

Identity and Public Attitudes to Foreign Aid: A Framework for Bottom-Up Policy Reform

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I declare that this work is entirely my own and has not been carried out in collaboration with others

Signed
Kizzy Gandy

To my mum, for always believing in me and for teaching me to fight for what I believe in

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Abstract

How can we close the gap between the policy commitments governments make at the international level and policy implementation at the domestic level in order to address global problems such as poverty and climate change? I integrate the constructivist perspective in international relations and self-categorization theory in social psychology to propose an identity-based approach to bottom-up policy reform. Identities are context-dependent categorisations of 'self' and 'other' which help actors navigate reality. I argue that policy outputs are determined by the state's identity whereas each citizen's policy preferences are determined by the multiple identities which comprise their self-concept. State identities constitute cultural norms and the state's international image relative to other states. Citizen identities constitute personal value priorities (personal identities) and group memberships (social identities).

Citizens contribute to the state identity but a state's identity is bigger than the sum of its parts. Therefore, the aggregate preferences of individual citizens may not necessarily correspond to policy outputs. This is not undemocratic because people do not engage in policy issues unless doing so is stereotypical of their current context-dependent identity. In addition, people modify their interpretation of identity stereotypes so that their behaviours are not wildly contradictory across situations. Identities that are maintained by few people lack popular legitimacy so they become behaviourally aligned with identities that are important to the majority. This means that the state's identity has a top-down influence on public opinion, making it difficult for radical change to catch on. However, reframing an issue can reconfigure identity stereotypes, enabling the established order to be challenged.

To test my model I focus on the commitment by developed countries to increase foreign aid. I use cross-national policy and survey data for 13 major aid donor states. I find that: (1) state identities are pro- or anti-aid in line with the justice norms that underpin their domestic welfare policies; (2) personal and social identities that are other-focused are stereotypically pro-aid and those that are self-focused are stereotypically anti-aid; (3) the degree to which people's personal identities are pro-aid depends on the pro-aid orientation of their social identities, and the degree to which their social identities are pro-aid depends on the pro-aid orientation of the state identity; and (4) policy discourses shape identity stereotypes.

I offer four prescriptions for enhancing global governance to reduce poverty in developing countries. First, states legitimately pursue differentiated policy orientations to maintain their identities. Therefore, replacing uniform policy targets with unique performance criteria could facilitate positive synergies between states as they will be motivated to scale-up identity-congruent policies. Second, reminding citizens about their personal and social identities that are stereotypically pro-aid could activate the dormant aid constituency. Third, direct lobbying to change a state's anti-aid policy orientation could facilitate bottom-up momentum through a realignment of legitimate citizen behaviour. Finally, discursively linking foreign aid to helping others rather than serving the national interest could expand the size of the aid constituency because supporting aid will become stereotypical of inherently other-focused identities.

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Acronyms and Definitions

Commonwealth of Nations (the Commonwealth)	An intergovernmental organisation comprising 54 states, 52 of which were former British colonies
CSO	civil society organisation
DAC	Development Assistance Committee
EU	European Union
FDI	foreign direct investment
G8	Group of eight governments from the world's largest economies
G20	Group of twenty finance ministers and central bank governors
GDP	gross domestic product
global governance	Global public policy aimed at solving problems that affect more than one country
GNI	gross national income
GPG	global public good
individual agency	The capacity to effectively act upon the world
logic of the everyday	Habitual experiences that configure what is understandable, thinkable and imaginable
LDCs	least developed countries
LICs	low income countries
MDGs	Millennium Development Goals
NGO	non-governmental organisation
ODA	official development assistance
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
PCD	policy coherence for development
PR	proportional representation
SCT	self-categorization theory
structural determinism	Historical and institutional rules and conditions that determine behaviour

UN	United Nations
welfare state regimes	The classification of different types of welfare states according to the role of the state, market and family in welfare provision
word-deeds gap	The difference between intentions and behaviour
WTO	World Trade Organization

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