Money Makes the World Go Frowned

Analyzing the Impact of Chinese Foreign Aid on States’ Sentiment Using Natural Language Processing

Dennis Hammerschmidt und Cosima Meyer

China is on the rise in global politics, especially due to its increasing influence in the African region. How does this affect other states that are investing in this region? We argue that China offers an attractive alternative to the highly conditional US aid because it enters the aid donor market with largely unconditional aid. We expect that the increasing independence from US foreign aid due to China’s presence enables African states to become more critical of US foreign politics, and we expect these effects to be particularly strong for post-civil war states. We use natural language processing to automatically extract sentiments from states’ speeches at the United Nations General Debate and identify shifts in positive and negative sentiment of African states toward the US. Our results support our argument and show that countries increasingly move away from and criticize the US as China enters the market.

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Introduction

China is on the rise as an aid donor. Since 2009, total foreign aid provided by China has continuously surpassed the foreign aid payments by the United States (US), which until then had been the largest aid donor worldwide (AidData, 2019). However, China emerges as a new competitor to the US not only in terms of the total amount but also regarding the geographical distribution of aid (Liu and Tang, 2018). Chinese aid increasingly focuses on Africa, a region in which the US is heavily investing as well (AidData, 2019). This development has brought to the fore important consequences to and challenges for the US predominance on the African continent (Tull, 2006; Carmody and Owusu, 2007; Campbell, 2008; Carmody, 2017).

As Kastner (2016) shows, the emerging presence of Chinese aid in Africa leads to shifts in states' trade relations as they increasingly move away from the US market and trade more with China. Yet, to date there are only a few studies that focus on the effects of growing economic relations with China on the relationship structure of African states in the world (e.g., Flores-Macías and Kreps, 2013; Strüver, 2016; Carmody et al., 2020). Our study explores one specific aspect in this regard: how does the emergence of China as an aid donor in Africa affect the relationships of African aid recipients with the US?

China’s foreign policy strategy is generally perceived as an alternative to the US-led Washington Consensus² (Carmody and Owusu, 2007). Part of this is that, in contrast to US aid, Chinese foreign aid is largely unconditional and comes with few strings attached – especially in the domestic political level of the recipient state (Bräutigam, 2011a). We argue that this unconditionality provides aid seemingly without favors in return and is thus an attractive alternative to US aid, allowing recipients to become more independent from the latter (Whitaker, 2010). Building on recent studies that observe an increasing independence

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² The Washington Consensus describes a set of economic policy recommendation originally dedicated to the development of Latin America. The ideology concerns ideals of neo-liberalism and free market principles that were largely introduced by the US along with the two major economic institutions International Monetary Fund and World Bank (Williamson, 1993).
from the US as China becomes more involved in trade (Kastner, 2016; Wu et al., 2016) and foreign aid relations (Xun and Shuai, 2018), we expect that this increasing independence through China’s presence as an aid donor allows African recipients to become more critical of US foreign policy actions.

We study these two developments – China’s entrance on the aid donor market and the subsequent independence of states from previous donors expressed by higher criticism in public speeches – with special emphasis on Africa and thus also in the context of pervasive civil wars (Prunier, 2008). Owing to post-civil war states’ particularly dire need of foreign aid and preference for largely unconditional aid (Collier et al., 2008), we further expect that the two developments above are especially strong and prevalent in countries that recently came out of a civil war. Shifting away from and criticizing the main competitor of China on the aid donor market, i.e., the US, can be an important signal to attract China’s unconditional foreign aid.

We use natural language processing (NLP) to automatically extract positive and negative sentiments as well as direct criticism on the basis of states’ speeches at the United Nations General Debate (UNGD). UNGD speeches are particularly useful to analyze our argument because they frequently contain critical statements directed at the US (Baturo and Watanabe, 2019). Using parts of states’ speeches that directly address the US allows us to analyze the extent to which the sentiments of African states become more critical once China starts investing. Our results support our argument and show that countries increasingly criticize the US as China enters the aid donor market.

Our findings have several important implications. First, we contribute to an emerging literature that analyzes the effect of Chinese foreign politics – especially their foreign aid strategy – on the international relationship structure of states. Second, our study speaks to the literature on the increasing isolation of the US in world politics, which, as we argue, is further driven by the independence of their aid recipients (Huntington, 1999).
Talking Money – How Does Aid Affect State Relations?

In contrast to common beliefs, foreign aid is mostly used strategically in international relations, and only a small share accounts for need-based allocations of aid (Alesina and Dollar, 2000, p. 33). In most cases, foreign aid is tied either to specific conditionalities or to the donors’ expectations of some favors in return.

**Conditionalities** include, for example, the requirement for recipient states to develop human rights or to improve their general path toward democratization. This is mostly the case for multilateral aid from international organizations (IOs) such as the International Monetary Fond (see Vreeland, 2003).

The distribution of foreign aid with an expected *favor* in return is more common in bilateral aid and oftentimes takes the form of so-called vote buying. This means that donors seek voting support for specific resolutions in IOs in return for foreign aid payments (Wang, 1999; Dreher et al., 2008; Dreher and Vreeland, 2011; Carter and Stone, 2016; Woo and Chung, 2018). To give only a few examples, Russia publicly pledged Nauru aid to extend the diplomatic recognition of two regions in Georgia, Iran paid the Solomon Islands to vote against all pro-Israel resolutions at the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA), and Japan even persuaded states such as Guinea to join the International Whaling Commission to support Japan’s pro-whaling position in exchange for foreign assistance (Lockwood, 2013). The US, however, emerges as one of the most active vote buying powers in the world (Alexander and Rooney, 2019).

This is not least due to their public statement in 1983, in which then Ambassador to the United Nations Jeane Kirkpatrick made clear that US foreign aid should be adjusted to states’ voting behavior in the UNGA (Kirkpatrick, 1983). Since then, the US Department of State has kept track of how states vote in the UNGA, and a large amount of studies show that states’ voting behavior can be explained by US foreign aid payments (US Department of State, 1984).

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3 Need-based foreign aid describes aid that is distributed in response to humanitarian or environmental crises. Yet, even this type of foreign aid is not free from strategic considerations, as Lewis (2003) shows.
This has severe consequences for the relationship structure between donor and recipient. Most importantly, international support through vote buying creates a dependency on US foreign aid that requires states to constantly support the US internationally in order to guarantee continued payment. If recipients fail to do so, this means also that they risk losing foreign aid in the subsequent year. At least since the punishment of Yemen in 1990, when the country was sent into a deep recession because the US cut almost all of its aid following Yemen’s vote against the invasion of Iraq (Dreher et al., 2009), states are aware that their aid payments depend on their international support of US positions.4

**Chinese Foreign Aid in Africa**

In contrast to US foreign aid, Chinese aid is rather unconditional. As Busse et al. (2016) argue, having few strings attached is particularly interesting for African countries since they often suffer from weak institutional settings. Conditioning aid on constitutional reforms makes receiving aid more difficult for them. “China’s economic cooperation [thus] provide[s] a viable alternative for many African countries” (Busse et al., 2016, p. 256). In fact, China has become the major economic partner in Africa over the past 15 years and is the largest trading partner in Africa (Tull, 2006; Busse et al., 2016).

While Chinese aid might come with few strings attached, it still has important consequences for the recipient states. Research broadly distinguishes between intended (Busse et al., 2016; Woods, 2008) and unintended consequences (Wu et al., 2016; Xun and Shuai, 2018) of Chinese foreign aid in the region. Intended consequences describe whether Chinese foreign aid fosters economic development (Busse et al., 2016) or bolsters weak states (Woods, 2008). While China’s aid policy is mainly driven by economic interests, there are some political side effects

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4 Similar threats to cut foreign aid are still present to date. In 2017, the US administration publicly stated that it will closely watch states’ vote on the re-evaluation of Israel’s capital and will punish those that fail to support the US position (Lynch, 2018) to move the US embassy and to declare Jerusalem as the capital of Israel, contrary to UN consensus (Landler, 2017).
that are not explicitly intended (Bräutigam, 2011a; Eisenman, 2012), such as changes in state relations (Carmody et al., 2020).

Based on previous research, we know that China’s increasing presence on the African continent has important consequences for African states’ relationship structures in the world and especially with the US (Carmody et al., 2020). Increasing independence from trade with the US, for instance, translates not only into more trade with China (Kastner, 2016) but also into less voting support for the US at the UNGA (Wu et al., 2016).

While there appears to be consensus that the emergence of China as a trade partner has weakened the influence of the US in Africa (Carmody et al., 2020), we still know little about the specific consequences of China’s foreign aid strategy. Yet, recent observations show that trade and aid should not behave much different: China’s increasing role as a foreign aid donor provides an attractive alternative to US aid and can eventually lead to greater independence from the US (Whitaker, 2010). First studies show an associated effect with regard to US vote buying efforts. As Xun and Shuai (2018) demonstrate, the effect of vote buying from the US at the UNGA decreases with increasing Chinese aid.

We build upon these findings and argue that China’s unconditional aid provides a viable alternative to aid from the US, which usually expects some favors, such as voting support, in return. As a result, with the emergence of China on the aid donor market in Africa, states become largely independent of US foreign aid. In the following, we outline the effect of increasing independence from US aid on the relationship structure between Africa and the US.

**New Patron Equals Freedom of Speech?**

Economic independence from the US can have different consequences for states. First, it can open new trade opportunities (Kastner, 2016), especially since China is eager to establish long-term economic partnerships instead of short-term political influences (Bräutigam, 2011b). Second, economic independence extends to a more general form of independence from the US. As outlined above, Chinese aid makes African states less dependent on US aid and thus lowers the pressure...
from US vote buying at the UNGA (Xun and Shuai, 2018). We expect that this general independence from the US goes even further and translates into a shift in African states’ relationship structures with the US. In particular, we expect that the increasing independence from the US through China as a new aid donor allows African states to speak more freely about topics and especially about US policy actions.

These expectations hail from the general use of public, political speeches in international relations. Heads of states, foreign ministers, and legislators in IOs deliver public speeches on a regular basis and frequently address also the policy positions and actions of other political actors (Baturo and Watanabe, 2019). Public speeches thus provide a profound insight into the current relationship structure of political actors (Laver et al., 2003; Baturo et al., 2017). Despite the general diplomatic tone of political speeches (Bullock and Luengo-Oroz, 2019), the way other actors are addressed is not always neutral or friendly. In fact, states frequently use their political speeches to outright criticize foreign policy actions of other states (Baturo and Watanabe, 2019).

For instance, Zimbabwe addressed the West with “Shame, shame, shame to the United States of America [...] [p]lease remove your illegal and filthy sanctions from my peaceful country” in 2013 (Mugabe, 2013, p. 3) and Venezuela called US President George W. Bush in 2006 “the Devil” (Chávez, 2006, p. 1).

Naturally, criticizing other states is more likely if there is no direct, one-sided dependency in place. While states can and do use their speeches to draw attention to specific issues that are important to them (Corbett et al., 2019), it is reasonable to expect that public criticism of powerful states requires a sufficient level of independence or relative power vis-à-vis the criticized state.5

For African states, however, dependency – especially in the form of US aid – might still hinder them to publicly criticize their main foreign aid donor if their economic wellbeing depends on these payments. Yet, the situation might change once this dependency is disrupted. We thus argue that China’s increasing presence on the aid donor market and the

5 These trends are also visible in the post-Cold War trend observed by Huntington (1999) and Voeten (2004), with the US and its Western partners increasingly diverging in their policy interests following the shift in relative powers internationally.
associated relative independence from US aid not only translates into economic independence but further allows states to speak more freely and thereby become more critical of US foreign policy actions. One important setting in which this can be observed is the UNGD.

The UNGD as a Venue for Criticism

Every year in September, heads of states and state representatives gather at the UN headquarters to summon the new UNGA session, at which each state, regardless of size or economic power, gets the chance to publicly address its most important foreign policy positions (Baturo et al., 2017). Given that there is neither a formal agenda nor a prior coordination with other states on the topics and content of states’ speeches (Baturo et al., 2017; Chelotti et al., 2018), UNGD speeches are generally perceived as a “barometer of international opinion on important issues” (Smith, 2006, p. 155). Based on the similarity of topics and political positions, several studies infer relationship structures of states from these speeches (e.g. Baturo et al., 2017; Pomeroy et al., 2019). For instance, studies show that increasing trade with China induces African states to align more closely with China’s position on human rights topics (Carmody et al., 2020). We argue that UNGD speeches can reveal more than a similarity of topics and positions between states.

States use their UNGD speeches also to address other states in the international system. While they can praise states’ international efforts to address specific foreign policy topics, they can also be used to outright criticize the foreign policy actions of other states. Baturo and Watanabe (2019), for instance, show that leaders and UN representatives criticize, attack, or even insult other countries and their heads of state for various political actions, with African states such as Kenya, Tanzania, or Somalia being among the most critical and the US one of the most criticized states at the UNGD.

We argue that the effect of growing independence from major donors can be analyzed best by means of UNGD speeches because this is where states can freely address not only topics but also other states. In particular, as China enters the aid donor market, states become increasingly independent from their main donor, the US. As a result, recipients no longer
need to publicly support the US out of fear that failure to do so would lead
to a cut in foreign aid payments. Instead, having an attractive alternative
donor country allows states to increasingly criticize the policy actions of
the US. We therefore expect that African states become more critical of
the US in their UNGD speeches as China enters the aid-donor market.

*Hypothesis 1:* The rise of China as an aid donor enables African
states to become more critical of the US.

We further expect these effects to be particularly strong for countries that
are in dire need of aid, e.g., countries coming out of a crisis. One of the
main crises in Africa – the most conflict-ridden continent in the world
(Prunier, 2008) – are civil wars. In post-civil war states, foreign invest-
ment is seen as an impulse of a virtuous circle that is required for
economic recovery and post-conflict stability (Collier et al., 2008). Post-
civil war states are not favored targets of international companies due to
their instability and insecurity which is likely to discourage investors
(Garriga and Phillips, 2014).

Foreign aid can serve as a credible signal to encourage foreign direct
investment (Garriga and Phillips, 2014). In doing so, it is important that
the aid must not be geo-strategic in order to be a credible signal. This is
where China’s aid is particularly interesting: Whereas US aid is typically
seen as geo-strategic through its use for vote buying (Dreher et al., 2008;
Garriga and Phillips, 2014), China’s aid provides an attractive alterna-
tive. It is important to note that this does not mean that it is conceived of
as “altruistic” (Garriga and Phillips, 2014, p. 287) – it can still be used for
economic purposes. The difference to US aid is that economically
motivated foreign aid – such as Chinese foreign aid – is not related to the
stability (performance) of the recipient and can therefore be seen as a
credible signal for foreign investors (Garriga and Phillips, 2014).

Chinese foreign aid also comes with fewer strings attached than US aid
(Bräutigam, 2011a). Given post-conflict states’ urgent need for financial
subsidies, we expect that Chinese unconditional foreign aid – in contrast

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6 Furthermore, the US is the largest shareholder at the IMF and the World Bank, and
multilateral aid payments are oftentimes not only tied to specific conditionalities by the
financial institutions but also to favors for the US through voting support at the UNGA
(Thacker, 1999; Dreher and Sturm, 2012).
to the highly conditional US aid – is particularly interesting for post-civil war states.

There are two reasons why this should be visible through increasing criticism of the US. First, in dire need of financial assistance, states might become critical of potential foreign aid donors if they tie their aid payments to favors or conditionalities that are difficult to fulfill and present this situation in front of a global audience. Second, states might actively try to attract Chinese foreign aid and secure easy and unconditional finances by publicly criticizing China’s greatest competitor on the African continent. We therefore argue that China’s presence as an aid donor has a particularly strong effect on African post-civil war states’ sentiment toward the US.

Hypothesis 2: We expect the influence of China’s presence on the foreign aid donor market to be particularly strong for African post-civil war states’ criticism of the US.

Data and Methods

We analyze the sentiment in UNGD speeches using the official English-translated versions of the states’ speeches in the dataset by Baturo et al. (2017). Our data includes 44 African countries between 2000 and 2013. This period covers the sharp increase and importance of China as a

7 The argument might also be reversed, i.e. that states in dire need of financial aid try to approach both China and the US by balancing their appeal to both donors. While there is certainly support for this claim (e.g., Carmody et al., 2020), we are primarily interested in studying states’ criticism toward the US. Further research can extend the findings in this study and contrast the criticism of African states toward the US with their criticism directed at China.

8 The sample is restricted due to data availability. The complete list of all countries can be found in the Appendix.
foreign aid donor on the African continent (AidData, 2019). We use an ordinary least squares (OLS) regression with country clusters.

Dependent Variable: Average Sentiment in UNGD Speeches

To analyze states’ speeches at the UNGD in a systematic way, we turn to the field of NLP. This allows us to process the 328 speeches in our sample in an automated way. Our goal is to identify the extent to which African states talk positively or negatively about the US and to analyze to what extent their sentiment changes once China emerges as a foreign aid donor. In the following, we elaborate on the process of how we retrieve states’ sentiment toward the US as well as on how we analyze the impact of Chinese aid on this sentiment.

To study criticism of the US in states’ UNGD speeches, we employ targeted sentiment analysis. Targeted sentiment analysis estimates to what extent a text is positively or negatively referring to an entity or actor in it. For this, we first disaggregate each speech in its subparts, i.e., single sentences, and then select only the sentences that explicitly address the US. This selection is based on a manually coded dictionary with specific words that are associated with the US. We use this dictionary to match sentences that contain the terms in the dictionary and end up with a total of 3,874 sentences that directly refer to the US.

To classify the sentiment of these sentences, we use the sentimentr algorithm by Rinker (2017). Most sentiment approaches use a simple dictionary approach, similar to the one we used to identify sentences that

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9 As the first Forum on China–Africa Cooperation was held in 2000, it can also be seen as the first formal manifestation of Chinese–African relationships and thus makes a valid starting point for our analysis (Cheng, 2019). The restriction to 2013 is due to data availability on African states’ UNGD statements that directly address the US.

10 Based on our regression diagnostics, the data appears to be a good fit for an OLS and meets the Gauss-Markov assumptions. To ensure that neither outliers nor high leverage points drive our results as well as to accommodate the highly right-skewed distributions of our main independent variable (Chinese foreign aid inflows), we consider a subsample containing the first three quarters of this variable.


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refer to the US. The problem with these approaches is that they can only classify words as positive or negative that are part of their dictionary and labelled accordingly (Husnain et al., forthcoming). That is, the sentiment of sentences that have only a few matches in the dictionary are less reliably classified. Another shortcoming of most dictionary approaches is that they have difficulties in dealing with the context of a sentence (Husnain et al., forthcoming), especially with regard to negators or valence shifts.\(^\text{12}\) Since sentimentr is the only dictionary that specifically addresses these problems when estimating sentiments of sentences, we use it here to analyze states’ UNGD sentences that directly refer to the US (Naldi, 2019; Rinker, 2017).\(^\text{13}\)

Independent Variables: Chinese Foreign Aid and Post-Civil War Periods

Using the AidData dataset by Dreher et al. (2018) we measure Chinese foreign aid inflows in current USD values. Our measure captures the total amount of Chinese foreign aid including both Official Development Aid (ODA) and Other Official Flows (OOF) of foreign aid. We do this for two reasons: First, we argue that foreign aid – irrespective of the type of

\(^\text{12}\) Following Rinker (2018), valence shifts are words that alter or intensify the meaning of polarized words. Part of these words can be negators, i.e., adverbs that negate the meaning of a sentence. I do not like the US would be one example in which not is the negator and, compared to the sentence I do like the US, this negator alters the sentiment of the entire sentence.

\(^\text{13}\) For robustness, we re-estimate our models based on sentiment scores from other commonly used dictionaries. In particular, we use the highly popular NRC dictionary as it takes into account both positive and negative sentiments as well as other, more fine-grained emotions such as anger or joy (Mohammad and Turney, 2013); the compiled Jockers’ dictionary developed in the Nebraska Literary Lab (Jockers, 2017); the dictionary by Hu and Liu (2004), which focuses on consumer reviews to contrast our results with a different sentiment domain; and SentiWordNet which enjoys wide support for sentiment classification (Baccianella et al., 2010). We receive largely similar results using all four alternative approaches, except for SentiWordNet, in which US foreign aid becomes negative and statistically significant in all models. One reason might be that, despite its popularity across different sentiment classification tasks, SentiWordNet has shortcomings when used to extract sentiments directed toward a specific subject (Andries, 2016). More detailed information on these and further robustness tests can be accessed here: https://github.com/cosimameyer/money-makes-the-world-go-frowned.
foreign aid – has an effect on the criticism toward the US. Second, as Bräutigam (2011a, p. 752) finds, “the lion’s share of China’s officially supported finance is not actually official development assistance”. If we restricted our measure to ODA-like Chinese foreign aid only, we would then drastically reduce our sample, as the portion of Chinese ODA is “relatively small” (Bräutigam, 2011a, p. 752). We thus apply a more comprehensive measure of foreign aid (Dreher et al., 2018).

We further create a dichotomous variable that measures whether a country is currently in a post-civil war period or not. We rely on the standard definitions for post-civil war settings and use UCDP’s 25 battle-related deaths threshold (Gleditsch et al., 2002, pp. 618f.) and follow Garriga and Phillips (2014) who define that a country transits from a conflict into a post-civil war period once it comes out of a conflict, i.e., has less than 25 battle-related deaths. In line with Garriga and Phillips (2014) and Hartzell et al. (2001), we refer to the first five years after the end of the conflict to describe the post-civil war period.

Control Variables

We control for other economic and political factors that potentially affect the sentiment toward the US. To account for economic dependence on the US, we include US foreign aid (current amount in USD) (USAID, 2020). As outlined in our argument, we expect that a greater dependency from the US is likely to lead to a more positive tone vis-à-vis the US. We thus also control for bilateral trade shares between the African countries and the US (UN Comtrade, 2020). This follows Carmody and Owusu (2007) and Barbieri (1996), who argue that particularly bilateral trade share is able to capture the dependence from a single (and specific) country. We further include trade shares with China. To control for economic independence, we use the amount of total natural resource revenues in relation to GDP (World Bank, 2019b) as well as the logged GDP per capita (World Bank, 2019a), similar to the study by Carmody et al. (2020).

On the political level, we control for bilateral agreements between African countries and both the US and China using the directed dyad-year from the ATOP dataset (Leeds et al., 2002; Leeds, 2018). We expect
that a bilateral alliance is likely to form a dependency and is thus more likely to lead to a positive sentiment toward the alliance partner.

**Results**

We argue that Chinese foreign aid – as an alternative to US foreign aid – has an impact on the relationship of African states toward the US. We expect that the more foreign aid a state receives from China, the more independent it is from its other donors, i.e. the US, and is thus more likely to publicly criticize the US. Our results support these assumptions. Figure 1 visualizes the effects of Chinese foreign aid inflows on the average sentiment toward the US.

![Figure 1: Predicted values of Chinese foreign aid on the average sentiment (with 90% confidence intervals)](https://doi.org/10.5771/9783828876361-241)

We observe that a change from no Chinese foreign aid to a substantial amount of Chinese foreign aid leads to more neutral formulations of African states’ speeches toward the US. More precisely and based on the
predicted values’ coefficients, we see that a country is relatively positive toward the US if it receives USD 0 of Chinese foreign aid. Keeping everything else constant, however, once a country obtains on average approximately USD 80,000,000 inflows of Chinese foreign aid per year, we observe a strong shift toward neutrality.

Excellent examples that showcase these findings are Comoros in 2009 and Namibia in 2005. Comoros received no Chinese foreign aid in 2009 and expressed an overly positive sentiment toward the US by “applaud[ing ...] Barack Obama, whose charisma, dynamism and sense of justice renew our hope to see the [USA] act with more engagement and pragmatism in the service of peace, justice and development in the world” (Sambi, 2009, p. 3) whereas Namibia, which received relatively high Chinese foreign aid flows, addressed the US in a more negative tone by stating their concerns “that the people of Cuba continue to suffer from the effects of the unilateral embargo imposed on them by the United States of America” (Pohamba, 2005, p. 3). Figure 2 takes a closer look at Zimbabwe and compares Chinese (solid line) and US foreign aid (dotted line). Starting with China’s investment at the beginning of the 2000s, Zimbabwe’s tone toward the US became increasingly critical. In 2004, Mugabe stated that “Iraq today has become a vast inferno created by blatant and completely illegal and defiant acts of aggression by the United States […]” (Mugabe, 2004, p. 25). Ten years later, Chinese foreign aid flows continue to grow in Zimbabwe – and so does Zimbabwe’s criticism toward the US. They continue to “denounce in the strongest terms the illegal sanctions that are imposed on my country by […] the United States of America […]” (Mugabe, 2015, p. 17) and see themselves as “a victim of the evil machinations of Western countries, namely, the United States […]” (Mugabe, 2014, p. 25). Similar results can be observed for Mozambique and Eritrea cases, where criticism against the US coincides with increasing foreign aid payments by China. For instance, Mozambique condemns the US’s continued embargo against Cuba in 2014, and Eritrea, at the height of its Chinese foreign aid payments around 2008, criticized the US for its interference in Eritrea and the African continent more generally (Baturo et al., 2017). We therefore conclude that, with an
increase in Chinese foreign aid, African states’ sentiment toward the US becomes more critical.\textsuperscript{14}

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{zimbabwe.png}
\caption{Comparison of foreign aid payments over time by the US and China}
\end{figure}

Our second assumption – that countries in post-civil war periods are particularly likely to become critical of the US because they are in dire need of unconditional foreign aid from China – is also supported. As Figure 3 displays, we observe that the effect of Chinese foreign aid on post-civil war states is stronger, i.e., leads to a more critical tone, than on countries that are not in a post-civil war environment. While we cannot distinguish the effect for both post-civil war and non-post-civil war countries that receive lower levels of Chinese foreign aid inflows, the effects become significantly different once countries receive more Chi-

\textsuperscript{14} We reran our models for a modified time period that excludes the year 2001 given that many countries spoke highly positive and supporting of the US following the 9/11 terror attacks. We receive largely similar results, giving us confidence that 9/11 does not impact our estimation of African states’ sentiment toward the US.
Chinese foreign aid. Post-civil war countries with higher Chinese foreign aid express significantly more negative sentiments toward the US than countries with similar foreign aid inflows that are not in a post-civil war period.¹⁵

Figure 3: Predicted values of Chinese foreign aid in post-civil war states on the average sentiment (with 90% confidence intervals)

Conclusion

How does the relationship toward donors change once a new donor enters the market? Based on our theoretical argument, we expect that China offers an attractive alternative to the highly conditional US aid since it enters the aid donor market with largely unconditional aid. We further argue that higher Chinese foreign aid inflows allow African states to become more critical of US foreign politics.

¹⁵ Both effects hold for various sentiment measures and other model specifications.
Testing our assumptions with NLP to extract sentiments toward the US from African states’ UNGD speeches, our results support our argument and show that countries increasingly criticize the US as China enters the aid donor market. We find this effect to be particularly strong for states that recently came out of a civil war.

Our findings contribute to studies that analyze Chinese foreign aid’s impact, with particular emphasis on the African region (Kastner, 2016). Moreover, we provide new insights into an on-going debate focusing on the US’s increasing isolation in the international system (Huntington, 1999). We show that this isolation can also be observed by states that become increasingly independent of US foreign aid and can publicly criticize US foreign politics.

In sum, we see that China’s presence in Africa has a visible impact in international relations. This opens various opportunities for further research, for instance, regarding the long-term consequences of China’s foreign policy or its effect on other aspects of state relations that are yet to be studied.

References


