

# Foreign Policy Begins at Home: The Local Origin of Support for US Democracy Promotion

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Citizens hold opinions about what kinds of foreign policy their government should pursue. Because foreign policy often has geographically-specific domestic consequences, we expect opinions to vary with the locality of its impact. In this article, we examine whether individual support for US foreign policy to promote democracy abroad depends on exactly where the policy's domestic impact will occur. We expect individuals to favor policies that bestow local benefits, while opposing those that impose local costs. Accordingly, we argue that support for proposed democracy aid grants will be higher when such aid benefits local firms and organizations. Conversely, we expect that opposition to proposed economic sanctions in the form of development aid cuts will be higher when the associated domestic costs stemming from lost jobs fall locally. Using results from an original survey experiment, we find evidence that a positive local impact of aid increases support for and reduces opposition to democracy promotion, while a negative local impact of sanctions reduces indifference and increases opposition to punitive policy in the case of democratic backsliding.

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Few contemporary scholars of foreign policy believe that politics ends at the water's edge (Milner and Tingley 2015). Encouraged by the contemporary understanding that public opinion does matter for foreign policy (Baum and Potter 2008), a growing number of scholars examine the origins of individual attitudes on a variety of foreign policy issues and instruments. Research has considered the roles of ideology and partisanship, generalized trust, demographic correlates, and the impact of pocket-book or sociotropic economic evaluations. Less prevalent in this burgeoning literature is a focus on geographic factors; the old adage, "all politics is local," has been somewhat disregarded with respect to the realm of foreign policy.

We contend that this disregard is misguided and examine the ways in which local considerations play a role in determining individual attitudes on foreign policy, reconsidering theories of distributional politics with a focus on geography. Scholars of domestic politics are familiar with the "not in my back yard" (NIMBY) phenomenon in which individuals oppose policies or developments that impose local costs irrespective of their wider societal benefits (Deer 1992). The fundamental logic underlying this phenomenon does not limit its applicability to domestic politics, and yet few studies extend this perspective to the realm of foreign policy.<sup>2</sup>

We examine how support for new grants of aid and, conversely, the imposition of aid sanctions, is influenced by the location of domestic economic impact—specifically a person's proximity to a city that experiences either economic benefits or lost jobs as a consequence of foreign policy.<sup>3</sup> In an original survey experiment of 711 people located in the US, respondents are presented with a scenario in which the (randomly assigned) outcome of a close election

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<sup>2</sup>Studies that do so typically examine the influence of casualties on support for armed conflicts or politicians in power (Gartner, Segura, and Wilkening, 1997; Gartner 2008; Gartner and Segura 2000; Kriner and Shen 2007, 2013). In an international trade example, Pelc (2013) reports that the World Trade Organization cases raise interest among people living close to the affected industry. To our knowledge, no studies consider localized effects with respect to the issue of democracy promotion—the focus of this study.

<sup>3</sup>"Aid sanctions" refer to cutting existing or promised flows of foreign aid. See Von Soest and Wahman (2015*a*); Von Soest and Wahman (2015*b*) on economic sanctions in the context of changes in regime types.

in a developing country suggests potential either for the strengthening of democracy or for movement toward authoritarianism.<sup>4</sup> We then ask respondents to rate support for a corresponding foreign policy tool that is commonly used in reaction to such an event: a grant of democracy aid when the pro-democracy candidate wins, or a sanction that cuts existing aid when the authoritarian candidate wins—in both cases where the aid is disbursed directly to US firms or organizations which then provide goods and services to the recipient country. We randomly assign the locus of domestic impact associated with the proposed tool of democracy promotion, telling respondents that firms located either in (a city in) their home state or in a different US state stand to benefit from new aid grants, or lose from imposed sanctions.

The findings from our experiment support our expectations that individuals favor foreign policy that bestows local benefits while opposing foreign policy that imposes local costs. Dividing attitudes into the three categories of support, indifference, and opposition, we find that respondents are more likely to support and less likely to oppose aid grants when the benefits accrue to their home state; the probability of support increases by about 0.12 on average. Similarly, respondents are more likely to oppose sanctions by 0.05 on average, and less likely to be indifferent, when their own state would face lost jobs as a consequence.

Our results hold implications for scholars and policymakers. While our focus on policies intended to promote democracy or punish democratic backsliding is intended in part to provide (somewhat) comparable scenarios in which to study local considerations underlying support for grants of US democracy aid and development aid sanctions, this focus also affords an opportunity to contribute to the relatively thin literature examining the origins of public attitudes regarding policies broadly aimed at bolstering democracy around the world. Previous observational research finds that demographic factors such political ideology, education,

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<sup>4</sup>We use democracy promotion as a unifying issue across all variants of our experiment in order to facilitate respondent familiarity with this common goal of US foreign policy.

and working skills are associated with people of the European Union supporting this foreign policy goal (Faust and Garcia 2014). Yet the causal mechanisms underlying such correlations remain unclear. A survey experiment by Brancati (2014), which relies on US citizens, finds little to no evidence that either normative arguments or those cueing self-interest affect citizen support for democracy promotion. However, this previous study considers self-serving motivation in terms of general US benefits, which citizens could perceive as less salient than locally distinct consequences. Accordingly, our paper advances the literature by providing experimental evidence regarding the potential for geographically-defined in-group costs and benefits to drive individual attitudes on the issue of democracy promotion.

While we do not discount the roles of ideology, partisanship, and other, often-invoked demographics in determining public reactions to foreign policy proposals, our findings suggest that foreign policy also follows from geographic considerations. Foreign policy goals such as democracy promotion might be of little concern to many in the US specifically because the policy impact seems far removed from an average individual's experience; yet individuals may nonetheless support such a policy from which they foresee tangible benefits for their community. Similarly, while punitive foreign policy in response to perceived misbehavior has been shown to garner popular support,<sup>5</sup> our results suggest that people are more likely to oppose such policies that harm their local economy. Contrary to the individualist, pocket-book perspective or a broadly (national) sociotropic orientation, our results suggest a middle-ground in which economic evaluations of foreign policy follow from whether the perceived gains or losses accrue locally to one's community, or to more distant "others."

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<sup>5</sup>See Allendoerfer (2017); Heinrich and Kobayashi (2018); Heinrich, Kobayashi and Long (2018); Heinrich, Kobayashi, and Peterson (2017).

## Public Opinion and Foreign Policy

Scholars have moved beyond the Cold-War era “Almond-Lippmann consensus” (Almond 1950; Lippmann 1955) to demonstrate that the public has rational and relatively consistent views on foreign policy, with consequences for policymakers (Aldrich, Gelpi, Feaver, Reifler, and Thompson 2006; Holsti, 1992, 1994). Though research finds an important role for the media that conveys information—and potentially frames issues (Baum and Potter 2008; Baum and Groeling 2009), evidence is mixed regarding the degree to which cue-taking from elites is responsible individual attitudes on foreign policy (Berinsky 2009; Zaller 1992). Indeed, a recent study by Kertzer and Zeitzoff (2017) suggests that individuals are more responsive to the endorsement of their peer group(s) than to partisan elites. Research finds that individual attitudes regarding a variety of foreign policy instruments depends on the consequences of that policy for the groups with which one identifies, whether these groups are based in ideology (Aldrich et al. 2006; Risse-Kappen 1991) or economics (Mayda and Rodrik 2005; Scheve and Slaughter 2001).<sup>6</sup>

Given that foreign aid and economic sanctions are two commonly-used and relatively understandable instruments of foreign policy, it stands to reason that broad patterns regarding public opinion and foreign policy would apply in these specific cases. Regarding foreign aid, Milner (2006), Eisensee and Strömberg (2007), and Heinrich, Kobayashi and Long (2018) provide evidence that public support correlates with the provision of aid. Along similar lines, public opinion seems to affect the use of sanctions. For example, sanctions are deployed to placate demand for action amid an international incident or crisis (McLean and Whang 2014; Whang 2011).<sup>7</sup> More recent work expands on this explanation by uncovering

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<sup>6</sup>However, more recent research suggests that economic self-interest in terms of education and employment could be a function of sociotropic views on the economy and broader views of foreigners (Hainmueller and Hiscox 2010; Mansfield and Mutz 2009). These studies’ focus on divergent attitudes regarding in-group/out-group members vis-à-vis nationals vs. foreigners could be extended to the domestic setting—to isolate divergent attitudes regarding local versus non-local compatriots.

<sup>7</sup>However, empirical evidence for this contention is indirect. Whang (2011) shows that the use of sanctions

specific perceived effects of sanctions that individuals favor (Heinrich et al. 2017; McLean and Roblyer 2017). Other work echoes the connection between mass media coverage and foreign policy choices, showing that sanctions and changes in foreign aid over human rights violations are more likely as media attention to abuse increases (Heinrich et al. 2017; Nielsen 2013; Peksen, Peterson and Drury 2014).

Public support for foreign policy is likely to depend on the distributional consequences of the policy (see Milner and Tingley 2015, for a summary). With respect to aid and sanctions, the results of previous studies imply that people favor policies that are likely to benefit groups to which they belong. Research finds that those in the donor country who are more educated and more skilled, and who have higher income are more likely to support aid (Chong and Gradstein 2008; Milner and Tingley 2011; Paxton and Knack 2011), whereas those whose employment status has declined are less likely to do so (Heinrich, Kobayashi, and Bryant 2016), and that legislators will vote for aid presumed to benefit their constituents (Broz and Hawes 2006; Milner and Tingley 2010, 2015). These relationships could stem from material considerations following the Stolper-Samuelson theorem: to the extent that wealth and education suggest an individual to be a holder of capital, this individual stands to gain from increased interaction with capital poor nations such as aid recipients. Similarly, research suggests that the use of sanctions is motivated by lobbying from domestic firms or industries in the sender state that would benefit from economic restrictions as a form of protectionism (Kaempfer and Lowenberg 1988; McLean and Whang 2014; Milner and Tingley 2015). Fleck and Kilby (2001), McLean (2015, 2017) and Malik and Stone (2017) report similar patterns with respect to foreign aid.

Taken together, previous research demonstrates that individuals support foreign policy—including aid and sanctions—that benefit groups to which they belong, while opposing foreign

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is associated with a subsequently higher level of popularity for presidents, while McLean and Whang (2014) operationalize voter awareness of international disputes using an indicator of social globalization.

policy that harms these groups. However, few studies consider how group membership with respect to geography affects individual foreign policy preferences. One notable exception is a study by Busch and Reinhardt (2000), which considers how the geographic concentration of firms could facilitate the development of common preferences over trade policy, while also incentivizing the mobilization of these interest groups (see also Busch and Reinhardt 1999). More relevant for our study, previous work demonstrates that opposition to war tends to be highest among those who experienced greater casualties in their hometowns—for instance, where local costs are higher (Gartner and Segura 2000; Scott Sigmund Gartner and Wilkening 1997).

The link between hometown deaths and reduced support for armed conflict could follow from an instance of the “not in my back yard” or NIMBY phenomenon (Deer 1992). The NIMBY effect is present when individuals voice opposition to some development or policy that presumably would provide some useful service—or public good—in general, but where the local impact is perceived to have a detrimental effect on their quality of life. Classic examples include opposition to local storage of hazardous waste or nuclear power plants. However, this phenomenon also occurs with respect to transportation infrastructure such as rail lines or airports, prisons, services for the poor, controversial businesses, etc.

Local effects beyond the classic NIMBY phenomenon discussed above exist. For example, people could prefer to locate renewable energy generation infrastructure locally in order to improve air quality, or attempt to attract firms to their region in order to facilitate local employment. Complementing the well-known NIMBY acronym, this phenomenon has been deemed “yes, in my backyard,” or YIMBY.<sup>8</sup> Indeed, a driving force behind parliamentary pork barrel spending relies on the fact that constituents approve of—and reelect—legislators who appear to use government spending to provide development and services to their district

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<sup>8</sup>Other local effects, with associated acronyms, have been coined. However this study is concerned primarily with these two phenomena.

(Ferejohn 1974; Mayhew 1974), even if legislators actually had little role in securing them (Grimmer, Westwood, and Messing 2014).

With the exception of the few studies discussed above showing that local casualties reduce support for war, scholarly consideration of the NIMBY and YIMBY phenomena has not been extended to the domain of foreign policy. Yet this gap in the literature invites exploration because these localized effects could explain how people become informed—and potentially politically active—on what many see as low-salience policies such as foreign aid and (to a lesser extent) sanctions. Furthermore, the initiation of armed conflict is a relatively rare phenomenon while foreign economic policy is implemented regularly. Indeed, common instruments of foreign economic policy such as grants of foreign aid or imposed economic sanctions could hold geographically-based distributional consequence for domestic firms—and thus, as we demonstrate below, could influence individual attitudes via their sensitivity to local impacts.

### **Locality and Foreign Policy Attitudes**

Our main argument is that individuals are more likely to support foreign policy that bestows local benefits, and more likely to oppose foreign policy that imposes local costs. While not every foreign policy tool would prime concern for one's local community, we contend that locality matters whenever the deployed policy instrument of foreign policy would have visible domestic consequences specific to certain localities. While almost any foreign policy instrument could meet these criteria, we consider the provision of aid or the imposition of sanctions as particularly useful policy instruments on which to focus. The assumption that attitudes on foreign aid can be understood as a function of its local effects follows from recognition that foreign aid is rarely distributed directly to recipient states. Instead, aid often goes to domestic third parties such as NGOs and contractors, which carry out development



tasks (Dietrich 2013; Easterly and Williamson 2011; Kemp and Kojima 1985; McLean 2015).<sup>9</sup> Similarly, sanctions restrict trade, aid, or investment, resulting in loss of revenue for the firms with ongoing ties to these restricted markets. Further spillover effects in a local area may come about by reducing employment, real incomes, and individual spending—at worst leading to a spiral of depressed economic activity.

While it is relatively unlikely that any given person would be employed by a local organization that is affected by grants of aid or sanctions, we nonetheless expect a local impact of such changes to affect support for the policy. Pelc (2013) and Kriner and Shen (2014, 2007) provide evidence that people’s interests are indeed roused when international outcomes affect people even at the granularity of the US state level. Interests can also be piqued by politicians who wish to claim credit for aid funds that are *de jure* and *de facto* tied to goods and services from the district.

Indeed, evidence exists that US members of Congress are aware of the incentive to credit-claim for locally-beneficial aid grants. For example, in July of 2004, the office of Senator George Allen (R-VA) issued a press release stating that “the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) has awarded an extension grant in the amount of \$14,045,952 to CARANA Corporation, based in Arlington, VA.” This grant was aimed at providing technical assistance, specifically aiding states in “implementing programs that help West African countries compete in the global market.” The Senator is quoted as saying “As U.S. citizens,

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<sup>9</sup>Similarly, aid is often (and particularly in the United States) tied in a *de jure* way. Even funds that go directly to the recipient country may be stipulated specifically for purchases from the donor country. For example in 2007, roughly 37% of US Official Development Assistance (ODA) was tied to US purchases. Indeed, this percentage reflects only formally tied aid. In the same year, 68% of aid that was officially untied nonetheless went to US domestic contractors. See Tables 3.3 and 3.8 in OECD, *Untying aid: Is it working?* (2007), <https://goo.gl/XmQsrZ> [accessed June 5, 2017]. In that year, 65 of 95 development-related contracts went to US companies. A large literature examines the consequence of aid tying, typically finding that tied aid is inefficient (Easterly and Williamson 2011), and theoretically could leave recipient countries worse off than they would be if they received no aid at all (Kemp and Kojima 1985). International organizations such as the OECD discourage the use of tied aid (Nichol 2014); and progress has been achieved, as between 1991 and 2008, the proportion of untied aid across all OECD members has increased from 46% to 82%. However, there remains considerable variation in the use of tied aid across states.

we have a great opportunity to help smaller nations be successful in the world market by passing on the common sense principles that made our country what it is today,” emphasizing a concrete policy goal. However, in the very next quotation, Senator Allen states that “I am pleased that CARANA Corporation is continuing this noble mission by investing their resources in improving West African economic development.” Thus, the senator reiterates the fact that a local firm is benefitting from this multi-million dollar grant.<sup>10</sup>

US foreign aid and sanctions are used, respectively, to reward or punish the behavior of states across the globe. We contend that, following some commendable behavior by a foreign state, individuals who are informed that aid will be distributed to firms or organizations in their area will increase their support for the policy in accordance with local effects. While this effect could stem solely from desire to bolster their local economy, it is also possible that people oppose policies that would benefit others outside their home state or region, particularly given that aid allocations entail a cost to the US treasury. Evidence for local effects has seen little academic study, but has been reported by US media sources over domestic policy issues. For example, some US Senators opposed disaster relief for New York in the aftermath of Hurricane Sandy, despite previously supporting similar efforts for their home states.<sup>11</sup> Similarly, in the aftermath of misbehavior by a foreign state, if a person were informed that sanctions would result in the loss of contracts among firms in her area, we expect that she might rethink support for the policy, in this case following from a negative local effect. Conversely, people might be *less* opposed to sanctions that harm a more distant domestic location, despite the fact that US jobs could be at risk generally. In the latter case, people are expected to favor the policy specifically because they perceive that outsiders will pay the costs. Our expectations regarding local effects in aid and sanctions policy lead to

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<sup>10</sup>The press release was obtained from the corpus of press releases collected by Grimmer (2009). See <https://github.com/lintool/GrimmerSenatePressReleases> [accessed April 26, 2018].

<sup>11</sup>Washington Post, “Jim Inhofe and the ‘reverse NIMBY’ phenomenon”, May 21, 2013, <https://goo.gl/1hekPg>.

the following two hypotheses:

**Hypothesis 1** *Individuals are more likely to support increased allocations of foreign aid when the domestic economic impact is local as opposed to distant.*

**Hypothesis 2** *Individuals are more likely to oppose the imposition of sanctions when the domestic economic impact is local as opposed to distant.*

## Survey Experiment

In this section, we introduce a survey experiment that allows us to study the existence of local effects as discussed above. We take care to design a background vignette that involves a well-understood foreign policy issue: democracy promotion. Democracy promotion is a primary stated aim of foreign policy of many democracies,<sup>12</sup> and in particular of the United States (Bush 2015; Carothers and De Gramont 2013; Finkel, Pérez-Liñán, and Seligson 2007; Heinrich and Loftis 2019; Meernik 1996; Rose 2000-2001; Von Soest and Wahman 2015a).<sup>13</sup> Prominent policy instruments toward this end include grants of aid often geared toward the development of democratic infrastructure; sanctions on trade, aid, and investment; and military interventions of varying scale (for example, Bush 2015; Finkel et al., 2007; Heinrich and Loftis 2019; Meernik 1996; Rose 2000-2001; Von Soest and Wahman 2015a). Grants of democracy assistance and sanctions thereof are (crudely) symmetric forms of foreign policy—

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<sup>12</sup>Admittedly, policymakers balance this goal with the impulse to cooperate with (useful) autocratic leaders (Heinrich, Kobayashi and Long 2018; Licht 2010).

<sup>13</sup>Notably, the extant literature on individual attitudes regarding democracy promotion is thin. Faust and Garcia (2014) consider democracy promotion by the European Union in general, as well as its militarized variant specifically. Since the study is not experimental, the authors rely demographic and situation factors exclusively. Their key findings are that political ideology, education, and working skills are associated with support for the EU promoting democracy. In contrast, Brancati (2014) presents a survey experiment conducted in the US. She finds no evidence that cuing either normative or self-interest arguments for democracy promotion affects US resident support for efforts to spread democracy; however, the sub-group of respondents who identify themselves as cosmopolitan react to the normative treatment. Notably, the (overall) null effects for self-serving arguments by Brancati (2014) follow from a treatment that provided an elite cue about *general* benefits to the US. The treatment appends the following rationale to support democracy promotion: “The senators urged the United States to respond because, ‘Democracies make for better neighbors. They are more stable and less war-prone. They are better allies in the war against terrorism, and better trading partners as well.’” (Brancati 2014:715). In contrast, our experiment emphasizes that the presence of local benefits, or the absence of local costs, from democracy promotion make people more supportive of it.

giving or taking away some economic benefit, respectively. Accordingly, we take advantage of the opportunity to examine attitudes regarding both instruments using a single background vignette.

In our experiment, respondents are introduced to a vignette in which an election pits a candidate from a pro-democracy party against a member of a violent, anti-democratic movement. We consider the case of either candidate winning and explain that US policy could respond with a change in foreign aid outlays. Specifically, we first introduce the common background information and then randomly assign a scenario in which one candidate wins, after which the US considers increasing democracy aid or cutting existing aid.

### *Design*

At the outset, each survey-taker sees the same introductory background information about a “small African” country that has a fragile democratic government. The story is centered on an African country because (sub-Saharan) Africa has long been the main focus of development efforts (Easterly 2009). The use of “small” as an adjective puts distance between survey-takers and the locus of political action. Had we invoked a “large” or geographically proximate country, people might perceive there to be immediate repercussions from political changes in that country (Schumpeter 1942). Through the distance and the smallness of the country, we set the baseline more clearly with democracy promotion for its own sake.<sup>14</sup> In a similar spirit, the vignette states that US relations with that country have been friendly.

The vignette explains that the country’s political direction is tenuous: democratic practice is described as fragile, held together by a leader who has died recently of natural causes. Following this death, an election took place in which two candidates competed. One is known to be committed to democratic principles, while the other is affiliated with a violent movement. The latter is said to want to move the country in a more centralized, authoritarian

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<sup>14</sup>Similarly, research shows that European states give aid to stabilize its nearby areas (see Schneider and Tobin 2013).

direction. Specifically, the introduction reads:

A small African country that enjoys friendly relations with the United States has maintained a fragile democracy in large part due to the efforts of its president. After the death of this president from natural causes, the country held elections in which two candidates competed. Candidate A has been associated with a pro-democracy party and has been known to be committed to promoting rule of law, protecting minorities, and holding free and fair elections. Candidate B has been associated with a violent movement and has been known to be determined to centralize authority in the executive branch by undermining legislative and electoral processes.

The first randomization varies the outcome of this election. One half of the survey-takers learns that “despite intimidation at the polls,” the democracy-leaning candidate wins; the other half learn that “because of intimidation at the polls,” the autocracy-leaning candidate emerges victorious. Again, the universal background information and mirrored electoral outcomes reflect a common scenario where an election should be seen as pivotal for the future of a fragile democracy. In particular, we emphasize the role of violence surrounding this narrowly-decided election; either outcome could have easily gone the other way. The two possible outcomes give rise (naturally) to the two policy tools. In the case of Candidate A winning, the US would want to bolster the new leader with more democracy aid. Similarly, the US would seek to punish the norm-violating victorious Candidate B by cutting funds.

Each survey-taker sees only one realization of the election outcome. Within each case, we randomize the details about the chosen US response (naturally matched to the outcome) and, as explained below, the locus of domestic impact—our primary treatment. After reading the presented scenario, the respondent is asked to evaluate the policy on scale from 1 (“strong opposition”) through 9 (“strong support”), which we divide reported levels of support into three ordered categories: “opposition,” “indifference,” and “support.”<sup>15</sup> This answer serves

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<sup>15</sup>Opposition is coded for reported values between 1 and 4; indifference is coded for 5; and support is coded for values 6 through 9. As noted in the supplemental appendix, our results are robust to the use of alternate thresholds. Treating the outcome linearly is problematic as there is a pronounced mode at 5, the middle category.

as our main outcome variable.

### *Local Versus Non-local Treatments*

In the first case, the pro-democracy leader wins the election “despite intimidation at the polls.” Respondents are told that the new leader seeks to strengthen democratic institutions: “The political system remains contested and efforts to stabilize democratic practices are just beginning.” This is consistent with the background information that this candidate was committed to democratic principles. Our interest lies in how respondents evaluate US policy toward this weakly democratic country. The vignette explains that the US government provides an increase in foreign aid for “specific projects to promote citizen participation and build a stronger civil society” in the recipient country.<sup>16</sup> This type of democracy aid is a common tool of foreign policy and that has been shown to help establish and solidify democratic systems (Dietrich and Wright 2015; Gibson, Hoffman, and Jablonski 2015; Heinrich and Loftis 2019; Scott and Steele 2005, 2011).

In the aid grant scenario, US companies compete over specific contracts “to assist local projects toward these ends” (ie., fostering democracy).<sup>17</sup> Specifically, bidding among US contractors “is for building a web platform that connects political parties, citizens, and newspapers.” In this scenario, the US government hires a US company to carry out the assistance for the pro-democracy efforts put forth by the newly elected government. The funds allocated for the project highlighted in our vignette are of non-trivial size.<sup>18</sup> The major treatment of interest is the location of the company winning the largest contract. With probability of 0.5, the survey-taker is paired with a company headquartered in a city from the respondent’s self-identified home-state, and with complementary probability from elsewhere in the United States.<sup>19</sup> When the selected city falls in the respondent’s home state,

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<sup>16</sup>The amount is randomized: \$25, \$50, or \$75 million USD.

<sup>17</sup>Quoted text is in reference to specific language of the survey instrument.

<sup>18</sup>We randomize whether the contract under focus is “half” or “a third” of the total aid volume.

<sup>19</sup>Our list of potential cities comprises the largest city in each state and all cities with populations of 500,000

we expect a positive local effect because the proposed aid would benefit a community local to the respondent.

If the candidate associated with the violent movement wins “because of intimidation at the polls,” the scenario is inverted. In this scenario, the US government proposes punishment for the violent autocracy-leaning candidate via cuts to existing aid.<sup>20</sup> Either one half or one third (randomized) of the cut will harm a specific US manufacturer of specialized goods—specifically plastics and metals. The vignette explains that this aid was tied to the purchase of these US goods, which are vital to the recipient government’s economy. The location of the US firm harmed by aid cuts is randomized following the same scheme described above in the aid grant scenario. If the respondent’s home-state and the company’s city match, we expect a negative localized effect because the proposed sanctions would harm a community local to the respondent.

The two cases are broadly similar, but we intentionally avoid perfect symmetry. In order to achieve symmetry, we would have to model a case in which existing democracy aid gets cut when the autocrat wins. Given that this case is less realistic, we instead design scenarios in which we envision an aid increase intended to promote democracy, whereas classical tied aid is cut when sanctions are imposed. However, economic penalties for democratic backsliding can be viewed as a form of democracy promotion, albeit one involving the “stick” rather than the “carrot.” These scenarios share focus on benefit or harm to a specific US company, but the content of foreign aid is different. As such, we are very cautious when comparing the cases and the treatment effects.<sup>21</sup>

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and more. This preserves some realism as contractors with such volume are less likely to reside in smaller locales. The full list is given in Section 5 in the appendix.

<sup>20</sup>Again, the amount is randomized: \$25, \$50, or \$75 million dollars.

<sup>21</sup>We also randomize how confident US government officials are over the success of the policy. The change in aid is said to “help greatly” or merely “help” the prospects of democracy in the small country. We view this randomization as more as a measurement strategy (Tingley 2014).

## *Subjects*

In February of 2016, we posted a short job on Amazon’s Mechanical Turk platform and asked for people to participate in a two-round survey on foreign policy preferences. The second round differed from the first round in exactly one way, namely that the treatment of the locality of the affected company was reversed. 711 people completed the initial task. Three weeks later, we contacted them again for a follow-up survey that would more than double their pay. After up to four reminders were sent, 71% of first-round respondents participated in the second round. We found no evidence of carryover effects, as completing the second round survey was independent from the substantive variable of interest.<sup>22</sup> Accordingly, we used multiple imputation to fill in ratings for the attitude of the non-responders in the second round (King, Honaker, Joseph, and Scheve 2001).<sup>23</sup>

Unsurprisingly, the descriptive statistics of respondents differ somewhat from the US population. The following comparisons rely on the weighted realizations from the Cooperative Congressional Election Survey from which we took several questions (Ansolabehere and Rivers 2013; Vavreck and Rivers 2008).<sup>24</sup> The age is lower; there are fewer females; the distribution of education is skewed toward people with post-graduate degrees; median housing values are higher; and people lean ideologically more to the left. While these differences exist, recent work finds that samples from MTurk often replicate the magnitudes of known benchmark effects and generally replicate the qualitative result (Berinsky, Huber, and Lenz 2012; Mullinix, Leeper, Druckman, and Freese 2015). We take further steps to remedy the imbalances through post-stratification, as we explain below.

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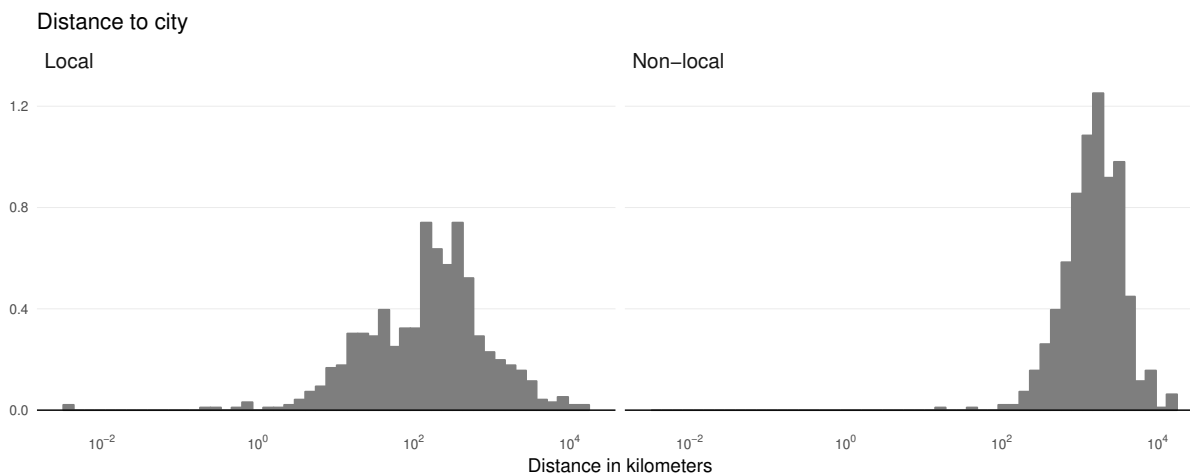
<sup>22</sup>In the appendix, we examine demographics, whether one saw the backyard treatment, and which case was drawn, as predictors to model participation in the second round. Females as well as older people were more likely to participate the second time. Crucially, the realization of the vignette (democrat wins versus autocrat wins, with associated variation in aid grant versus aid sanction) did not matter, as coefficient point estimates were close to zero. Therefore, we assume that there were no carryover effects.

<sup>23</sup>Since each respondent who participated in two rounds observed a local and non-local treatment, there is exact balance across treatments.

<sup>24</sup>The exact wording of the questions is in the appendix.



We also examine the realizations of local and non-local treatments and whether these actually occurred at different geographic distances. As people completed the survey online, we performed an IP address lookup to obtain the longitude and latitude of the connecting server’s location.<sup>25</sup> For respondents who receive the backyard treatment, the median distance between a person’s location of internet connection and the city is 172km. Conversely, for respondents receiving the distant treatment, the (median) distance to the city is more than nine times longer. 37% of local cities are within 100km of a person’s IP address, relative to only 0.3% of non-local cities. The following histograms show the distribution of distance for respondents considered to experience localized effects as opposed to non-local effects.



*Figure 1. Distribution of distance between respondent and the city where the policy impact occurs. The x-axes are scaled logarithmically.*

These graphs show that many of the locally treated respondents experience somewhat long distances between their location and the policy impact. As such, our test is likely conservative in terms of finding evidence for a local impact on support for foreign policy.<sup>26</sup>

<sup>25</sup>We did not retain the IP address itself for privacy reasons.

<sup>26</sup>The location of one’s IP address need not reflect one’s home-state allegiance and ties as one could take the survey on MTurk, for example, while traveling. However, vastly fewer people are traveling than are at home in any given day.

## *Inference*

We seek to compare local against non-local placement of companies that either benefit from democracy aid grants or suffer from a cut in aid. To gain statistical efficiency and deal with the non-representativeness of the MTurk data, we estimate a total of four ordered probit models as functions of respondents’ demographic features—one for each combination of *location* (local versus distant) and *scenario* (democracy aid grant versus aid sanction). This approach follows the suggestion of Bloniarz, Liu, Zhang, Sekhon, and Yu (2016) who demonstrate that we can improve the variance of the estimates in randomized experiments by regressing the survey response on covariates (such as demographics) while subsetting the data by treatment status.

Each model includes as covariates: a dummy for gender; age; dummies for low and high educational achievement (where low is coded for respondents with some college or less, high is coded for those with a four-year degree or better, while two-year degree composes the reference category); a seven-point ideology indicator; the logarithm of the median housing value given a person’s ZIP code (Zillow Research 2016); the randomized contract value; and dummies for whether one thinks that life has improved or worsened. After estimating the four models, we calculate post-stratified estimates of support for the policy under each model using the (weighted) data from the Congressional Cooperative Election Study (Ansolabehere and Rivers 2013; Vavreck and Rivers 2008).<sup>27</sup> We model uncertainty of the estimation using a parametric bootstrap (King, Tomz, and Wittenberg 2000), while averaging across the imputations.

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<sup>27</sup>See Park, Gelman, and Bafumi (2004) for more on post-stratification. All simulations marginalize over the features of the contract.

## Results

We find support for our expectations that a local impact of democracy aid or aid sanctions affects respondent evaluation of the policy. Figure 2 illustrates respondent attitudes regarding grants of democracy assistance in the aftermath of an election in which a pro-democracy candidate wins. The figure presents the probability (with 95% confidence bounds) of respondent support, indifference, or opposition to the increased democracy aid grant for each of the realizations of our treatment. We find that a local domestic impact is associated with an increase in probability of support, from 0.57 [0.54, 0.61] to 0.69 [0.66, 0.72]. This increase follows from a mirrored reduction in opposition to aid grants, while indifference stays roughly the same.

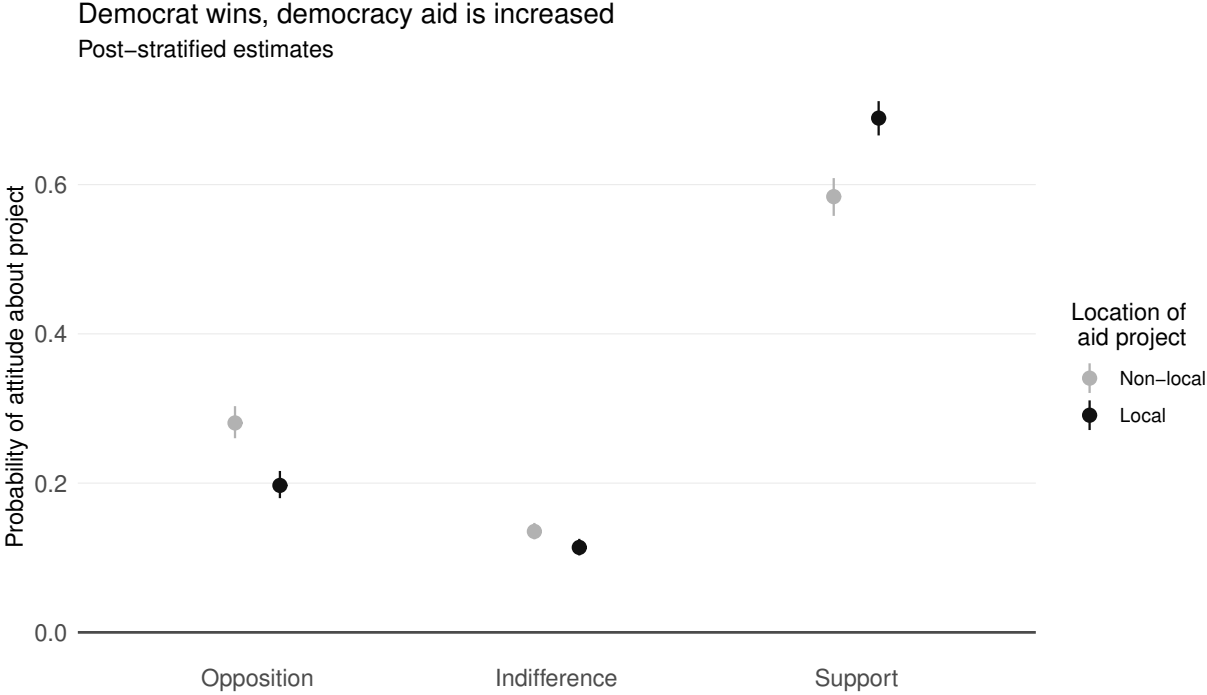


Figure 2. **Democrat wins, democracy aid is increased.** Each category on the x-axis shows the potential levels of support for local (black) and non-local policy (grey). Along the y-axis, we show the respective predicted probability for each, with 95% confidence bounds.

Figure 3 presents results for the scenario in which sanctions in the form of aid cuts are proposed in the aftermath of an authoritarian candidate election win. Once again, the figure illustrates the probabilities of support, indifference, and opposition to the policy for both local and non-local treatment conditions. While support declines only minutely (and not statistically significantly) between treatment conditions, opposition to sanctions increases when the aid cuts would have local impacts. Specifically, opposition increases by 0.05 [0.01, 0.10], offset by minor reductions in the probabilities of indifference and support.

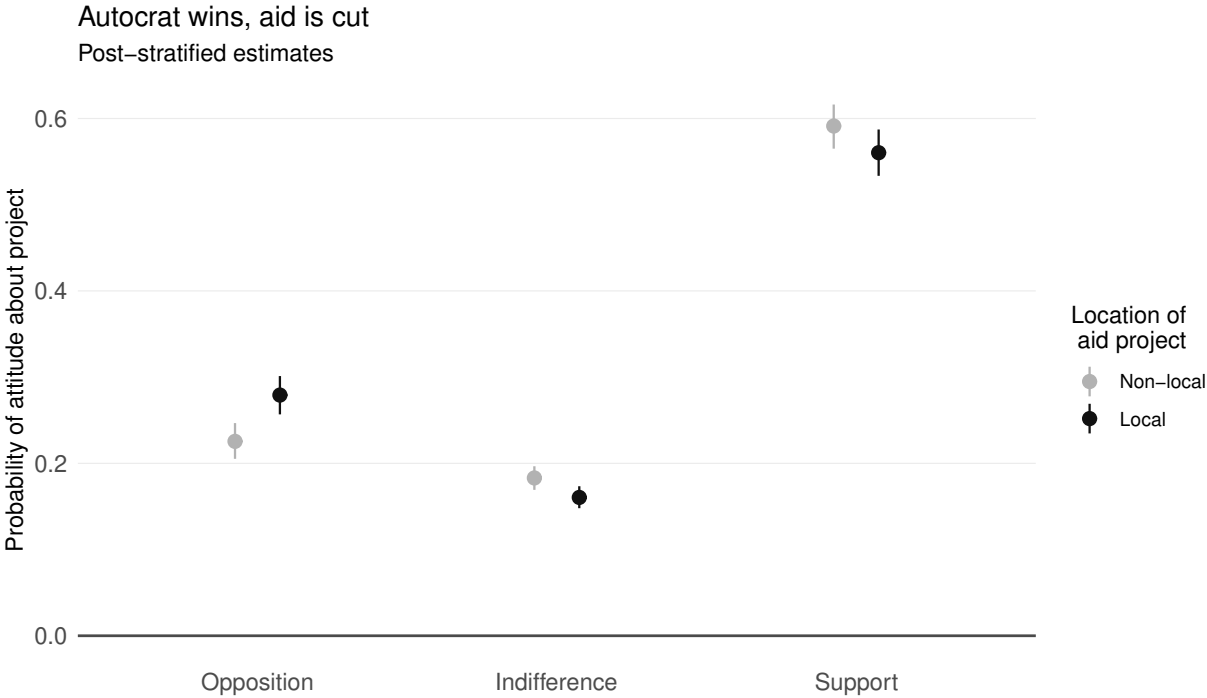


Figure 3. *Autocrat wins, foreign aid is cut.* Figure is constructed analogously to Figure 2.

In the appendix, we replicate the analyses from above using five levels to capture finer-grained support for aid grants and sanctions. Specifically, these alternate specifications add “strong opposition” and “strong support” categories. Figure A.1 in the appendix presents the results. For the scenario in which a democrat wins and the government proposes increased in democracy aid, we find that a local policy impact is associated with a significant decline in

strong opposition and opposition, while the highest level of support for the policy increases. In the aid sanctions case, the probabilities of strong opposition and opposition increase when the policy would have a local impact. However, the consistency of the results are lower; 84% and 93% of simulations lead to increases for the two categories, respectively. The probability for indifference falls significantly, whereas probabilities of support stay roughly the same.

## **Subgroup Effects**

Given that we collected additional data on demographics, ideology, life experiences, and features of the aid change scenarios, we encounter an opportunity to consider conditionality with respect to our treatments. The section “Examining Heterogeneity” in the appendix provides figures replicating results for a variety of subgroups. We use the applicable subset of the CCES data to perform the post-stratification. We want to emphasize that this examination is purely exploratory, geared primarily toward generating suggestions for future studies regarding how local effects in foreign policy could interact with other factors. toward this end, we describe some overall patterns here and highlight interesting relations.

First, we find that, in the case of a victorious autocrat, opposition to locally costly sanctions varies with age. Specifically, younger respondents see less opposition in the local treatment condition while older respondents see more; 90% of the simulations show this increase when examining a subset of data representing the fourth quartile of age, relative to the first quartile. Similarly, 97% of simulations show that, in the aftermath of victorious democrats, the gain in support associated with locally beneficial aid grants is greater moving from the first to fourth quartile of age.

We see interactive pocketbook effects (Heinrich et al. 2018). Two of our non-experimental variables speak to this: housing value and life changes. The moderation effects are equivalent across the two. People whose life had got better (in their own estimation) over the last year and those with higher housing values experience a smaller treatment of local democracy aid

grants compared to people with worse lives. These moderations in treatment effects do not occur in the aid sanctions scenario.

We find opposite conditioning effects of education across our two scenarios. Those with high levels of education see larger treatment effects in the autocratic win/sanction scenario, yet these same highly-educated respondents see dampened treatment effects in the democrat wins/aid grant scenario. It appears that education is not merely proxying better economic outcomes, but could be capturing socialization or basic attitudes (Hainmueller and Hiscox 2006).

While we think these interesting interaction effects are worth highlighting, we reiterate that they could be mere artifacts of randomness and examining many cases. We did not consider conditionality in our theory linking the local domestic impact of foreign policy to individual policy support. However, our findings provide an intriguing first look at patterns that could be worth future theoretical considerations and analysis using new data.

## **Conclusion**

By cueing respondents to the domestic location of benefits from aid grants or costs from aid sanctions, we study whether individuals have geographically parochial interests that influence their attitudes on foreign policy. We find strong evidence of local effects: respondents are more supportive of aid grants that benefits organizations and firms in their area, while reporting greater opposition to aid sanctions that harm local firms.

Our experiment offers a “proof of concept” that individuals care about the local implications of programs geared ostensibly toward international spending. Our design is not entirely unlike a scenario where someone might read about local economic benefits in a newspaper or press release. However, future research can improve upon the external validity of our findings by expressly considering the manner in which people receive the messages and the variety of information sources to which they could be exposed, all of which could affect attitudes.

Our study leads to several new insights. As people generally dislike more expensive foreign aid outlays (Heinrich et al., 2018; Heinrich and Kobayashi 2018), it seems politically opportune to garner political support through a small coalition of states and parliamentarians that stand to benefit. This scenario appropriately mimics reality in the US where a large percentage of any domestic aid contract goes to a small number of states. Accordingly, a small coalition should be able to log-roll effectively in Congress for support.

Though it might risk pushing our results too far, these discussions could imply that our understanding of democracy promotion via foreign aid must incorporate the role of distributional and local effects in addition to those who support on cosmopolitan grounds (Brancati 2014). At the very least, opportunistic local politicians in Congress should be expected to vie for democracy aid contracts beyond the purely monetary values. While aid funds will benefit some firms who might be campaign donors, there is likely an added benefit: the legislator can tout achievements and reap the public relation benefits (Grimmer et al., 2014). These rent-seeking and opportunistic rationales behind democracy aid might be cause of alarm as donor-driven aid is less effective (Bearce and Tirone 2010). Yet, democracy aid has long been recognized as a success story in foreign aid (Finkel et al., 2007; Heinrich and Loftis 2019; Scott and Steele 2005). Why might that the parochial interests behind democracy aid not render it ineffective? The solution to this puzzle could lie in the greater monitoring that tied aid enjoys at the hands of Congress (Bush 2015). Our study, alongside Brancati (2014), is the first to tackle the donor-domestic determinants of democracy aid; future work should try to predict variation in effectiveness based on these factors.

Finally, future research should address the piece of the puzzle about which we still know relatively little: how does public opinion on aid and sanctions—particularly with respect to geographic considerations—affect actual policy. One implication of our findings is that respondents support democracy aid grants less, but support aid sanctions more, when these policies affect the economy of a more distant US state. Followup studies could benefit from

examining whether the use of aid is more common when the positive domestic economic consequences are more dispersed across US house districts or US states; in this case, citizens in more constituencies would support aid in accordance with the locally beneficial effect. Similarly, sanctions—even quite costly sanctions—might be feasible when the domestic negative impact is sufficiently concentrated in fewer Congressional districts, as there would be fewer people upset as well as fewer representatives to contact when voicing their opposition.



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