

Anti-aid rhetoric has an impact, but only among fans of populist politicians

July 8 2021

Populist anti-foreign aid rhetoric works—but only fans of populist politicians are convinced by hostile messages about charity abroad, a new study shows. Those who distrust populist politicians are significantly less susceptible to these messages.

The research shows international aid institutions and non-populist politicians should not be unduly worried about the impact of populism on global development cooperation.

Those wanting to convince the public about the importance of foreign aid should focus on communicating their message transparently and clearly, and using local partnerships.

The research, by A. Burcu Bayram from the University of Arkansas and Catarina Thomson from the University of Exeter, is published in the *International Studies Quarterly*.

Dr. Thomson says that "populists are not converting pro-aid individuals with their rhetoric; they are preaching to those predisposed to be converted. Populist parties and politicians continue to portray overseas aid spending as the enemy of prosperity 'at home', and this has an impact on public attitudes."

"We have found those most likely to be swayed by anti-foreign aid populist rhetoric are those who have favorable views of populist leaders. This means the situation for those wanting to make the case for foreign

aid isn't necessarily as bleak as many fear. The Conservative Party backlash to cuts is a good example of this."

"The effect of negative comments about foreign aid is moderated by whether people think populist leaders stand up for the little guy or scapegoat those in other nations. The future of global development might not be as bleak as previously feared in the age of populism."

Dr. Bayram says that they "found people who trust populist leaders are more persuaded by populist rhetoric against aid than those who are suspicious of populists. Populist rhetoric against foreign development aid has a larger impact on the willingness to provide such aid when people think populist leaders represent the will of the people than when they think populist leaders scapegoat others."

Academics surveyed 1,600 American and 1,200 British adults during 2017 and 2018. First they measured their [political views](#), asking if they saw populist leaders as the kind of leaders who "stand up for the little guy" or "scapegoat out-groups" for America or Britain's problems. Participants were asked to read a hypothetical scenario showing how leaders had handled multilateral development aid in different ways. One group were told the U.S. President or Prime Minister had said people prefer to help children in their country first; another were told the President or Prime Minister blamed elites for exaggerating the situation of global poverty and manipulating the people and another were told the President or Prime Minister said it was not their country's responsibility to help. A [control group](#) was told the President or Prime Minister had called for a congressional or parliamentary committee to evaluate a request from UNICEF's for more funding.

Participants were then asked about their willingness to contribute funds to UNICEF, and if the American or British government should provide additional funds to UNICEF.

In the UK, among the participants exposed to anti-aid populist [rhetoric](#), those who believe that populist leaders scapegoat others were 31 percentage points less likely to want to reduce aid funding compared to those who believe populist leaders stand up for "the little guy". They find similar results in the U.S..

About 12 per cent of British respondents expressed strong support for funding UNICEF while about 22 percent said they were strongly opposed. Around 16 percent of Americans were strongly in favor of funding UNICEF and 23 percent were strongly opposed.

Those in the UK told their leader wanted to help children in their country first, global poverty was exaggerated or it was not their country's responsibility to help, were 6 percentage points more likely to say funding should definitely not be given to UNICEF, compared with those told their leader would get an outside body to consider the charity's request.

More information: A Burcu Bayram et al, Ignoring the Messenger? Limits of Populist Rhetoric on Public Support for Foreign Development Aid, *International Studies Quarterly* (2021). [DOI: 10.1093/isq/sqab041](https://doi.org/10.1093/isq/sqab041)

Provided by University of Exeter

Citation: Anti-aid rhetoric has an impact, but only among fans of populist politicians (2021, July 8) retrieved 17 July 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2021-07-anti-aid-rhetoric-impact-fans-populist.html>

This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.