

The Choice for Multilateralism:
Foreign Aid and American Foreign Policy¹

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Abstract

Why do states choose multilateralism? We develop three theories that could explain this choice: a principal-agent model in which states trade some control over the policy for greater burden sharing; a normative logic of appropriateness; and hegemonic self-binding in which powerful states seek to reassure other countries. Each theory leads to distinct observable hypotheses regarding both the reasons for and the patterns of the public's support and opposition to multilateralism. To focus our study, we choose to analyze bilateral and multilateral foreign aid giving by the United States. The U.S. position as hegemon makes it a good test, and aid is an important avenue of foreign policy with clear bilateral and multilateral choices. By analyzing survey data, we provide evidence about the correlates of public support for multilateral engagement, showing that two competing rationales—burden sharing and control—dictate some of the politics around the choice between multilateral and bilateral aid channels. We conclude with a discussion of how a principal-agent model can help us understand the choice for multilateralism.

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I. Introduction

In pursuing their foreign policies, countries may choose to engage bilaterally or multilaterally. Bilateralism often refers to a set of policies that are not coordinated with other countries and/or that engage with one other country alone.² Multilateralism implies adopting a coordinated approach among three or more states. In much of the post–World War II period, the US has pursued a policy of international engagement through multilateralism (Kupchan and Trubowitz, 2007, pg. 158). We seek to understand the sources of the public’s support and opposition to multilateral engagement in the US. We focus on the choice between bilateral foreign aid, which a donor country gives directly to a recipient, and multilateral foreign aid, which a donor country gives to a multilateral institution, such as the World Bank, which pools funds from many countries and allocates aid to recipients.

Why do countries choose multilateralism? We have chosen to study the US in part because its choice of multilateralism has always been surprising given that it is the world’s hegemon, with the means to achieve its goals bilaterally. And while the US has often pursued bilateral measures, its multilateral engagements have been notable in many areas of foreign policy, from NATO in military security to the WTO in trade policy (Holsti, 2004, pg. 287). However, public support for multilateralism has not been constant; and in most issue areas multilateralism is accompanied by bilateral policies as well. We seek to understand the domestic sources of support and opposition to multilateral engagement.

To focus our broader interest in multilateralism, we explore why countries choose to give foreign aid multilaterally rather than bilaterally. Aid is an interesting case for exploring the broader question of why states employ multilateralism. First, aid is an important instrument of

² The distinction between bilateral and unilateral relations in foreign policy terms is hard to maintain. Most policies are directed at particular countries, and hence even if chosen by the US alone they are part of a bilateral relationship.

influence because it can affect recipient country policies (Baldwin, 1986; Bueno de Mesquita and Smith, 2007; Kuziemko and Werker, 2007). Aid is important for both security and economic policy, and hence involves significant political stakes. Second, there is a fairly clear distinction between a policy of bilateral aid and one of multilateral giving. Bilateral aid is given directly to a foreign country or to groups within it. In a multilateral policy, the US and other countries either coordinate their aid giving or they give aid to an international institution, like the World Bank or a regional development bank, which then distributes that aid according to the institution's own decision process. For close to sixty years, in each budgetary cycle the US has chosen to give some percentage of its aid through multilateral channels (usually between 10 and 30% of total aid) and the rest bilaterally (see Figure 1). The choice of how to send aid is especially interesting in light of evidence that multilateral aid is often more efficient than bilateral aid (Balogh, 1967; Easterly and Pfutze, 2008; Lumsdaine, 1993; Maizels and Nissanke, 1984; Martens et al., 2002). It is also more likely to follow OECD rules for best practices in aid and thus is less likely to serve donor's priorities than recipient needs (Easterly and Pfutze, 2008; Martens et al., 2002).

<figure 1 here>

Recent work suggests multilateralism involves delegation in a principal-agent setting, and we seek to develop this argument further (Hawkins et al., 2006; Nielson and Tierney, 2003; Tierney, 2006). States may want to delegate to a common agent under an arrangement where others also agree to commit resources but cede direct control to the agent. The cost is some loss of control over aid policy; the gain is a coordinated policy that pools resources. As principal-agent models suggest, governments face a tradeoff between the desire to share burdens with other countries and the desire to control the policy. We also consider two alternative explanations. First, powerful states may choose to pursue multilateralism as a means of demonstrating to others that they are not going to abuse their overwhelming influence (Lake,

2009). Hegemonic states may try to bind themselves to the rules and procedures of multilateralism in order to advance their own goals. Second, a country may adopt multilateralism because of powerful norms that designate it as the most appropriate or legitimate means of pursuing one's foreign policy (Finnemore, 1996a; Ruggie, 1993). Normative pressures may thus account for the choice of multilateralism.

To our knowledge, no study has tested the principal-agent model or the alternatives. We do this by analyzing public opinion on multilateralism, which is a useful test of the principal-agent model but is also informative for several more general reasons. First, public opinion on foreign policy does reach the ears of political leaders and can affect their thinking (PIPA, 2001).³ Second, public opinion may reflect elite attitudes. The public and elites in the US both exhibit caution toward the use of multilateral aid but also recognize its benefits. Although we do not causally link public opinion, elite opinion, and policy outputs, our study suggests that elite policy choices and public opinion are consistent on this issue. Earlier work has also found congruence between mass opinion and elites on foreign policy issues (Aldrich et al., 1989) or at least congruence in some areas but not others (Busby and Monten, forthcoming). A systematic elite sample for our study would be most desirable. Lacking access to such a sample, our quantitative analyses rely on the most systematic public opinion polling on the issue to date. Finally, public opinion research like ours has a long history; hence, our findings contribute to a tradition that emphasizes the importance of public opinion for foreign policy (Aldrich et al., 2006; Aldrich et al., 1989; Holsti, 2004; Page and Shapiro, 1992; Sobel, 2001; Wittkopf, 1990). We find very stable patterns of preferences over multilateralism in aid in a number of surveys. Our evidence shows that attitudes about different means of engagement hinge on actors' beliefs about the

³ A 2004 sample of House and Senate members asked how important public opinion was for the formation of foreign policy. On a 0-10 scale, with 0 not at all influential and 10 extremely influential, average responses were 7 and 7.5 for the House and Senate, respectively (ChicagoCouncil, 2005).

importance of American control of foreign policy versus the need for burden sharing. We also examine sub-samples of the public most likely to resemble foreign policy elites—those with college degrees—and show that they have similar patterns of opinions. The public’s understanding of these tradeoffs provides support for principal-agent models of politics.

This paper continues in four sections. First, we discuss what we mean by multilateralism and how it differs from internationalism. Second, we discuss the PA model and two alternative theoretical frames and show how they shed light on the choice between multilateral and bilateral aid giving. Each is associated with several testable hypotheses about support and opposition to multilateralism in foreign aid. Third, we introduce a new series of surveys that provide the first tests of the theoretical arguments and allow us to examine the choice for multilateralism much more carefully than existing studies. We have framed our survey questions so that they explicitly address the different theoretical reasons for preferring a bilateral or a multilateral approach, and we solicit the reasons for this choice. Our surveys also allow us to examine what political factors best predict support for and opposition to multilateralism in aid giving. Having multiple surveys conducted at different points in time gives us greater confidence in our results and suggests that the attitudes expressed may be fairly representative. We conclude with thoughts about the future study of the choice for multilateralism and how our arguments might operate in other issue areas.

II. Multilateralism Defined and Differentiated from Internationalism

States face a hierarchy of choices related to their foreign policy. We label these three choices internationalism, cooperation, and multilateralism. Their first choice is whether to engage with the international system and other states and how much engagement to pursue. Isolationism usually implies a preference for limited engagement and high dependence on self-help strategies. Autarchy and the fortification of a country’s borders are typical of this strategy.

Internationalism, on the other hand, means extensive engagement with other countries for security and economic exchange. Alliances, treaties, cooperation within international institutions, and economic cooperation agreements are hallmarks of an internationalist strategy. The choice of whether to engage or not, however, does not determine the type of foreign policy instruments employed in such engagement nor the process for engaging with other countries. We show later that support for internationalism is largely unrelated to the choice of multilateralism.

A second choice for states then is how to engage if internationalism is being pursued. What kinds of foreign policy tools are they going to utilize? Some have phrased this as the choice between cooperative versus militant internationalism (Wittkopf, 1990). This choice often pits primary reliance upon military means and the use of force against economic instruments of statecraft such as foreign aid, investment treaties, and trade. The reliance upon mainly military means or coercion of various sorts gives foreign policy a “militant” cast. In contrast, cooperative strategies focus more on mutual gain, often through economic exchange. This decision is a critical one, but it is distinct both from that for engagement in the first place and from multilateralism.

Finally, once states make a choice among foreign policy instruments, they then face the issue of whether to use those tools bilaterally or to coordinate their action with that of other states, i.e., to act multilaterally. Bilateralism often refers to set of policies that are not coordinated with other countries and/or that engage with another country singly. Multilateralism, by contrast, involves both the coordination of policy among three or more states, and coordination around a series of generalized principles of conduct. As Ruggie maintains, multilateralism involves “principles which specify appropriate conduct for a class of actions without regard to the particularistic interests of the parties or the strategic exigencies that may exist in any specific occurrence” (1993, pg. 11).

Ruggie (1993) notes that multilateralism may not involve a formal international institution. While we agree conceptually, in foreign aid multilateralism has involved coordination through international or regional institutions like the World Bank, regional development banks, the UN, and the EU. In other issue areas, the role of international institutions in a multilateral strategy is also important: in trade, the WTO and many preferential trade agreements (PTAs) play this role, and in security NATO is obviously salient.⁴ This third-stage choice between bilateralism and multilateralism is less related to the initial choice for engagement and the secondary decision about which foreign policy tools to use than many scholars assume (Holsti and Rosenau, 1984, 1986; Wittkopf, 1986), though see (Chittick et al., 1995). With these difference choices in mind, we turn to our main focus.

III. Three Theories of Multilateralism

Why do countries choose multilateralism over bilateralism? We claim that there are at least three theoretical explanations in the literature: principal-agent, self-binding, and constructivist or normative (see also Lake, 1999, 217-23). Our goal is to provide a first test of the PA model and to compare its support with alternative theories that might also help explain multilateralism.

Principal-Agent Theory

In principal-agent (PA) models, governments are principals who have a choice of whether to delegate policy-making to agents, namely international institutions (Hawkins et al., 2006; Nielson and Tierney, 2003; Tierney, 2006). Multilateralism is associated with the choice to delegate to an international institution and hence PA models seem well suited to explain the choice for multilateralism. Principals have an incentive to delegate because they do not have the knowledge, ability, or desire to make certain decisions as well as the agent can. For delegation to

⁴ This paper focuses on the choice to use these multilateral organizations. Future work could explore less institutionalized forms of multilateralism, which are also important.

occur, the principals must enjoy some gain from reducing transaction costs or improving their ability to resolve collective action problems.

Delegation, however, raises the issue of control since the principal cannot observe or direct all actions the agent takes, and hence the agent may make decisions that the principal might not desire. If there is any divergence in preferences between the principal and the agent, then this imperfect observation creates the possibility that the agent does not promote the preferences of the principal. This difference between the agent's and the principal's preferences that can lead to undesired outcomes by the principal when monitoring is imperfect is often termed agency slack. This situation creates a dilemma for the principal and agent. The principal in order to minimize agency slack must either appoint agents whose preferences are identical to his own, or find ways to write a contract that motivates yet constrains the agent. The principal tries to minimize his loss of control, while maximizing the contributions of the agent. But the greater the constraints on the agent, the less the agent is likely to invest in performing his duties well. This dilemma animates the dynamics of support for and opposition to multilateralism. When there are multiple principals delegating to a single agent, as is the case for multilateralism in foreign policy, then it is almost certain that at some point, the agent will make a decision that is not preferred by one or more of the principals because the principals usually do not have identical preferences.

The key tradeoff then involves the gain created by using the agent and pooling resources versus the loss of control for the principal. A crucial gain from delegation is burden sharing, but this of course involves multiple principals (i.e., other countries) with their own preferences. Why is burden sharing so important? If states are making decisions about the provision of global public goods, there is a likelihood of under-provision as each one tries to free ride on the efforts of others. Multilateral security organizations, like NATO, and economic aid organizations, like

the EU and World Bank, help countries to overcome such collective action problems and provide greater amounts of public goods for more countries generally.⁵

Foreign aid in particular manifests collective action dilemmas: “From the perspective of a recipient country’s welfare, incentives for any one donor to shirk on activities that maximize overall development in favor of activities that contribute to donor-specific goals strengthen as the number of donors increase” (Knack and Rahman, 2008, pg. 334). In aid, the World Bank can help solve this free riding problem and facilitate burden sharing. For example, in the World Bank regular replenishments of donor commitments to the IDA have required that a certain number of donors agree to commit to a substantial level of aid giving in order to move forward. This procedure forces at least some sizable number of countries to make their commitments public and to avoid free riding on others. The IDA replenishment procedures have fostered greater burden sharing in a number of cases where countries seemed to want to refuse to commit aid dollars (Mason and Asher, 1973, pg. 410-415). In the US, this procedure has been praised by some. In testimony to the US Congress, for example, Treasury Secretary Robert Rubin noted how multilateralism in aid can enhance burden sharing, pointing out that the World Bank’s International Development Association (IDA) “is the world’s largest lender of concessional resources for projects in [public goods provision like] health, primary education, nutrition, safe drinking water, proper sanitation; and in IDA for every dollar that we [the US] put up, roughly speaking \$8.5 is lent [by others]” (Rubin, 1999, pg. 6).

Support for international burden sharing resonates broadly. Americans support multilateralism because they believe it “will be cheaper than unilateralism in the long run” since other countries will work in cooperation with the US (Lake, 1999, pg. 220). Keohane and Nye

⁵ Internal burden sharing in international institutions is a topic of significant interest. Early research pointed out that countries will share burdens differently depending on size, with the largest countries providing the most (Olson and Zeckhauser, 1966).

(1985, pg. 153), Cowhey (1993a, pg. 311), and Holsti (2004, pg. 267) point out that multilateralism relies upon cooperation in international institutions and that burden sharing is crucial to this multilateral engagement and attitudes supporting it. As Cowhey (1993a, 311) maintains, “The practice of multilateralism also ameliorates concerns over the possibility of the economic bleeding of America while other countries shirked their duties. Collective public institutions (e.g., NATO and the World Bank) with clear conditions on access to their benefits and contributions by other countries addressed US fears about burden sharing.” In the case of aid, there is a strong incentive for multilateralism—that is, using a common agent—in that it facilitates burden sharing and prevents free riding. Members of Congress and Treasury Secretaries often point out that reducing support for multilateral organizations would lead to reductions in aid from other countries.⁶ The burden-sharing nature of multilateral organizations means that one country’s reductions in multilateral funding are likely to lead to substantially larger cuts overall as other countries also decide to contribute less.

PA theory makes clear the connection between the benefits from burden sharing and the costs of such delegation, which involves a loss of control. In aid policy, once the US delegates aid to the World Bank, it loses *some* (of course, not all) amount of control over who gets the aid, what projects are funded, and what conditions are imposed on recipients. Indeed, control over multilateral aid agencies has often been a concern for American policymakers. While proponents

⁶ For example, Representative Long noted this with respect to the World Bank’s International Development Association (IDA): “Is it not true if we cut this...that this will have a multiplier effect in causing every other contributing nation to make a significant reduction?” (CongressionalRecord, 1977, pg. 20573). Nearly 20 years later this theme continued. “The Kasich amendment would cut \$56 million, but, in fact, it has the impact, because it is leveraged 118 times, which makes it undoubtedly the most single cost-effective element in our entire foreign aid budget...the capital contribution to the World Bank eliminated by this amendment leverages burden-sharing by other countries at a ratio greater than \$4 for every \$1 of US contribution” (CongressionalRecord, 1993, pg. 13159-60). Others note that the multiplier effect of US participation is so great as to also lead to beneficial distributional consequences for the US. “I also want to point out that because we leverage lending ability, the \$62 million appropriation which we provided last year to the World Bank resulted in \$1,120,000,000 in procurement from the bank during the same period of time for American business” (CongressionalRecord, 1993, pg. 13158). While states might coordinate their bilateral aid programs in order to share burdens, this is decidedly less institutionalized in practice.

of multilaterals highlight the benefits of burden sharing, opponents respond with arguments that the US should retain control over its aid dollars (Rubin, 1999). These concerns have echoed across several decades. In 1972, a subcommittee of the House Appropriations committee issued this missive to President Nixon: “The committee is deeply concerned over the trend to direct an increasing amount of US foreign assistance through the multilateral institutions while at the same time decreasing the bilateral aid program...The same degree of detailed examination which is possible in the bilateral foreign assistance programs is impossible in the multilateral assistance programs. The Congress does not know when, where, or how the budget requests will be disbursed by these multilateral organizations because they do not justify their requests by specific project” (House, 1972, pg. 33). A House minority report several years later echoed similar concerns (Gwin, 1994; House, 1977, pg. 72-73). In the 1980s, some members of Congress were infuriated that loans from the World Bank were flowing to China, and in the early 1990s they objected to funds flowing to Iran. Between 1993 and 2000 the US was able to convince other G-7 members of the Bank to vote against loans to Iran, but in 2000 this coalition against Iran dissolved, leading to a flurry of Congressional action and complaints about World Bank aid to Iran (Kirk, 2007; Sanford, 2008). Members of Congress have gone so far as to create a World Bank Caucus, designed in part to extend greater oversight and control over it (Wroughton, 2008). This suggests the important role that “control” plays in the politics of multilateral aid.

Debate, however, continues about how autonomous international institutions are from powerful countries and hence whether principal-agent models make sense in international politics. Some scholars have argued that multilateral institutions like the World Bank and IMF are largely controlled by “powerful” states (Stone, 2002). Even if true, there are two reasons why this position does not undermine our argument. First, a number of scholars, including Stone,

agree that these institutions still have substantial leeway (Boas and McNeil, 2003, pg. 92). Most analysts, such as Hawkins et al. (2006), Gutner (2005), Gutner and Thompson (2010) and Boas and McNeil (pg. 23), view extreme claims that multilaterals are either entirely controlled or entirely uncontrolled by states as inaccurate. If international institutions are not perfectly controlled by the largest power(s) in them, then this margin of autonomy makes the principal-agent framework useful. The possibility of agency slack creates a dilemma for both principals and agents. As the institution's autonomy grows or as the preferences of other contributing states diverge (Nielson and Tierney, 2003), the principals' concerns over the loss of control should grow as well. Second, political actors in the US believe that such multilateral institutions take control of policy away from national actors. Concerns over the loss of control through multilateral aid giving have frequently been voiced in Congress, as shown above. Whether true or not, the World Bank is believed to usurp American control over aid policy, and this belief animates domestic politics.

Principal-agent models thus identify the tradeoff between loss of control and gains from burden sharing as the main dynamic that influences the decision for or against multilateralism. By participating, each donor country loses some ability to direct aid to the exact recipient countries and projects it favors. But it gains from the international institution's ability to overcome collective action problems and induce a higher level of public goods provision through burden sharing (Knack and Rahman, 2008). This process relieves some of the problems associated with bilateral aid provision.

But the benefits of burden sharing and the costs of the loss of control over foreign policy may vary for different domestic actors.⁷ Opposition to multilateralism is likely to arise from

⁷In our case one can imagine that the country as a principal is also composed of multiple principals—i.e., voters who elect the government.

domestic actors whose preferences on an issue are farthest from the international institution's, since delegation gives the institution some latitude to pursue its own goals. All principals prefer an agent who has preferences identical to theirs since then the loss of control is not consequential. But if principals—domestically or internationally—have divergent preferences, then one must expect contestation over delegation (Hawkins et al., 2006). Indeed, Nielson discusses how different elements within the US government itself can have different preferences over what the World Bank should be doing (Nielson and Tierney, 2003).

Public support and opposition to multilateralism will then depend on the structure of preferences in an issue area. The costs of delegating will be low and the benefits high when a domestic group's most preferred foreign policy (its "ideal point") is close to that of the agent—in this case, the multilateral institution responsible for coordinating policy. As the preferences of the domestic group depart from those of the institution's, the costs of delegation rise, because the resulting policies will not reflect what the group prefers. Hence if liberal groups in the US prefer a policy of greater foreign aid for economic development while conservatives prefer that aid be used to build up the military or serve US commercial interests, and the multilateral institution coordinating aid policy supports economic development goals for the recipient, then the costs of delegating policy will be lower for liberals than for conservatives.⁸ Domestic political divisions thus should play a role in explaining support for and opposition to multilateralism if PA models have traction.

⁸ On the other hand, if conservatives prefer to use force in crises and liberals prefer other strategies, and the international institution for coordinating security policy has preferences for the use of force closer to that of the conservatives, then liberal groups will face higher costs if they delegate security policy to the institution.

We expect this partisan divide to play out differently in different issue areas, depending on the structure of domestic preferences relative to those of the relevant international institution.⁹ The World Bank's attention to development in contrast to the strategic and commercial opportunities afforded by bilateral aid suggests that Democratic aid policy preferences are closer to those of the World Bank than are those of Republicans. Fleck and Kilby (2006) find that during periods of Republican control of the United States Congress, foreign aid programs were driven largely by commercial interests. When Democrats control the Presidency and Congress, development concerns govern aid allocation more than when the Congress and/or Presidency are controlled by Republicans. Also, geopolitical interests get more weight with a conservative President (Milner and Tingley, 2010). But this reverses when it comes to non-military assistance.¹⁰ These findings suggest greater divergences in aid preferences between the World Bank and conservatives in the US, and help explain why they might worry more about loss of control in delegation to the Bank.

To the extent that the principal-agent logic is correct, we expect that 1) the public should be divided over multilateralism and 2) the main reasons given for these differences should center around preferences for control relative to burden sharing. In addition, if our assumptions about preferences hold, we expect that 3) conservatives in the US should be more opposed to delegation to the multilateral agent than liberals and they should be much more concerned with loss of control in aid policy and that 4) domestic support for multilateralism should depend on which party controls the executive branch. Loss of control (especially for conservatives) should be less worrisome when the executive is from the opposite party because conservatives expect a

⁹ A general finding in the public opinion literature is that attitudes toward multilateralism break down along liberal-conservative lines but little theoretical reason is given for this opposition to multilateralism per se (Broz, 2008; Holsti, 2004).

¹⁰ The 2004 National Leaders survey of political elites also shows greater support amongst liberals for helping LDC's improve standard of living compared to conservatives, whereas this relationship reverses for questions about military aid (ChicagoCouncil, 2005).

liberal president would give bilateral aid according to similar principles as the multilateral institution; in other words, conservatives see the aid priorities of a liberal president and the institution as similarly negative, so it is not as important that control over aid be retained by the executive.

Alternative Explanation #1: Hegemonic Self-Binding Theory

One alternative account of why countries choose multilateralism relies on the calculations of the strongest country. In this view, the hegemon, the world's strongest power, must first choose multilateralism and then others will follow. A hegemon chooses this as a form of self-constraint that allows it to signal to other countries that it will not abuse its position if the others participate in a joint adventure. As Lake argues, "dominant states must demonstrate that they cannot or will not abuse the authority that subordinates have entrusted to them...Some mechanism of restricting opportunism by dominant states is necessary. This requires that dominant states tie their hands, giving up policies or options they would have otherwise enjoyed, or send costly signals of their benign intent or willingness to act only within the bounds of what their subordinates regard as legitimate... Multilateralism has been a key signaling mechanism for the US since 1945" (Lake, 2009, pg. 14). Similarly, others such as Ikenberry (2001) and Deudney (2007) have posited that the US has used international institutions and multilateralism to self-bind and restrain its power since World War II. Cowhey makes a related argument, which suggests that hegemons reduce their costs by not having to coerce other states constantly, and this is the reason they are willing to self-bind. "Other [states] will not become fully committed to working within the multilateral order unless they believe the dominant powers intend to stay with it. And it is in the interest of the great powers to reduce their burdens by winning voluntary compliance" (Cowhey, 1993a, pg. 158).

The problem for states is the credibility of the great powers' self-restraint. Given that the US is so powerful, why should others expect it to follow the multilateral rules, especially if they do not promote American interests at a particular moment? This dilemma is grave for the hegemon since by definition it has enough capacity to pursue its own interests. Cowhey argues that domestic politics can provide an important answer.¹¹ "The credibility of the promises of the strong are [sic] strongly influenced by the degree to which their external obligations make sense in light of their domestic political preferences and institutions. For democracies the nature of the electoral system, the distribution of preferences of voters...are important determinants of the credibility of foreign policy promises by the strong" (Cowhey, 1993b, pg. 186). Cowhey argues that US public support for multilateralism has been a critical element in establishing the credibility of this policy. The hegemonic constraint argument about multilateralism would thus seem to rely to some extent on American public opinion. Lack of support by the American public would undermine the credibility of US self-binding attempts.

The argument that multilateralism is a self-constraint for large powers has not to our knowledge been applied to specific issue areas like foreign aid. It is a general claim that applies to any foreign policy tool employed by a dominant power. As the hegemon, the US could use its disproportionate influence to give lots of aid and demand many concessions from recipients in return. Other potential donors with fewer resources might not like to compete with the US in aid giving, expecting the recipients to acquiesce to US preferences and not their own. By giving aid through a multilateral organization that sets priorities collectively, the US might be seen as constraining itself, making other donors feel less threatened by US giving and more inclined to give aid themselves.

¹¹ Alternatively, multilateralism can provoke many countries to sanction defection by any one country; this can make the costs of defection large. See Martin (1992) and Maggi (1999).

The self-binding theory of multilateralism does not suggest reasons why groups in the hegemon might be opposed to this strategy; indeed, domestic politics of any form seem largely absent from the current exposition of the theory (though see Lake, 1999, pg. 293).¹² It abstracts away from competing domestic interests and instead depends on the assumption of a commonly held national interest. Without providing a theoretical rationale for why different domestic groups should support or oppose self-binding, or why domestic politics matters, this frame does not suggest why there should be domestic political battles about multilateralism. However, it does imply that lack of domestic support and outright opposition to multilateralism should weaken, if not undermine, the hegemon's commitment to a policy of self-binding. To the extent that domestic divisions exist over multilateral policy in the hegemon, they would tend to undermine the credibility of self-binding efforts in the eyes of other countries.

Alternative Explanation #2: Normative Theories

Normative theories focus on the power of norms to guide state behavior, suggesting that governments choose multilateralism because it is widely considered today to be the appropriate way to engage. Global norms support a policy of multilateral interaction with other states (Finnemore, 1996a; Ruggie, 1993). As Finnemore notes, "At a systemic level, norms among states can also create shared expectations for multilateralism" (Finnemore, 1996b, pg. 145). Similarly, Ruggie makes the case that it was the spread of American norms about appropriate international cooperative behavior that led to the development of multilateralism after World War II (1993, pg. 306).¹³ The legitimacy of US foreign policy, in this view, depends on following the norm of multilateralism.

¹² In a personal correspondence Lake acknowledges that the current formulation of the theory does not anticipate political cleavages though he suggests there are ways his model might be extended.

¹³ For instance, the development of the idea of a "Western security community" has been associated with the continuity of the norm of multilateralism among Western countries even after the end of the Cold War (Jepperson et al., 1996, pg. 64).

Finnemore (1996a) provides the most detailed account of the normative basis of multilateralism in the context of humanitarian intervention. However, while humanitarian intervention is her focus, her discussion of multilateralism is also more general. The legitimacy of a country's policies depends, she argues, on a multilateral approach. "Contemporary multilateralism thus differs from the multilateral action of the nineteenth century... [This earlier form] was strategic...; [it] was driven by shared fears and perceived threats, not by shared norms and principles...Contemporary multilateralism is political and normative, not strategic. It is shaped by shared notions about when the use of force is legitimate and appropriate" (pg. 181-82). In this view, adopting a unilateral policy brings with it additional costs associated with a lack of legitimacy (pg. 183). Constructivists often take this point further to claim that these multilateral norms reflect the collective identities of the countries involved. That is, multilateralism is an accepted way of conducting foreign policy that is seen as legitimate domestically because it is so closely tied to the national identity of Western democracies (Risse-Kappen, 1996, pg. 378).

This identification with domestic norms and values suggests that one should find solid support for multilateralism in Western democracies among publics who are the carriers of these values. Ruggie, for instance, claims that multilateralism arises from American's own distinct political culture. He states that "a multilateral vision of world order is singularly compatible with America's collective self concept as a nation" (Ruggie, 1993, pg. 25). This claim suggests that we should find strong support within the US public for multilateralism since it is so closely connected to American's national identity. In particular, if multilateralism is a shared norm among Americans, then we do not expect to see preferences about it following traditional political cleavages. Shared norms should transcend such political divides and should "acquire a taken for granted quality and are no longer a matter of broad public debate" (Finnemore and

Sikkink, 1999, pg. 255). If this is not the case, perhaps, then the conditions for multilateralism to be normatively dominant are not present because multilateralism is a new norm or one not congruent with American values.¹⁴ It would seem difficult to sustain the claim that multilateralism is a new norm, given that it has been part of US foreign policy for around five decades and was treated by some as well established over 15 years ago (Ruggie, 1993).

Constructivists have written only a small amount about foreign aid policy, and they have had little to say about the choice of multilateralism in aid. But their arguments about aid tend to emphasize the points made above: the breadth of support for the norm. Lumsdaine (1993) and others (Noel and Therien, 1995) have emphasized the relationship between foreign aid and norms for domestic welfare. More recent work has focused on how to explain changing forms of aid and how this responds to changing global (Elgstrom, 2000; Sundstrom, 2005) or domestic (Hook, 2008) norms about the appropriate type of aid. These studies, however, focus on the introduction of new norms, and as noted above it is hard to argue that multilateralism is a new norm in American foreign policy.

In summary, neither self-binding nor normative theories lead one to expect strong domestic political divisions over support for multilateralism. In contrast, we expect that the dynamics of domestic political cleavages should reflect the principal-agent tradeoffs closely. Furthermore, both alternatives predict that American public opinion will support multilateralism

¹⁴ Constructivists have noted two conditions that might affect the adoption of an international norm. When a new norm is introduced, norm entrepreneurs are needed to push the idea and help it compete with existing norms (Sikkink, 1991) (Elgstrom, 2000, pg. 458). It seems unlikely that this position fits the norm of multilateralism today; the US and its Western allies embraced multilateral policies in many issue areas including foreign aid in the 1960s. The second condition is some kind of congruence (or “resonance”) with domestic structures or attitudes (Cortell and Davis, 2000; Risse-Kappen, 1991). The domestic “salience” of an international norm depends on how it fits with domestic politics and norms (Cortell and Davis, 2000, pg. 66). As the authors note, analysis of this condition often becomes tautological since it is very hard to measure the salience of a norm. They argue, however, that one way that norms become salient is if domestic political discourse and institutions “incorporate” them (Cortell and Davis 2000, pg. 79-81). Ruggie’s claim about the strong compatibility between America’s identity and institutions, on the one hand, and multilateralism, on the other, would seem to suggest that the norm should be highly salient, and thus well accepted by most Americans.

by large majorities whereas the PA model does not make this prediction. To the extent that the self-binding theory governs opinion, the public, and certainly elites, should cite a desire to constrain US options or lock in US behavior. To the extent that the normative theory governs opinion, publics should cite the shared norm and increased legitimacy from multilateral action as the primary reasons for supporting it. These reasons are distinct from the issues of burden sharing and control that are emphasized by the PA model. Below we summarize the predictions made by the different theoretical models regarding the choice for multilateralism.

Table 1: Key predictions for conditions supporting multilateral aid

	Majority public support?	Reasons for position:	Partisan politics matters?
Normative	Yes	Appropriateness/ shared consensus	No
Self-Constraint	Yes	Lock in US	No
PA	No	Burden sharing vs. control	Yes, conservatives emphasize control

IV. Survey Data

To examine our predictions, we draw on public opinion surveys. Survey data allows us to elicit general preferences for multilateralism as well as to explore what drives these preferences. While surveys have been used extensively in the IPE and security literature, there is little survey data that focuses on preferences for multilateralism, let alone surveys that speak to the different theoretical models identified in the literature. Like other foreign policy scholars, we find strikingly coherent sets of preferences among the public (Aldrich et al., 2006; Aldrich et al.,

1989). We also explore elite attitudes by focusing on subsamples of the public that have characteristics similar to policy elites.¹⁵

Our analysis employs data from several national surveys. First, we analyze a November 2000 Program on International Policy Attitudes (PIPA) survey that asked individuals about their preferences for sending aid bilaterally or multilaterally (PIPA, 2001). These questions allow us to directly investigate the choice for multilateralism versus a bilateral alternative. Second, we analyze a series of surveys fielded by the authors that explore support for multilateral aid in more detail.¹⁶ In particular, these surveys elicited the *reasons* for preferring multilateral or bilateral aid. These reasons let us explore how members of the public think about the choice of multilateralism. To the extent that stated reasons correspond with one of the theoretical models, we have more confidence in the applicability of that model. We also present results from a survey experiment in which we experimentally manipulated the political affiliation of the US President. This manipulation lets us examine different ways that the PA model's focus on "control" helps explain preferences over multilateralism. We believe these surveys represent the universe of data that isolates the choice of one form of aid delivery versus another.

Overview of support for multilateralism

Before testing our hypotheses, we describe the levels of support for multilateralism in aid delivery. As noted, the design of the PIPA and our surveys differ. In the PIPA survey, support for multilateralism was measured with the following question:

I'm going to read you two statements. Please tell me which one you agree with more. [Random alternate order] A. When giving foreign aid, it is best for the US to participate in international

¹⁵ Surveys of elites often identify them by their formal positions; see, for example, Hooghe (2003) and Chicago Council on Foreign Relations surveys of elites.

¹⁶ Each of these surveys was fielded through the internet by the survey firm Polimetrix/YouGov. Our first survey was fielded in the summer of 2008, the second survey in the fall of 2008 (prior to the election) as part of the Cooperative Congressional Election Study, and the final survey was fielded in the fall of 2009 also as part of the Cooperative Congressional Election Study. Throughout we use supplied survey weights to create a nationally representative sample, though our results change relatively little if we do not use these weights.

efforts, such as through the UN. This way it is more likely that other countries will do their fair share and that these efforts will be better coordinated. B. When giving foreign aid it is best for the US to do so on its own because that way the US has more control over how the money is spent and will get more credit and influence in the country receiving the aid.

In the 2000 sample, 57.3% of respondents selected statement A, the multilateral option, while 39.3% selected statement B, the bilateral option. Authors of the survey interpreted this as indicating that the US public is more multilaterally oriented than was commonly perceived (PIPA, 2001), though the public was still clearly divided. Interestingly, the PIPA questions were already framed to emphasize burden sharing and control considerations, not normative or self-binding arguments. Presumably PIPA wanted to design an ecologically valid survey.

In our surveys, we asked about multilateral preferences in a different way. We are interested in the reasons people might have for supporting multilateralism or bilateralism, and hence did not want to include such reasons as part of the survey question. Our surveys instead asked:

“Would you prefer that the U.S. give economic aid directly to a country or give aid to an international organization (such as the World Bank or International Monetary Fund) which then would give it to the country?”

In our summer 2008 survey, respondents chose between the multilateral (20%), bilateral (50%), and do not know options (30%).¹⁷ For our fall 2008 and fall 2009 surveys, we excluded the “do not know” option.¹⁸ In the fall of 2008, 66% of respondents chose bilateral delivery, whereas 34% chose the multilateral option. In the fall of 2009 support for the multilateral option

¹⁷ In our Polimetrix Surveys we specify that we are asking about “economic” aid, and we provide several examples of non-UN international organizations through which some form of multilateral support is provided. These differences might explain the higher levels of support for multilateralism in the PIPA survey.

¹⁸ We did this for several reasons. First, the political opinion literature is divided on how best to deal with the fact that people might not have clear, salient positions on questions (Mondak, 2001). We cover both cases. The results reported below differ relatively little in terms of the influence of important subject level covariates. Second, in the fall 2008 and 2009 surveys, we asked follow up questions on why the individual preferred one channel of aid versus the other. In order to maximize responses to this question, we did not include a “don’t know” response. While various branching methods might also be used, we feel our approach casts a broad, agnostic survey net.

was even smaller, with 73% preferring the bilateral option and 27% multilateral delivery. Note that the surveys differ in the level of support for multilateralism, and that this support seems to be declining slightly over time.

Interestingly, all three of our surveys reveal the absence of a strong consensus on the choice for multilateralism. When receiving our more neutral question frame as compared to the PIPA one, the majority of respondents preferred sending aid bilaterally. This result has several implications for the theoretical models. The lack of majority support for multilateralism casts doubt on both the normative and the hegemonic self-binding theories, as they both predict significant popular support that is not conditional on partisan affiliation. Neither alternative account, as currently formulated, gives much of a reason why some individuals should support multilateralism and others oppose it. Our discussion of the PA model, however, suggests that partisan ideological differences might explain differences in preferences over multilateralism.

Internationalism, ideology, and the correlates of multilateralism

Clearly the public is divided in its support for multilateralism, giving prima facie support to the PA model. The next question we ask is, what are the correlates of support for multilateralism, and is support for multilateralism divided along ideological lines? We also investigate whether the correlates of multilateral support differ from those predicting support for internationalism in general (Chittick et al., 1995; Holsti and Rosenau, 1984, 1986).¹⁹

We code responses of the individuals who prefer sending aid multilaterally as a 1 and bilaterally as a 0. To focus our analysis, we use only the 2008 and 2009 surveys. It is notable however that that analysis of the PIPA survey with similar covariates produced results consistent with what we report. We exclude respondents in the summer 2008 survey if they answered

¹⁹ One might expect that preferences over multilateralism relate to more basic preferences over US engagement. If someone favors the US taking part in world affairs, then this might also relate to the mechanism for this engagement. Conversely, if preferences for international engagement are more basic than preferences for the type of engagement, then preferences over multilateralism and those over internationalism need not be related.

“don’t know”. We estimate separate models for each survey to allow for differences across the surveys and present results in table 1.

Our surveys measured our respondents across a spectrum of covariates identified in the literature as relevant for foreign policy preferences. This allows us to estimate multivariate models where we include these variables as controls. To measure political ideology, *Ideology*, we use a standard five-point liberal-conservative scale, with strong liberals coded 0 and strong conservatives coded 5. To measure preferences for international engagement, we asked respondents whether they support or oppose the US taking an active role in world affairs.²⁰ We also include variables for gender (1 if male, 0 if female), age (continuous in years), and whether someone achieved a four year college degree or greater (1) or has less education (0), labeled *College*. We also estimate models with controls for the respondent’s region (dummy variables for the South, Midwest, and West), whether or not the respondent owns a passport (*r_passport*), had taken an economics class (*EconClass*), or was interested in the news (*InterestNews*). The fourth model includes a control for a respondent’s preferences for increasing or decreasing US economic aid (*AidPref*) and the fifth model includes only respondents who reported that they want to reduce overall foreign aid (measured in an earlier survey question).

The effect of political ideology was uniformly negative across the models and surveys: individuals who are more conservative tend to oppose multilateralism, and those who are more liberal support sending aid through multilateral institutions.²¹ This relationship is highly significant across all of the models and produces large substantive effects. For example, using the third model from the 2009 survey, changing ideology from “very liberal” to “very

²⁰ The question read: “Please tell us whether you strongly agree, somewhat agree, somewhat disagree or strongly disagree with the following statement: The U.S. needs to play an active role in solving conflicts around the world” (Mansfield and Mutz, 2009).

²¹ Supplementary regression analysis of the PIPA survey shows that Republicans were more likely to select the bilateral option than were Democrats, controlling for education, gender, and age.

conservative” while holding age at the sample median and other covariates at 0 (female, no college, Northeast, anti-internationalist) decreased the probability of preferring multilateralism by 42% (95% CI: 52, 32%). Furthermore, controlling for general aid preferences did not substantially change the influence of ideology.

The effect of international orientation was more ambiguous. Those wanting the US to take a more active role in world affairs were *not* more likely to support multilateralism. In fact, in the fall 2008 survey, this variable was negative. This suggests that support for internationalism and support for multilateralism are not clearly related, despite the positive relationship between internationalism and foreign aid attitudes (Tingley, 2008). The other variables in the model were either insignificant or inconsistently estimated.

While these domestic divisions and the ideological cleavages they rest on are troubling for the normative and self-binding accounts, they do not on their own suggest that the PA model is more appropriate. In order to explore the strength of each theory further, our next section explores the reasons that individuals give for their preferences.

Rationales for multilateralism vs. bilateralism

If the principal-agent model is correct, then support for multilateralism should be predicated on burden sharing and support for bilateralism based on the desire to control aid policy. If the normative argument is correct, then we expect to see individuals reporting that they support multilateralism because they believe that multilateral engagement represents shared motives across nations. If the self-constraint argument is correct, then support for multilateralism should be based upon a belief that multilateralism locks the US more solidly into its international commitments.

We find it interesting that when it came to asking questions about support for multilateral versus bilateral forms of aid, PIPA elected to frame the question along burden-sharing versus control lines. However, this means the PIPA question is not suited for exploring the reasons individuals give for their preferences. To remedy this problem, we used a two-step procedure on our fall 2008 and 2009 surveys. First, we asked individuals whether they prefer aid to be sent bilaterally or multilaterally (results above). Second, we asked people to select from a list of options the most important and second most important reasons for their preference. While this runs the risk of the individual “inventing” reasons given on our list, it attempts to link the theories and the reasons as closely as possible. Future work could use only open-ended responses or use deliberative polling procedures, although both have weaknesses.²²

If subjects indicated that they prefer aid to be delivered bilaterally, then the reasons we provided were:

- This means that the US controls the economic aid and that other countries cannot influence how it is used. (PA model)
- This gives the US the most flexibility.
- This sends a message to countries receiving aid from the US that the US has strong convictions.
- This sends a message to other countries—countries not receiving aid that the US does not have good relations with—that the US is more serious/determined to achieve their goals.
- It is harder for multilateral aid agencies to be monitored by US organizations.
- Other [text box]

If subjects chose multilateral aid, they were given the following response options:

- This involves sharing the costs of economic aid with partner countries. (PA model)
- This locks the US into its international commitments more solidly. (Self-binding)
- This sends a message to countries receiving aid that the US's motives are widely shared. (Normative)
- This sends a message to other countries—countries not receiving aid that the US does

²² While the order of the questions was fixed, we do not believe this affects our results because individuals were explicitly asked to rank options, not simply choose a response. Second choice options show this most explicitly, and many open ended responses emphasized P-A logics.

not have good relations with—that its partners are more serious/determined to achieve their goals.

- Multilateral aid agencies are monitored by more organizations around the world.
- Multilaterals prevent the US government from using aid for things other than economic development.
- Other [text box]

What do our respondents say is the reason(s) for their preference over multilateralism in foreign aid? Figure 2 breaks out the response frequencies for individuals stating they prefer aid to be delivered bilaterally, while figure 3 does this for proponents of multilateral delivery. We asked these questions in both our fall 2008 and 2009 survey, and we report results separately for each year. We list both the first and second most important reason. The frequencies provided here utilize survey weights, but dropping them changes little.

<figures 2 and 3 here>

The main reason individuals prefer giving aid bilaterally versus multilaterally is because it means that the US has more control over the aid. The vast majority of respondents indicated that considerations of control were the most salient to them. This is consistent with the logic of the principal-agent model. The perils of multilateralism are that it entails using an agent who might have its own preferences or be under the influence of other principals. Hence concern over the desire to retain control is paramount in the preference for bilateralism. And in our supplementary materials, as our PA model anticipates, we show that this reason was most salient among conservatives.

The normative and self-constraint models do not make clear predictions about why respondents would support bilateralism; hence, we must turn to those who prefer multilateralism to see if rationales consistent with those theories are present in our data. Here too there is an overwhelming pattern in the data: the most frequent reason given by our survey respondents for supporting multilateral delivery of aid was that the costs would be shared with other countries.

Burden-sharing considerations relate most directly to the PA model, which isolates the tradeoffs between burden sharing and control. When our respondents were asked to give reasons for why they supported multilateralism or bilateralism, most gave reasons consistent with the tradeoffs identified by the principal-agent model.

The normative and self-binding models receive less support in these analyses. The normative model suggests that people should prefer multilateralism because it “sends a message to countries receiving aid that the US's motives are widely shared.”²³ Only 8% and 17% of individuals in 2008 and 2009, respectively, mentioned this as their first reason, and only 12% and 23% mentioned this as their second most important reason for preferring multilateralism. If the self-binding argument is correct, we expect that individuals should cite the fact that multilateralism “locks the US into its international commitments more solidly” as their primary reason for supporting it. But in our data only 14% and 8% cite this as their number one reason, and only 6% and 9% mention this as their second most important reason. In contrast, 32% and 37% of respondents said burden-sharing considerations were the most important reason for supporting multilateral aid over bilateral aid. While alternative phrasing or solicitation procedures may improve the performance of the alternative theories, the salience of burden-sharing and control concerns by our survey respondents suggests strong support for the PA model.

Some scholars may argue that our alternative theories apply more to foreign policy elites than to the public in general. Unfortunately, existing Council on Foreign Relations surveys of elites do not ask questions like ours. Strong evidence suggesting that elites share the same views as the public comes from the congressional debates discussed in Section III, in which political

²³ We think that the idea of widely shared motives among countries gets at a central idea in normative accounts—i.e., the idea of a shared norm of using multilaterals. But the question does not ask directly if the multilateralism is “appropriate” and “motives” may be too close to “interests.” Future work could use different phrasings.

leaders repeatedly discuss multilateralism in principal-agent terms. While there is no well-accepted definition of what segments of the public most resemble foreign policy elites, as a rough proxy we present results in the supplementary materials that use only respondents with a college education. This highly educated segment of the public shares common traits with foreign policy elites that distinguishes them from the general public. We find results similar to those for the full sample. These elites are divided along partisan lines on the choice for multilateralism; and the reasons they list for their preferences are similar to the full, nationally representative sample. Burden sharing and concern over the loss of control associated with multilateralism animate this sub-sample's preferences. These results make us suspect that an elite sample would show very similar results to the general public.

The strong support for bilateral aid and the emphasis on burden sharing versus control in the rationales people provide for their preferences both lend credibility to the PA frame. Only small minorities point to the reasons that constructivist and self-binding frames suggest. Furthermore, the normative and self-constraint theories have a hard time explaining why individuals would prefer to send aid bilaterally. While not conclusive, these results suggest that the PA model does a better job capturing the politics around multilateralism compared to the alternatives.

The conditional importance of control

The PA theory expects that partisanship matters since it affects one's preferences in general for aid policy. Elsewhere scholars have shown that political ideology in the form of the left-right or Democratic-Republican partisan divide in the US colors attitudes toward aid greatly (Lumsdaine, 1993; Milner and Tingley, 2010, 2011; Tingley, 2010). Those on the right or in the Republican Party are much less favorable toward aid giving in general, and they tend to prefer aid that is most closely tied to national security goals, not economic or social development ones.

They worry that multilateral agencies will give aid to countries for development programs that do not necessarily enhance US national security. Furthermore, Republicans and those on the right worry even more about control over US aid policy because they do not trust multilateral institutions to have the same national security interests as the US has. Conservatives thus have aid preferences that tend to be closer to those of Republican presidents and further from those of most multilateral aid organizations. This preference ordering is important for it underlines why control over aid policy is so important.²⁴

Hence one potential implication of the PA theory is that the salience of control will depend on whether a respondent has a political orientation more similar to an actor likely to help shape national aid policy, such as the US President, or more similar to the international institution. Finally, if this particular structure of preferences among liberals, conservatives, and the multilateral agent exists, then concerns over control are likely to be far more important for Republicans than for Democrats. But these concerns should be tempered by who is in charge of the US executive branch. If Democrats control the presidency and have preferences close to the multilateral agent, then control should matter less since national policy will itself deviate from that preferred by conservatives. We ask here whether there is evidence that concerns over control of policy can be manipulated by changing the partisanship of the president.

In our 2008 surveys we asked whether individuals would be more or less supportive of multilateral or bilateral aid, conditional on whether a Democrat (i.e., Obama) or a Republican (i.e., McCain) won the election. Does support for multilateralism increase when survey respondents are asked to consider that the Presidency will be held by the candidate whose

²⁴ In additional analyses, Republicans were more likely than Democrats to cite control as the main reason for preferring bilateral aid. This can also be seen by breaking out the tables by party, which is provided in the supplemental materials.

preferences are far away from their own?²⁵ Conversely, if respondents are asked to consider their preferred executive being in charge, then does bilateral aid become more attractive?

The timing of our fall 2008 survey was uniquely suited to answer these questions because it was fielded prior to the election of President Obama. In light of this, we embedded a small experimental manipulation in this survey. After eliciting preferences for multilateralism as well as their rationales, we asked whether a respondent would like to change the amount of aid given multilaterally versus bilaterally *conditional* on one candidate winning the election. Half of our respondents were asked the question conditional on McCain winning and half with Obama winning. Respondents could say that they wanted to increase the multilateral share, increase the bilateral share, or keep the relative shares the same. No information was provided about the current shares.²⁶

To see whether support for multilateralism depends on the congruence of the executive in office and the respondent's own political preferences, in figure 4 we break out respondents by those saying they were likely to vote for Obama or McCain. On the left hand side are McCain voters and on the right hand side are Obama voters. Within each group of voters, we then distinguish respondents by whether they were asked to consider a McCain (red) or Obama (blue) presidency. In each case we plot the frequency of responses for the three categories, but focus on those saying to increase either the multilateral or bilateral shares.

<figure 4 here>

²⁵ For example, if multilateral institutions limit the ability of a particular partisan orientation to shape foreign policy, then multilateral aid can form a desirable constraining device.

²⁶ The specific text of the question was: If [McCain/Obama] wins in November would you like the US to change how it delivers aid by: 1) Increasing the percentage of aid given through international organizations and decrease the amount given by the US directly 2) Increasing the percentage of aid given directly by the US and decrease the amount given through international organizations 3) Keeping the relative amounts of these ways of giving aid the same.

The key difference between the two treatments is for McCain voters. When McCain voters are asked to consider giving aid under an Obama (McCain) administration, support for multilateralism increases (decreases). While a majority of McCain voters still prefer bilateral aid giving, there is an increase in support for multilateralism in this portion of our sample that is, a priori, much less likely to support multilateralism. To see this, we first restrict the sample to only those saying they want to increase or decrease the multilateral share (and hence exclude those who said to keep levels the same). We find that among McCain voters in the *Obama as president* treatment, 36% prefer to increase the share of multilateral aid, whereas only 14% of McCain voters in the *McCain as president* treatment had this preference ($p < .001$). Conversely, we observed no significant differences across the treatments among Obama voters.

Multivariate analysis suggests similar results. We code those who said they would increase multilateral aid as a 2, 1 if they would not make any change, and 0 if they would increase the share of bilateral aid. We use an ordered probit model in which our key explanatory variables are whether or not someone was in the McCain (1) or Obama (0) treatment, their candidate preference (McCain 1 or Obama 0), and an interaction between these two variables.

We begin by estimating the model separately for McCain (model 1) and Obama (model 2) supporters and hence exclude the interaction term. We see a strong effect of the treatment variable for McCain supporters, but little for Obama supporters. McCain voters—who on average are less supportive of multilateralism—become more supportive when asked to consider Obama being in office. Next we pool Obama and McCain supporters and include the interaction term between the treatment and candidate support. Consistent with models 1 and 2, the interaction term is negative and highly significant. The final models add additional covariates and do not change the main finding. Using model 4 and holding covariates at sample means, moving a McCain voter from the Obama to the McCain treatment frame increased the

probability of supporting bilateral aid by .24 (.04), decreased the probability of making no change by -.10 (.01), and decreased the probability of supporting multilateral aid by -.14 (.03) (standard errors in parentheses; signs flip for changing the treatment in the other direction). Support for multilateralism can be conditional on the congruence between the preferences of the respondent and the executive. Our results suggest that this dynamic is only salient for respondents *a priori* less likely to support multilateralism: i.e., conservative voters.²⁷ Support for bilateral over multilateral aid increases when McCain voters are asked to consider having McCain as President.

Summary

We provide an important first test of the PA model using new public opinion data, finding broad support for this important theoretical perspective (Hawkins et al., 2006; Nielson and Tierney, 2003; Tierney, 2006). When asked to provide reasons for preferring bilateral versus multilateral aid delivery, respondents in our surveys frequently cited burden-sharing and control concerns. Furthermore, the PA model seems best able to anticipate 1) the lack of a strong consensus within American society on the choice for multilateralism, 2) the divisions over multilateralism that fall along preexisting partisan lines, and 3) the primary reasons that individuals cite for supporting *both* bilateral and multilateralism in aid. The public less frequently cited the reasons that alternative theories expound. In our analysis of the portion of the public that most resembles foreign policy elites, we found very similar results. An auxiliary contribution of our paper is that we contrast attitudes toward multilateralism versus internationalism in general. Earlier literature has often been vague about this difference, and has

²⁷This suggests that at least some McCain voters saw Obama as having preferences further away from their own than the World Bank's preferences. We also compared support for multilateralism among Obama and McCain voters in the 2008 and 2009 surveys. One expectation might be that support for multilateralism amongst McCain voters would increase. We actually do not find that relationship. It is hence possible that other changes between 2008 and 2009 made Presidential partisanship less salient for McCain voters on this topic.

used survey questions that can conflate these two concepts. This is important in light of renewed interest in “internationalist” attitudes (Mansfield and Mutz, 2009). While a general sentiment for US engagement increases support for foreign aid giving, it has little effect on whether one prefers to deliver this aid multilaterally. Internationalism and multilateralism are two different aspects of foreign policy in the minds of the public.

V. Conclusion

This paper sought to understand the choice for multilateralism, which is an important foreign policy choice for governments and the publics they represent. Multilateral agencies have never received the majority of US aid funds, as we show in figure 1. Our data on public opinion suggest a reason as to why this might be the case: far less than a majority of the American public seems to support multilateralism in aid. This weak support arises in an issue area where there is substantial evidence that multilateralism is more effective than bilateralism. Moreover, it contrasts with other donor countries, which give a greater percentage of multilateral aid and have stronger public support for multilateralism (Milner, 2006). Policy makers in the US are choosing low levels of multilateral giving, and public opinion supports such low levels. While our data do not let us assess whether there is some relationship between public opinion on multilateralism and elites’ foreign policy choices, such a relationship is possible. Our efforts are the first of their kind to inquire systematically into who supports and opposes multilateralism. We find quite stable patterns in the public opinion data over multiple surveys. And we find that subsamples of the public that resemble foreign policy elites share similar attitudes toward multilateralism as the population at large.

We present three theoretical frames that are intended to explain the choice for multilateralism. One frame emphasizes the diffusion and dominance of norms in favor of

multilateralism. Multilateral aid giving has been in existence through the World Bank and regional development banks since at least the 1960s, close to five decades. We might thus expect that support for multilateralism would run deep in the US. Constructivist accounts of multilateral norms seem to suggest that they are strong and well established. Surprisingly, our data show that support for multilateralism in aid is weak and divides along standard partisan cleavages in the US. Multilateralism in aid does not seem to be a taken-for-granted norm in the US. In contrast, one might claim that the norm of sovereignty is still dominant even after decades of multilateral efforts. Perhaps constructivists need to explore more the contestation over norms and the domestic politics that surround different views of appropriate or legitimate behavior (Hook, 2008).

In terms of hegemonic self-binding, the data do not seem to support this interpretation either. If multilateralism were a way to reassure other countries about US intentions, then why would public support for multilateralism be so weak, and why would proponents not cite this goal more often? Indeed, the credibility of self-binding is itself undermined by the weak support for multilateralism. Even if policy makers want to self-bind, which has not yet been demonstrated, if the public is opposed to it how can this be a credible restraint in the eyes of other countries? Furthermore, given the partisan divisions over multilateralism, shouldn't other governments worry that Republican control of the US government would lead to abandonment or at least relaxation of this constraint? The data we present does not support an explanation that multilateralism, at least in aid policy, is primarily a means of binding the US. The domestic foundations of the self-binding claim about multilateralism seem to require more attention. While the normative and self-binding theories are well developed in other areas, this paper suggests boundaries in their applicability as well as ways they might be further developed.

Careful delineation of the scope conditions for a theory is an important part of a progressive research agenda.

In contrast, the data provide considerable support for the dynamics of a principal-agent model. In these models, principals face a trade-off between two goals: burden sharing versus control. On the one hand, delegating power to an agent like the World Bank can result in better decisions and more efficient use of aid. The World Bank has procedures it uses to reduce collective action problems and prevent countries from free riding. Countries may be willing to give more aid in this setting, and hence the burden of helping poor countries is shared. On the other hand, the principal loses some control. That is, the US has to give up complete control over aid policy when it delegates. The World Bank, through a consensual process in which the US plays an important role, decides where aid goes and what projects it supports. To the extent that the preferences of the decision makers in the World Bank are close to those of the US, this loss of control is not particularly worrisome. However, the US has important domestic political divisions that extend to foreign policy. In the area of foreign aid, Democrats in the US tend to hold policy preferences closer to those of the World Bank than do Republicans. This means that Republicans worry much more about control in aid delegation, and helps explain why they support multilateralism less than Democrats in this issue area. Finally, using a subset of our respondents who most resemble foreign policy elites, we find very similar preferences and rationales regarding multilateralism as the sample as a whole. Future work with elite samples might examine the choice for multilateralism directly as we have done.

For other issue areas, the preferences of domestic actors may mean that conservatives prefer multilateralism. In trade policy, for instance, we would conjecture that Republicans have preferences much closer to those of the WTO than do Democrats. Hence, Republicans may be more supportive of multilateralism and delegation to the WTO than Democrats. In both areas,

however, we expect to see partisan divisions. As the literature in American politics has shown, delegation domestically is a highly partisan issue: “Congress gives less discretionary authority to executive agencies controlled by the opposite party, reducing agencies’ latitude....[and] these changes in executive discretion had an appreciable impact on policy outcomes” (Epstein and O’Halloran, 1999, pg. 235). The international burden-sharing aspect of multilateralism may be a common goal for all domestic actors, but the loss of control from delegation is a more serious cost for some domestic actors than for others, given their preferences. Partisan contestation over multilateralism is thus understandable from a principal-agent perspective.

Since multilateralism in foreign policy is usually about delegation of policy to an international institution, our research has implications for theories of international institutions. Previous studies have argued that such institutions are useful and hence demanded by states to the extent that they reduce transaction costs (Keohane, 1982, 1984) or allow powerful countries to bind themselves credibly (Ikenberry, 2003; Lake, 1999). Our project underlines a more complex view of international institutions. Others have noted that rationalist arguments about delegation and principal-agency can help us understand these institutions (Hawkins et al., 2006). We concur. Principal-agent models show that one benefit of delegation can be reduced transaction costs (Epstein and O’Halloran, 1999). But the other side of the PA dilemma is also critical. The loss of control involved in delegation raises issues about the distribution of benefits from delegation to international institutions. Krasner and various Realists have raised questions about the relative benefits of reducing transaction costs in contrast to the distributive outcomes of international institutions (Gruber, 2000; Krasner, 1978). These distributive problems affect relative gains among states. The distributive problem here is domestic. Some domestic actors may pay higher costs for delegation to international institutions than others because their preferences may be less congruent with those of the institution. Multilateralism as a form of

delegation may thus raise thorny domestic political issues. While it may reduce international transaction costs, it may create domestic distributional struggles. Furthermore, these domestic controversies cannot help but undermine the credibility of such multilateral commitments in the eyes of other states. A foreign government is likely to place less value on a government's commitment to an international institution when it sees that domestic opinion is deeply divided over the value of the commitment. Self-binding is much less effective in such a setting. Our research thus has important implications for the study of international institutions.

This observation applies to the recent debate over the impact of multilateralism and international institutions on democracy domestically. Keohane, Macedo, and Moravcsik (KMM) (2009) argue that multilateralism may be salutary for democracy rather than deleterious. Our study raises two issues to consider in light of their claims, one questioning and one more supportive. First, public opinion in the US is divided over the value of multilateralism, in aid at least. KMM do not consider the question of whether the public should be consulted on the extent and nature of multilateral commitments a democracy makes. Is it democracy-enhancing for a government to pursue multilateralism if its public does not offer at least majority support for this policy? Second, our data show that the second most cited reason that publics like multilateralism in aid is that it "prevents the US government from using aid for things other than economic development." This finding fits nicely with the KMM argument. As others have claimed (Milner, 2006), if publics suspect governments of, willingly or not, using aid for such purposes as helping domestic interest groups, then they may support multilateralism as a means of constraining their own government. As KMM point out, to the extent that multilateral institutions can empower diffuse publics against special interest factions, then these institutions can enhance democracy at home. Our research suggests that parts of the American public understand this point.

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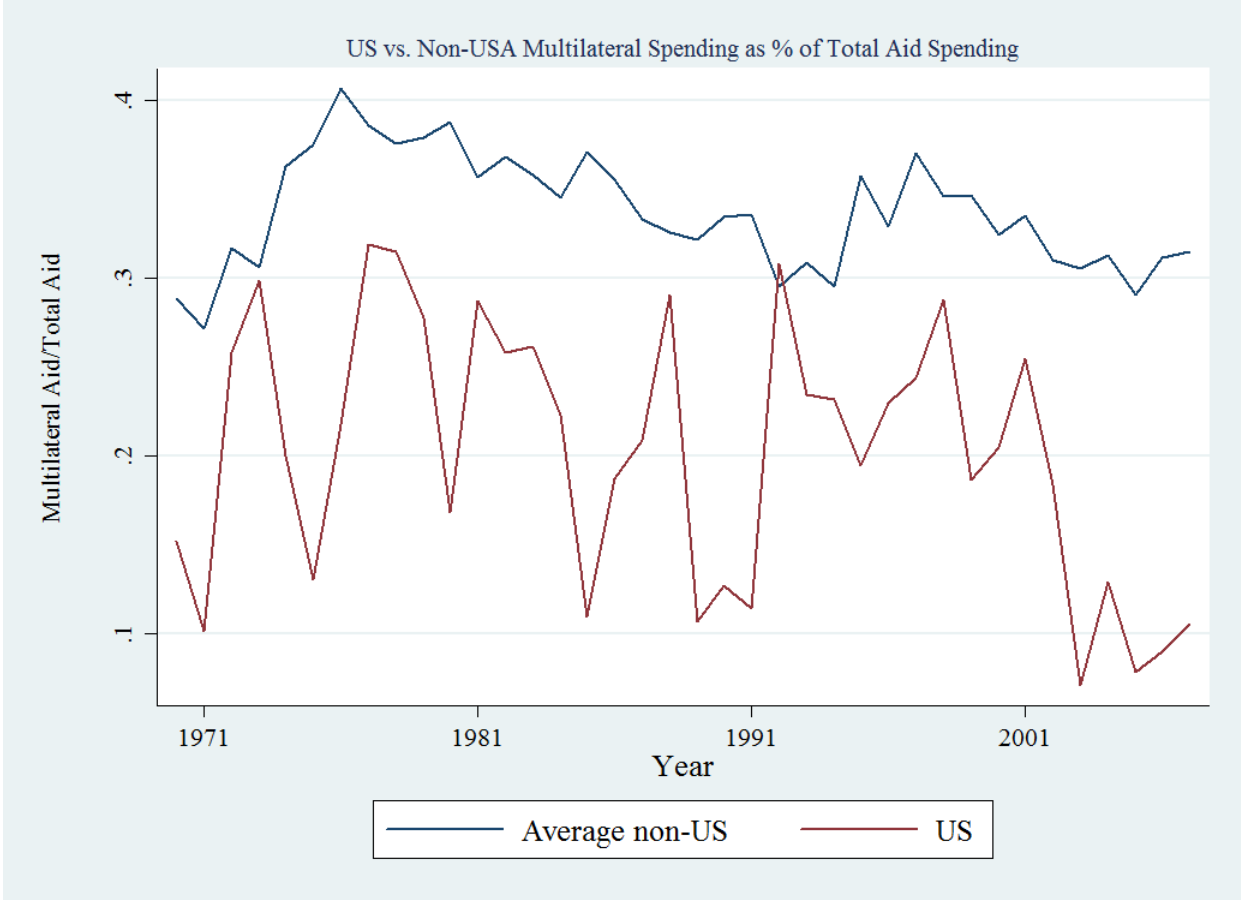


Figure 1: Percentage of total aid given multilaterally, US and non-US donors. Data from OECD/DAC and includes all donors on record in a given year.

	S08_1	S08_2	S08_3	S08_4	S08_5	F08_1	F08_2	F08_3	F08_4	F08_5	F09_1	F09_2	F09_3	F09_4	F09_5
Ideology	-0.23** [0.03]	-0.23** [0.03]	-0.23** [0.03]	-0.24** [0.03]	-0.32** [0.05]	-0.27** [0.06]	-0.28** [0.06]	-0.28** [0.06]	-0.27** [0.06]	-0.48** [0.10]	-0.32** [0.05]	-0.32** [0.05]	-0.33** [0.05]	-0.30** [0.06]	-0.40** [0.08]
ActiveRole	-0.07+ [0.04]	-0.06+ [0.04]	-0.06 [0.04]	-0.05 [0.04]	-0.06 [0.05]	-0.15* [0.07]	-0.14* [0.07]	-0.13+ [0.07]	-0.15* [0.07]	-0.07 [0.09]	0.07 [0.06]	0.07 [0.06]	0.08 [0.06]	0.04 [0.06]	0.06 [0.08]
College	-0.03 [0.07]	-0.04 [0.07]	-0.00 [0.08]	0.02 [0.08]	-0.03 [0.12]	-0.02 [0.12]	-0.02 [0.12]	0.02 [0.13]	0.02 [0.13]	-0.34 [0.22]	-0.00 [0.10]	0.00 [0.10]	0.13 [0.10]	0.06 [0.11]	0.16 [0.17]
Male	-0.31** [0.07]	-0.32** [0.07]	-0.31** [0.07]	-0.33** [0.07]	-0.34** [0.10]	-0.23+ [0.12]	-0.23+ [0.12]	-0.23+ [0.12]	-0.22+ [0.12]	-0.03 [0.19]	-0.11 [0.10]	-0.10 [0.10]	-0.05 [0.10]	-0.04 [0.10]	-0.33* [0.14]
Age	-0.00 [0.00]	-0.00 [0.00]	-0.00 [0.00]	-0.00 [0.00]	-0.01 [0.00]	-0.01+ [0.00]	-0.01+ [0.00]	-0.01+ [0.00]	-0.01 [0.00]	-0.00 [0.01]	-0.00 [0.00]	-0.00 [0.00]	-0.00 [0.00]	-0.00 [0.00]	-0.00 [0.00]
west		-0.07 [0.11]	-0.06 [0.11]	-0.10 [0.11]	-0.07 [0.16]	-0.28 [0.19]	-0.28 [0.19]	-0.28 [0.19]	-0.28 [0.19]	-0.59* [0.29]		-0.16 [0.14]	-0.16 [0.14]	-0.18 [0.16]	-0.03 [0.23]
midwest		0.04 [0.11]	0.04 [0.11]	-0.03 [0.12]	0.12 [0.15]	-0.21 [0.19]	-0.21 [0.19]	-0.22 [0.19]	-0.22 [0.19]	-0.40 [0.29]		0.01 [0.15]	0.00 [0.15]	0.01 [0.15]	0.20 [0.23]
south		-0.03 [0.10]	-0.03 [0.10]	-0.04 [0.10]	-0.06 [0.14]	-0.06 [0.18]	-0.06 [0.18]	-0.07 [0.18]	-0.06 [0.18]	-0.39 [0.26]	-0.00 [0.13]	-0.00 [0.13]	-0.02 [0.13]	-0.05 [0.14]	-0.02 [0.21]
r_passport			-0.10 [0.07]	-0.07 [0.08]	0.02 [0.10]			-0.15 [0.13]	-0.16 [0.13]	0.06 [0.20]					
AidPref1				-0.04 [0.03]				0.05 [0.06]						0.08+ [0.04]	
EconClass														-0.19+ [0.11]	-0.23 [0.15]
InterestNews														-0.11 [0.10]	-0.27** [0.07]
Constant	0.51** [0.15]	0.54** [0.17]	0.56** [0.17]	0.65** [0.19]	0.99** [0.26]	0.91** [0.31]	1.03** [0.33]	1.07** [0.32]	0.96** [0.34]	1.30* [0.52]	0.10 [0.21]	0.13 [0.23]	0.61* [0.24]	-0.04 [0.27]	0.16 [0.37]
Observations	1726	1716	1713	1588	852	888	888	888	883	348	1388	1388	1386	1235	625
BIC	1963.44	1970.75	1972.12	1823.92	988.20	1088.42	1103.26	1107.62	1109.84	419.97	1553.38	1572.07	1552.02	1375.89	610.79

Standard errors in brackets

+p < 0.10, *p < 0.05, ** p < 0.01

Table 1: Individual correlates of preferences for multilateral (1) versus bilateral (0) aid for “S”pring and “F” all 2008 and 2009 surveys. Coefficient estimates from probit regressions with survey weights and robust standard errors.

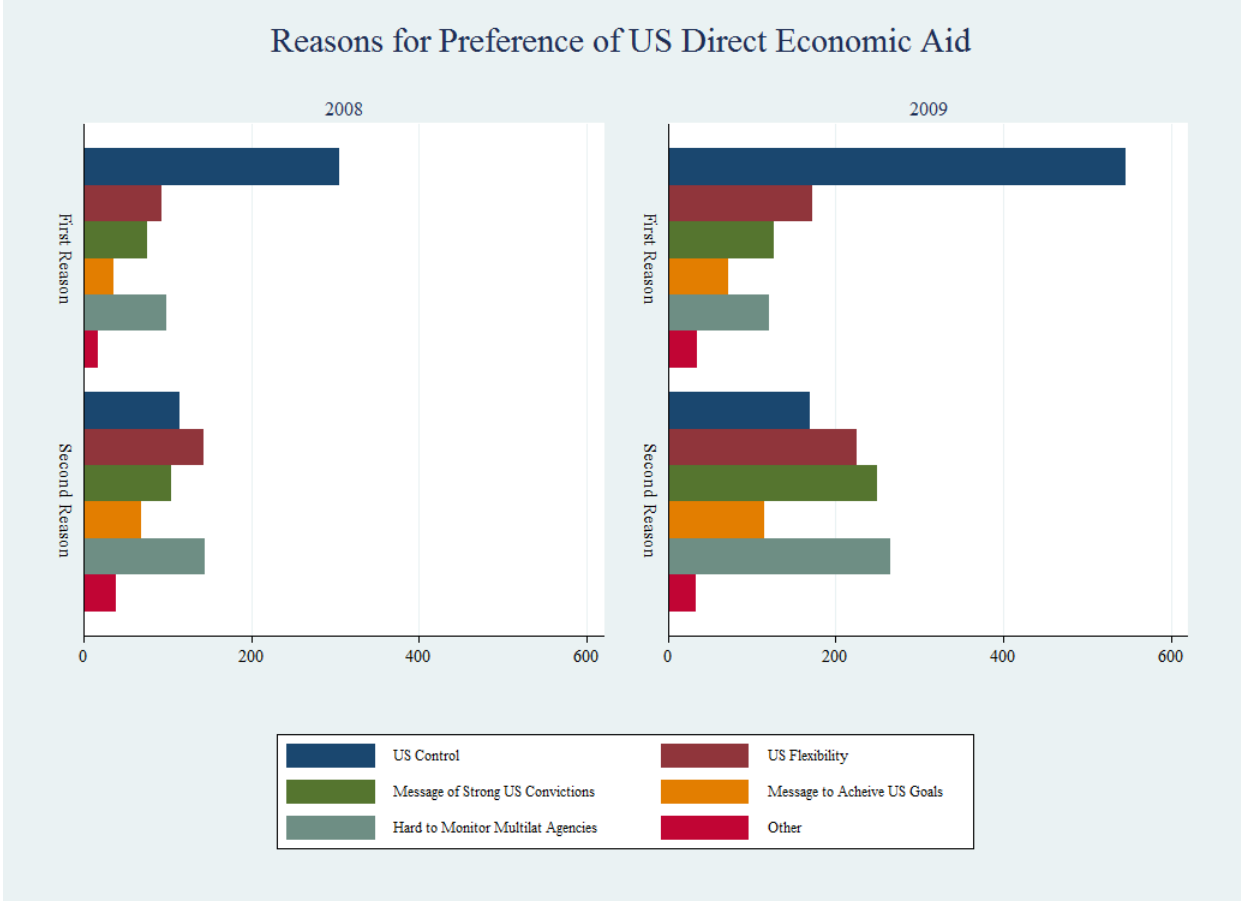


Figure 2: Reasons for preferring economic aid to be given bilaterally versus multilaterally. Survey frequency with weights applied.

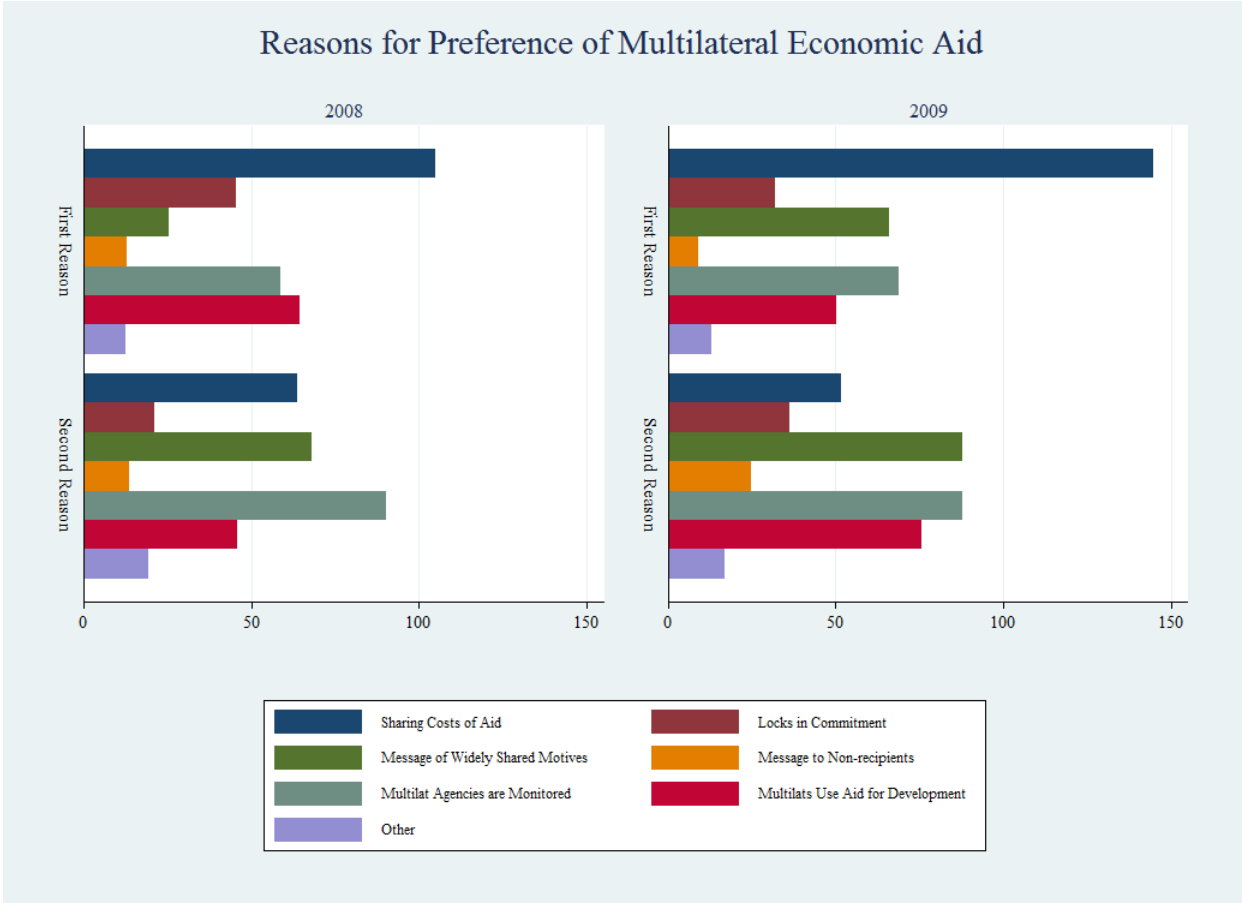


Figure 3: Reasons for preferring economic aid to be given multilaterally versus bilaterally. Survey frequency with weights applied.

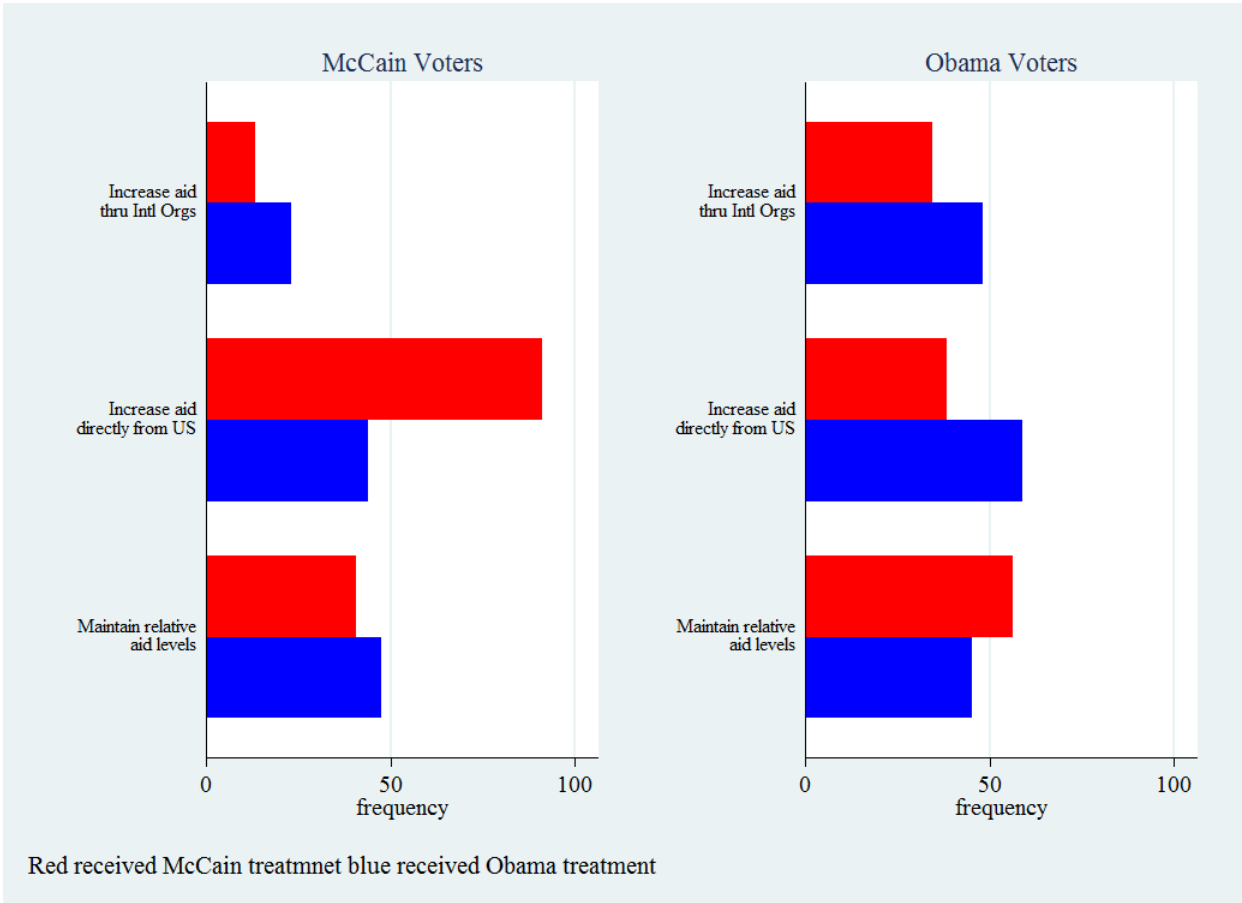


Figure 4: Preferences for changing multilateral versus bilateral aid share conditional on McCain or Obama becoming President. Broken out by those intending to vote for McCain and those intending to vote for Obama.

	McCainTreat	ObamaTreat	m3	m4	m5
McCainVsObamaVote	-0.81**	-0.15	-0.15	-0.02	0.29+
	[0.14]	[0.13]	[0.13]	[0.16]	[0.17]
VoteXTreat			-0.64**	-0.68**	-0.75**
			[0.19]	[0.20]	[0.20]
McCainVsObamaTreat			0.06	0.04	0.08
			[0.14]	[0.15]	[0.15]
Ideology				-0.09	-0.06
				[0.06]	[0.06]
ActiveRole				0.09	0.07
				[0.06]	[0.06]
College				-0.10	-0.01
				[0.10]	[0.11]
Gender				-0.22*	0.01
				[0.10]	[0.11]
Age				-0.01*	-0.01
				[0.00]	[0.00]
MultiVsBilat					1.82**
					[0.13]
cut1					
Constant	-0.50**	-0.36**	-0.40**	-0.87**	-0.01
	[0.11]	[0.11]	[0.11]	[0.32]	[0.30]
cut2					
Constant	0.59**	0.56**	0.60**	0.12	1.35**
	[0.12]	[0.11]	[0.11]	[0.31]	[0.30]
Observations	347	348	695	658	653
<i>BIC</i>	687.60	772.97	1459.40	1395.77	1131.98

Standard errors in brackets

+ $p < 0.10$, * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$

Table 2: Individual correlates of preferences for multilateral share change. Dependent variable: increasing multilateral share (2), no change, increasing bilateral share (0). Treatment variable coded as McCain (1) and Obama (0). Ordered probit with survey weights and robust standard errors.