

Transparency and Citizen Support for Public Agencies: The Case of Foreign Aid

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Can aid agencies reform to increase public support?

Aid is essential for many global issues, but giving aid depends on the approval of skeptical domestic publics.

- Support for aid, relatively to other spending priorities is low.
- Knowledge about aid giving is extremely low.

BUT!

- Citizens are relatively open to changing their mind on support for aid.

Public Opinion, Aid & Transparency

- Existing scholarship on public opinion & aid largely focuses on individual drivers of aid, not what donors might change to increase public support.
 - i.e., ideology, causal beliefs on poverty, religiosity, morality, and racial stereotypes.
- Nor have studies on transparency focused on the effectiveness of transparency initiatives.

Hypothesis & Empirics

Individuals will be more supportive of aid when aid agencies are transparent about their organizational practices and priorities.

Mechanisms:

1. Normative desirability
2. Information updating

Empirics:

- 3 survey experiments with sample of 2,058 UK Citizens (YouGov) in August 2022
- Observational data → Citizen Aid Transparency Dataset (Reinsberg & Swedlund 2023)

Experiment One

Control:

The Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office is the main UK aid agency. To what extent do you support aid given by this agency?

Treatment:

The Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office is the main UK aid agency. It provides information on its website on the main ministers, under-secretaries, and directors general that manage its aid portfolio and provides a detailed organizational structure. It also uploads detailed information on its aid portfolio on the website <https://devtracker.fcdo.gov.uk/>. The website includes data on individual projects that show where the money is spent, for which purposes and which contractors are used. To what extent do you support aid given by this agency?

Figure 2: Monadic experiment

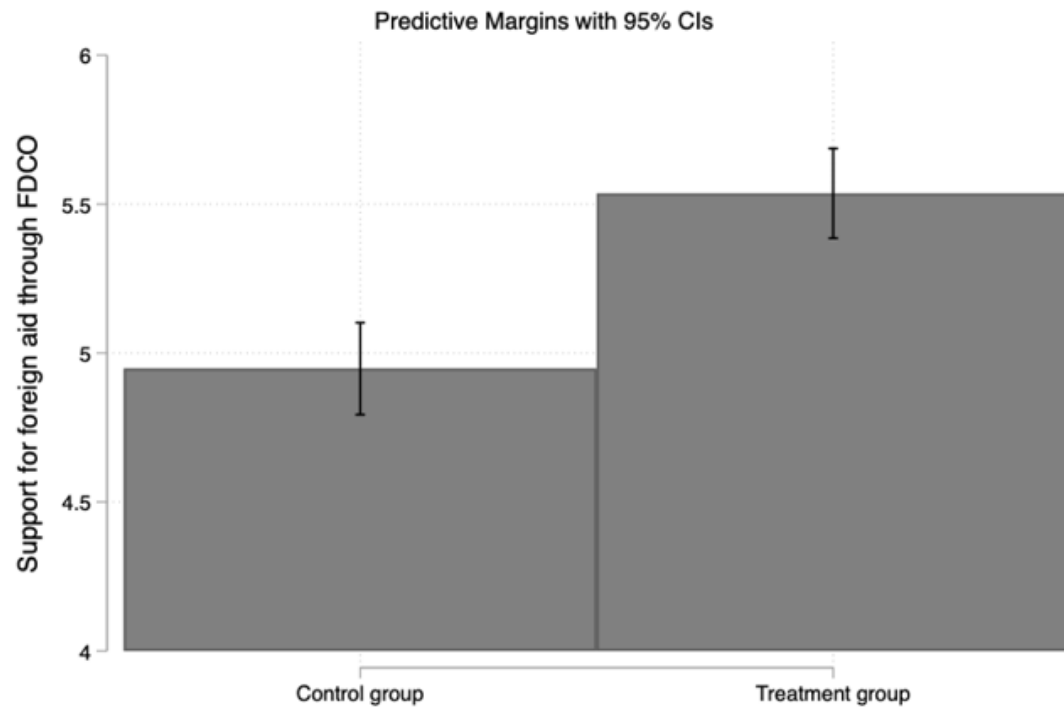
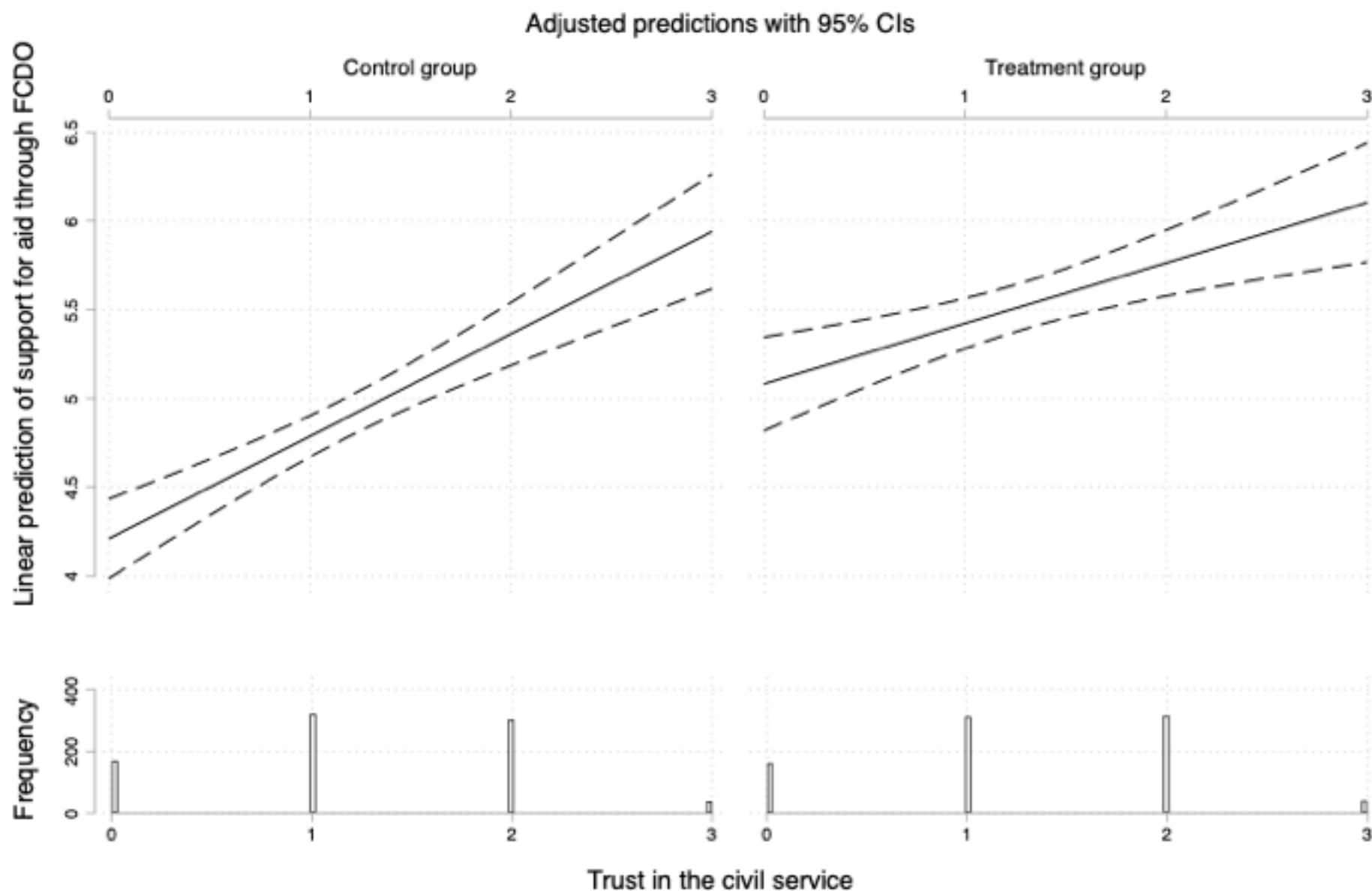


Table 2: Interaction between treatment and respondents' views

| | (1) | (2) | (3) | (4) |
|--|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|
| Treatment | 0.5886*** | 1.0107*** | 0.8723*** | 0.6519+ |
| | (0.1101) | (0.1794) | (0.1641) | (0.3634) |
| Support for aid spending | | 1.3578*** | 1.2521*** | 1.2534*** |
| | | (0.0529) | (0.0441) | (0.0441) |
| Trust in the civil service | | 0.4595*** | 0.5769*** | 0.4562*** |
| | | (0.0679) | (0.0844) | (0.0682) |
| Trust in Government | | 0.0234 | 0.0190 | 0.0272 |
| | | (0.0603) | (0.0604) | (0.0783) |
| Treatment * support for aid spending | | -0.2142** | | |
| | | (0.0748) | | |
| Treatment * trust in the civil service | | | -0.2365* | |
| | | | (0.1105) | |
| Treatment * trust in Government | | | | -0.0230 |
| | | | | (0.1126) |
| Constant | 4.9476*** | 1.5472*** | 1.6277*** | 1.7459*** |
| | (0.0787) | (0.2287) | (0.2281) | (0.2743) |
| Observations | 2058 | 1661 | 1661 | 1661 |
| R2 | 0.016 | 0.530 | 0.528 | 0.527 |

Standard errors in parentheses; + $p < 0.10$, * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$; Statistical significance levels were preregistered at $p < 0.05$.

Figure 3: Interaction between treatment and trust in the civil service



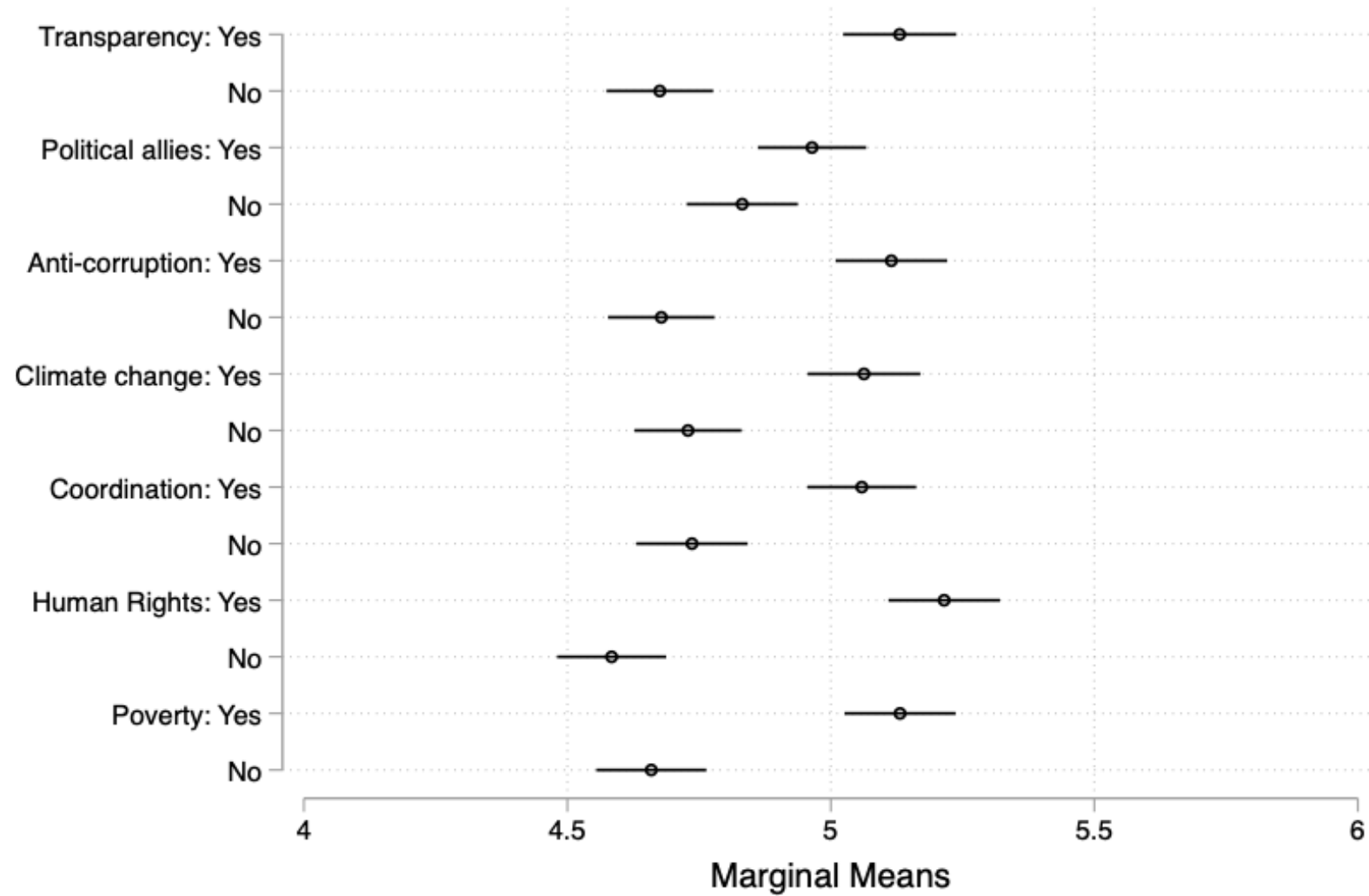
Experiment Two

The UK government provides around 12 billion pounds in taxpayer money as foreign aid each year, and 60% of that money is given through aid agencies of the UK government. These agencies face a number of choices on what information they disclose. Below you see the types of information that two aid agencies plan to disclose. Please indicate to what extent you support giving foreign aid through each aid agency?

| | Agency 1 | Agency 2 |
|--|-----------------|-----------------|
| The agency expands transparency on its foreign aid management, policies and spending | Yes/No | Yes/No |
| The agency includes anti-corruption as a guiding principle | Yes/No | Yes/No |
| The agency focuses more on giving foreign aid to political allies of UK | Yes/No | Yes/No |
| The agency focuses more on giving foreign aid to the poorest countries | Yes/No | Yes/No |
| The agency focuses more on giving foreign aid to countries that respect human rights | Yes/No | Yes/No |
| The agency focuses more on spending foreign aid to address global problems like climate change | Yes/No | Yes/No |
| The agency coordinates more with other donors | Yes/No | Yes/No |

Please indicate on a scale from 1 (strongly oppose) to 10 (strongly support), to what extent you would support or oppose foreign aid given through Agency 1 and 2?

Figure 2: Conjoint experiment—transparency versus other explanations of public support



Experiment Three

Now let's assume that the aid agency decides to increase its transparency. Please indicate to what extent different types of transparency would increase your support for foreign aid given through each aid agency.

| | Agency 1 | Agency 2 |
|--|-----------------|-----------------|
| The agency provides information on its aid strategy, including details on key goals of its aid program and how the agency wants to achieve them. | Yes/No | Yes/No |
| The agency provides information on decision-making about where aid is allocated. | Yes/No | Yes/No |
| The agency provides information on its organizational structure (like who its leaders are and how many departments the agency has). | Yes/No | Yes/No |
| The agency provides information on how much money it spends on the day-to-day administration of the agency (like overhead costs). | Yes/No | Yes/No |
| The agency provides information on how many staff it has and where they work. | Yes/No | Yes/No |
| The agency provides detailed information on each project (like sector, recipient country, and contractor). | Yes/No | Yes/No |

Please indicate on a scale from 1 (strongly oppose) to 10 (strongly support), to what extent you would support or oppose foreign aid given through Agency 1 and 2?

Figure 4: Conjoint experiment—transparency on different types of information

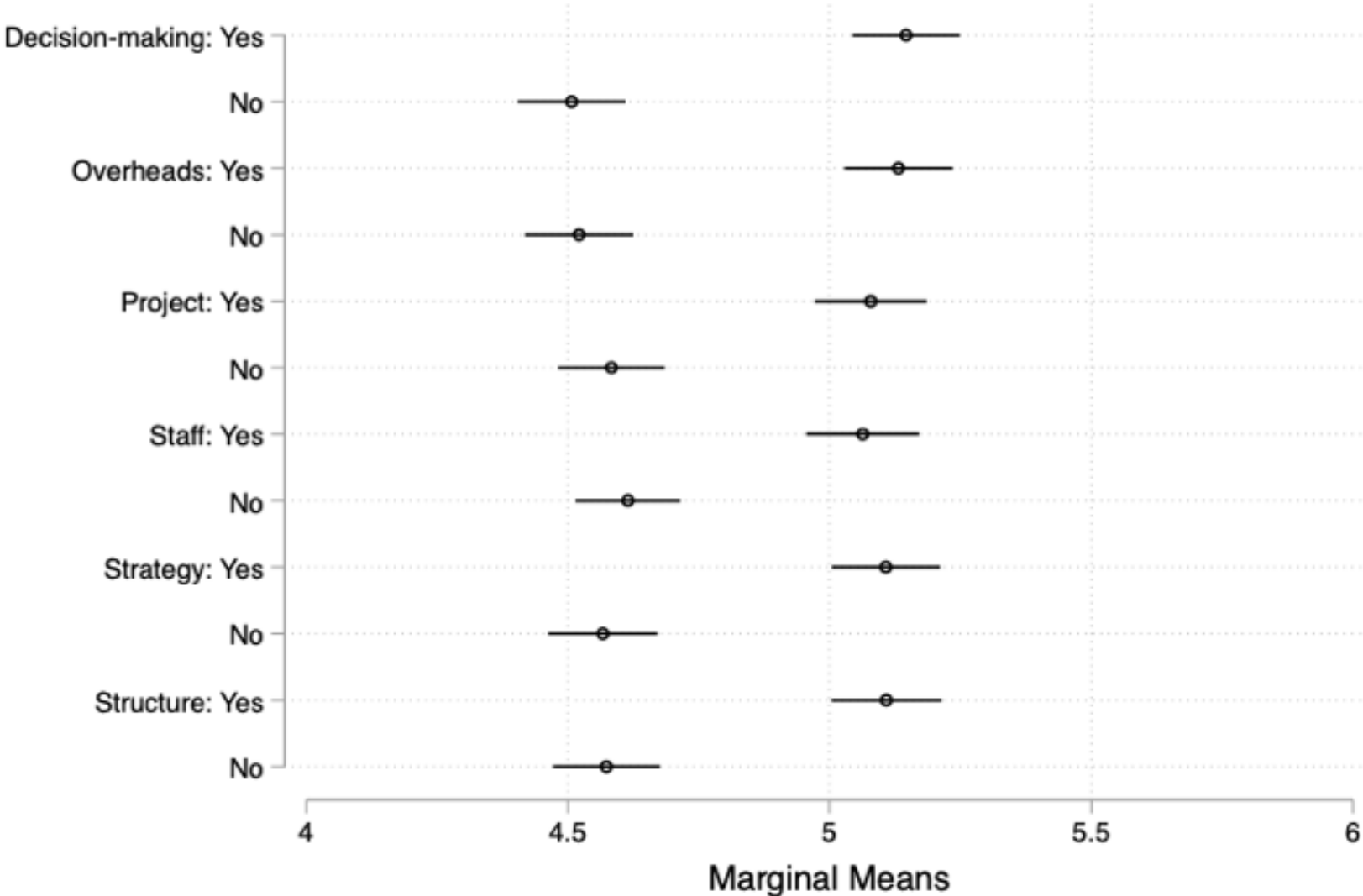


Table 4: Conjoint experiment—number of “Yes” in conjoint (exploratory)

| | (1) |
|--------------|-----------------------|
| One “Yes” | 0.3268 (0.2794) |
| Two “Yes” | 0.8804** (0.2724) |
| Three “Yes” | 1.4608*** (0.2705) |
| Four “Yes” | 1.8998*** (0.2743) |
| Five “Yes” | 2.5603*** (0.2898) |
| Six “Yes” | 3.3404*** (0.4055) |
| Constant | 3.4063*** (0.2624) |
| Observations | 4116 |
| R2 | 0.083 |

Standard errors clustered at the respondent-level in parentheses; ⁺ $p < 0.10$, * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$

Main Take-Aways

1. Citizens value (and reward) transparency
2. Transparency is rewarded particularly by skeptics
3. Citizens don't discriminate on the type of information

➤ **Transparency can improve (short-term) opinions on foreign aid.**

Observational Data

Citizen Aid Transparency Dataset (CATD)

- Measures the transparency of 212 bilateral aid agencies on 120 individual indicators
- Coded aid agency websites
 - Focus on what aid agencies reveal to **citizens**
 - Much larger coverage
 - Measurements for not only the availability of data, but also how accessible and usable it is.
- Correlation of the CATD index of aid agency transparency (Reinsberg & Swedlund 2023) and data on public opinion from the 2016 Eurobarometer.

Observational Data

Figure 1: Preference for increasing aid and aid agency transparency

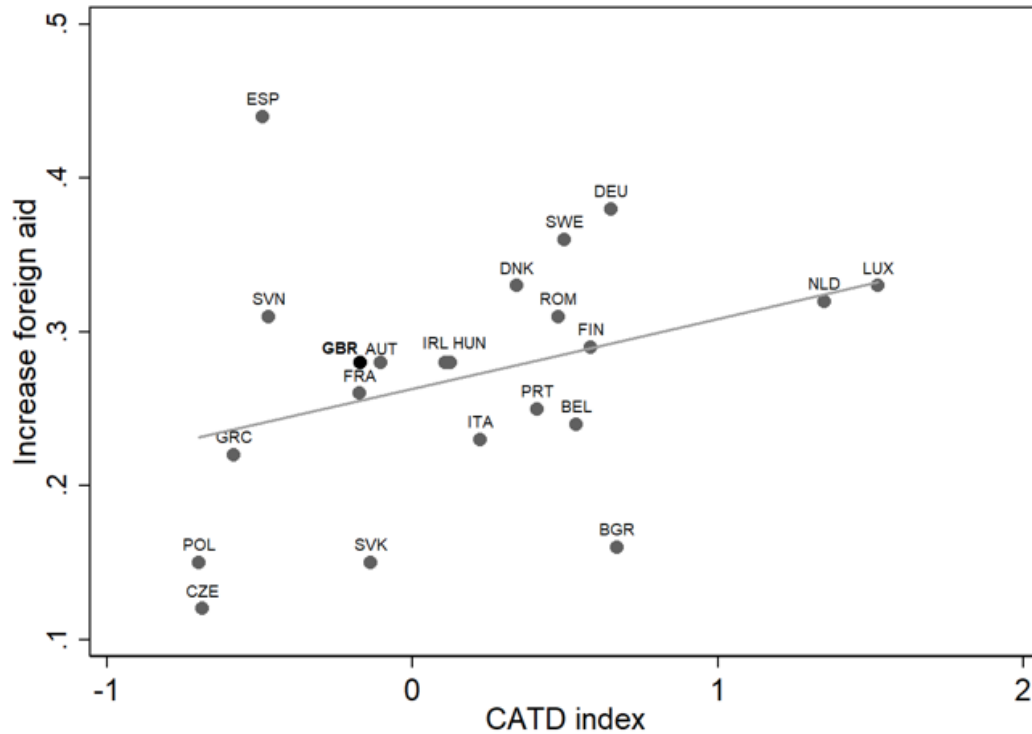


Table 1: Aid agency transparency increases public support for aid

| | (1) | | (2) | | (3) | |
|--------------|--------|---------|--------|---------|---------|---------|
| CATD index | 5.188* | (2.792) | 5.382* | (2.790) | 5.519** | (2.236) |
| DAC member | 6.250 | (6.210) | 3.895 | (5.597) | | |
| Log(GNI) | | | 1.911 | (1.355) | 1.618 | (1.356) |
| Tax revenue | | | | | 0.006 | (0.343) |
| Observations | 22 | | 22 | | 20 | |
| R squared | 0.171 | | 0.258 | | 0.248 | |

Significance levels: * p<.1 ** p<.05 *** p<.01