0.378**
		(0.151)	(0.163)		(0.154)	(0.171)
C_Polarzation		0.047	-0.437*		0.099	-0.372
		(0.136)	(0.231)		(0.139)	(0.242)
Openness	0.650***	0.037		0.639***	-0.016	
	(0.127)	(0.122)		(0.130)	(0.125)	
Imports			0.782**			0.727**
			(0.318)			(0.332)
GDPGrowth	-0.360**	-0.172**	-0.150**	-0.365**	-0.182**	-0.166**
	(0.130)	(0.078)	(0.068)	(0.132)	(0.080)	(0.071)
Impending_Elec		-0.044	-0.060		-0.004	-0.021
		(0.076)	(0.067)		(0.077)	(0.070)
Gov_Approval		-0.291***	-0.186**		-0.308***	-0.208**
		(0.087)	(0.088)		(0.089)	(0.092)
Constant	0.000	0.000	-0.000	0.000	0.000	-0.000
	(0.124)	(0.069)	(0.061)	(0.126)	(0.070)	(0.063)
Observations	29	29	29	29	29	29
R^2	0.603	0.901	0.924	0.586	0.897	0.917
Adjusted R^2	0.555	0.862	0.894	0.537	0.856	0.884
Residual Std. Error	0.667 (df = 25)	0.372 (df = 20)	0.326 (df = 20)	0.681 (df = 25)	0.379 (df = 20)	0.341 (df = 20)
F Statistic	12.640*** (df = 3; 25)	22.859*** (df = 8; 20)	30.370*** (df = 8; 20)	11.806*** (df = 3; 25)	21.828*** (df = 8; 20)	27.624*** (df = 8; 20)
Note:						*p**p***p<0.01

Table 2: LDC and OLIC & LMIC and UMIC Aid Distribution

	Dependent variable:					
	LDC_OLIC			LMIC_UMIC		
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
Pres_Ideo	-0.094	-0.149**	-0.188**	0.455***	0.190	0.051
	(0.132)	(0.070)	(0.073)	(0.136)	(0.151)	(0.152)
Divided_Gov		-0.042	0.019		0.093	0.156
		(0.068)	(0.068)		(0.147)	(0.141)
Post_911		0.541***	0.370**		0.678**	0.372
		(0.114)	(0.136)		(0.247)	(0.284)
C_Polarzation		0.313***	0.029		-0.461*	-1.177***
		(0.103)	(0.193)		(0.223)	(0.402)
Openness	0.653***	-0.089		0.481***	0.311	
	(0.129)	(0.092)		(0.134)	(0.200)	
Imports			0.387			1.326**
			(0.266)			(0.553)
GDPGrowth	-0.355**	-0.173***	-0.172***	-0.294**	-0.142	-0.080
	(0.131)	(0.059)	(0.057)	(0.136)	(0.128)	(0.119)
Impending_Elec		-0.035	-0.048		-0.135	-0.151
		(0.057)	(0.056)		(0.124)	(0.116)
Gov_Approval		-0.299***	-0.242***		-0.122	0.043
		(0.066)	(0.073)		(0.142)	(0.153)
Constant	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	-0.000
	(0.125)	(0.052)	(0.051)	(0.130)	(0.113)	(0.105)
Observations	29	29	29	29	29	29
R^2	0.593	0.944	0.947	0.561	0.736	0.770
Adjusted R^2	0.544	0.921	0.926	0.509	0.630	0.678
Residual Std. Error	0.675 (df = 25)	0.280 (df = 20)	0.273 (df = 20)	0.701 (df = 25)	0.608 (df = 20)	0.567 (df = 20)
F Statistic	12.122*** (df = 3; 25)	42.035*** (df = 8; 20)	44.537*** (df = 8; 20)	10.665*** (df = 3; 25)	6.968*** (df = 8; 20)	8.381*** (df = 8; 20)
Note:						*p**p***p<0.01

such as Carcelli (2021), there was some variation in our results. To be cautious, we reject this hypothesis. While there was statistical significance for coefficients pointing in the correct direction (negative) in the third models for the *Total_Aid* and *LMIC_UMIC* dependent variables—suggesting that as legislative polarization increases, foreign aid disbursements decrease—there was either no significance or the coefficients pointed in the wrong direction for the other variables and models. This inconsistency suggests that polarization has no clear impact on foreign aid disbursements. That said, these results do not disprove Carcelli's findings—in fact, our results may further support her theoretical framework and results. This is because, even in an extremely polarized and gridlocked legislature, foreign aid is still being disbursed, likely due to the free-rider limitations that tag foreign aid appropriations to larger omnibus legislation.

Concerning our third hypothesis (**H3**), which argues that in poor economic climates, foreign aid is likely to decrease, we have great confidence in rejecting this hypothesis. This result was perhaps our most surprising, as theoretically, in poor economic climates, donor nations would be less willing to give aid to avoid constituency political pressure and to maintain fiscal responsibility. However, while the *GDPGrowth* variable is significant in nearly every model, it points in the opposite direction. This finding suggests that as GDP growth increases, the US gives less foreign aid, and vice versa. Additionally, even when controlling for an impending election or government approval in models 1-3 and the interaction in model 4, these controls were also not found significant. In fact, while government approval (*Gov_Approval*) is significant in several models, it points in the opposite direction, suggesting that as government approval increases, foreign aid disbursements decrease, and vice versa. This inverse relationship is surprising and suggests that in the US, legislators do not

feel constituency pressure, nor do they feel obligated to maintain fiscal responsibility during poor economic conditions. This confirms a bastion of scholarship's theoretical frameworks that international affairs, especially those concerning finances, are matters of high politics (Sienknecht & Vetterlein, 2023).

Finally, regarding our final hypotheses (**H4a** and **H4b**), we found overall mixed results. To begin, **H4a**, which argues that increased trade openness in donor nations will lead to increased foreign aid disbursements, can be rejected. While *Openness* in the replication models (model 1) is significant and moving in the correct direction—suggesting that as trade (imports + exports/GDP) increases, foreign aid disbursements increase—this significance is diminished when additional controls are added. As a result, we cautiously reject **H4a**, given that it was not significant when included in a model with other variables.

In contrast, **H4b**, which posits that increased US imports will lead to increased foreign aid disbursements, can be accepted. In all third models for the dependent variables, except for the *LDC_OLIC* variable, increased US imports did lead to increased foreign aid disbursements. Specifically, for the *Total_Aid* variable, the coefficient suggests that for every million (billion) dollar increase in imports, the US disburses $782 thousand (million) more in foreign aid. While these results differ from Tingley's (2010) findings, as we did not find *Openness* to be significant, the significance of the *Imports* variable suggests that increased reliance on global imports leads the US to increase foreign aid disbursements, perhaps to stabilize global trade in the event of disasters. However, the null finding for *Imports* for the *LDC_OLIC* dependent variable is interesting, as one might expect that the least affluent nations would need foreign aid the most to stabilize trade in the event of a natural disaster, given the lack of money available for infrastructure rebuilding or social safety nets.

Post 9/11 Aid. Similar to Tingley (2010), who controls for the Cold War, we control for 9/11, given some scholarship suggesting that US foreign aid disbursements decreased following the end of the Cold War but have increased again since the onset of the War on Terror (e.g., Howell, 2012; Howell & Lind, 2009; Miles, 2012). The results of the Post 9/11 variable (*Post_911*) are highly significant, and the coefficient is positive, suggesting that since 9/11, the US has significantly increased foreign aid. While an analysis of why the US has increased foreign aid post-9/11 is outside the scope of this paper, we introduce two conjectures. First, while the Cold War between the US and the Soviet Union has ended, there may be a separate (perhaps less pronounced) Cold War between the US and China. For example, this result could suggest that the US has given a significant amount of foreign aid to compete with China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), a global development strategy involving infrastructure development and investments in nearly 70 countries and international organizations. Second, the War on Terror included efforts to reorganize government structures in countries like Afghanistan and Iraq. This may have led to substantial increases in foreign aid directed towards these and other countries to support anti-terrorism initiatives, reconstruction, and development.

Implications, Conclusion, and Future Directions

What impacts foreign aid disbursements? Existing scholarship suggests that domestic factors, such as fluctuations in ideology or poor economic conditions, play a significant role. However, in the US, the largest provider of foreign aid, scholars have identified that foreign policy remains largely bipartisan. Notably, during the Trump Administration, foreign policy saw a significant increase in bipartisanship. Furthermore, existing scholarship has primarily focused on the impacts of Openness on foreign aid disbursements rather than how imports independently impact foreign aid disbursements. Given these puzzles and gaps in the existing scholarship, we analyzed the statistical significance of two competing arguments on foreign aid distribution.

This research offers a quantitative analysis examining the impacts of domestic factors, specifically political ideology and economic conditions, on foreign aid disbursements in the US. Using contemporary data (1990-2018), we found no significant support for the domestic political factors hypotheses (**H1**-**H4**). First, our results suggest that ideological factors do not significantly impact foreign aid disbursements. While Tingley (2010) found significant results for the relationship between government ideology and foreign aid disbursements on an international level, this result does not hold true in the context of the US. Similarly, we did not identify a significant relationship between legislative polarization and foreign aid disbursement. While scholars have found that increased legislative polarization has led to extreme legislative gridlock in the US Congress, our results suggest that legislative polarization has an insignificant impact on foreign aid disbursements. This is likely because foreign aid may still be passed through dysfunctional processes, such as the utilization of free-rider limitations and attaching foreign aid bills to omnibus appropriations legislation.

Regarding the economic hypotheses, a significant finding from this study was the lack of support for **H3**. While one might expect that foreign aid would decrease in poor economic climates due to domestic pressure and the need to maintain fiscal responsibility, our study found that foreign aid actually increased during these times. While the outcomes of **H4a** were insignificant, suggesting there is no relationship between trade and foreign aid distribution, the findings of **H4b** yielded some significance. That said, however, this provides mixed support for the domestic factors hypothesis, as we believe that **H4b** partially measures the dynamics between donor and recipient countries. This is because a portion of this hypothesis builds on dependency/ economic self-interest literature, which posits that donor countries may increase aid to stabilize trade relations and protect their own economic interests while also benefiting recipient nations.

While the results of this study are surprising, we propose two conjectures to explain these unexpected findings and encourage future scholars to explore these areas further. First, it is possible that aid commitments, rather than disbursements, may tell a different story. Since the US typically honors aid commitments, there may not be a strong association between these factors and aid disbursements. Instead, the domestic political factors discussed in this study may cause more variation in aid commitments. Exploring aid commitments rather than disbursements would also provide the benefit

of offering a 'real-time' analysis of the factors discussed in this essay, as disbursement timing can vary depending on the legislation. Second, since aid disbursements fell after the conclusion of the Cold War but have increased again since 9/11 and the War on Terror, it is possible that aid disbursements will fall again following the Biden Administration's official end to the campaign in Afghanistan, and therefore the War on Terror, in 2021. Future scholarship should analyze whether this trend continues, as it would suggest that major geopolitical events, like the Cold War or the War on Terror, cause increased efforts to distribute aid. If this trend does not end, however, scholars should examine why. For example, it is possible that the US is increasing aid disbursements to compete with China's BRI.

While this essay did not yield significant support for our proposed theory, it offers important insights into the factors that impact foreign aid disbursements by the US, the largest aid disburser in the world. Specifically, we did not find significant evidence that domestic political factors influence foreign aid disbursements. However, we have identified potential areas for future research to explore further, including those in the comparative context. For example, it would be interesting to ascertain whether this null finding is unique to the US or if it can also be found in other countries, especially larger economic superpowers. We encourage scholars to investigate these areas, as this would provide a deeper understanding of what influences foreign aid disbursements.

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