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FOREIGN AID AND POLITICAL SUPPORT
How Politicians' Aid Oversight Capacity and Voter Information Condition Credit-Giving

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ABSTRACT

Prominent scholarship on foreign aid argues that aid can interfere with citizens' ability to hold politicians accountable. One particular concern is that politicians receive undeserved credit for aid projects due to misattribution by voters with low information. But in some cases, politicians exert effort to ensure the success of projects and thus may deserve any credit they receive from voters. The authors show that the credit politicians receive depends both on voter information and on the capacity of politicians' offices to provide oversight. Drawing on original surveys of politicians and nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) in Uganda, the authors describe circumstances in which politicians support the realization and administration of aid projects. The authors then use an experiment to show that information about foreign financing and NGO implementation of these projects reduces support for incumbent politicians only when their offices have low aid oversight capacity. The authors also provide evidence from other African countries that shows that credit-giving for aid depends on both information and state capacity. Their results suggest that voters think realistically about what politicians might have contributed to aid projects and update their assessments accordingly.

SCHOLARS have argued that foreign aid undermines political accountability because it allows leaders to coopt or coerce potential opponents.[1] Even in a world where foreign aid is not fungible and cannot be diverted for cooptation or coercion, aid may undermine accountability if politicians receive unearned credit for foreign aid projects. Standard political accountability models suggest that voters make inferences about the quality of politicians based on observed outcomes in their communities, and they then vote to select the most able politician

[1] Djankov, Montalvo, and Reynal-Querol 2008; Bueno de Mesquita and Smith 2009; Morrison 2009.

World Politics 75, no. 1 (January 2023) 1–42

in electoral contests.[2] The presence of foreign aid flows and nongovernmental service provision complicates this inferential process and can result in inflated support for politicians if they receive credit for projects that have materialized independent of their efforts.[3]

Yet politicians sometimes play a significant role in soliciting foreign funding, arranging access for nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), or facilitating interactions between aid organizations and communities.[4] In resource-poor environments, these acts might be key dimensions of political performance on which voters want to assess elected officials.[5] In such cases, voters who observe a well-executed aid project should update their perceptions of a politician's effort and skill in a positive direction.

A small set of existing studies has examined cases where development resources arrive in localities because of exogenous decision mechanisms, such as strict poverty-targeting guidelines or random assignment.[6] These studies find that politicians receive credit for such projects, even though no evidence exists that the politicians were involved in securing or administering the project. This credit might result either from the politicians' behavior or from inferences that the public makes. Cesi Cruz and Christina Schneider document how politicians engage in actions that make it look like they were involved in a project so they can claim credit,[7] whereas Raymond Guiteras and Ahmed Mushfiq Mobarak, and Jeremy Springman argue that citizens might give politicians credit even in the absence of overt credit-claiming.[8] But other studies have discussed the ways in which even apparently nonstate service provision is, in reality, the result of coproduction between state and nonstate actors.[9] These authors suggest that in many cases, politicians do deserve some credit for goods and services that are apparently provided by nonstate actors.

To better understand how voters attribute credit, we identify settings where credit for foreign aid projects that improve local well-being is more or less likely to be deserved, emphasizing the importance of variation in aid oversight capacity across political offices. By combining

[2] Ferejohn 1986; Fearon 1999; Ashworth 2012.
[3] Guiteras and Mobarak 2015; Cruz and Schneider 2017; Baldwin and Winters 2020; Blair and Winters 2020; Springman 2021; Springman 2022.
[4] Tsai 2011; Brass 2012; Brass 2016; Springman 2021; Springman 2022.
[5] Baldwin 2013; Jablonski 2014; Dolan 2020.
[6] Guiteras and Mobarak 2015; Cruz and Schneider 2017; Springman 2022.
[7] Cruz and Schneider 2017.
[8] Guiteras and Mobarak 2015; Springman 2022.
[9] Tsai 2011; Brass 2012; Brass 2016.

surveys of project implementers, politicians, and citizens, we are able to show that 1) political offices have different capacities to oversee aid projects, making the presence and quality of aid projects a differentially informative signal of politicians' quality depending on the politician's office's aid oversight capacity; and 2) citizens differentially use information about foreign financing and nongovernment implementing partners to update their opinions of politicians, depending on the aid oversight capacity of the politician's office. For those politicians most plausibly involved in facilitating an aid project, information about foreign funding and nongovernment implementation does not reduce the credit they receive, whereas for other politicians, we observe a loss of credit as a result of the new information. These findings challenge the common perception that all politicians receive credit for foreign aid projects, as well as the normative claim that no politician should receive credit for these projects.

We begin by reviewing the existing literature on the effects of foreign aid on incumbent support and by outlining the ways in which the effects of aid projects on incumbent support should differ by aid oversight capacity if rational voters are fully informed about project funders and implementing partners. We then provide three types of evidence on the importance of aid oversight capacity for conditioning the inferences that voters make about incumbent performance based on the presence of foreign aid projects.[10] First, we provide descriptive information from eighteen aid-receiving localities in Uganda that shows evidence of systematic variation across political offices in terms of involvement in donor-funded projects administered by NGOs (that is, "bypass aid" projects).[11] Second, we demonstrate how this variation in the likelihood of involvement conditions how citizens update their beliefs about politicians in reaction to information about the origins and administration of well-executed foreign aid projects. Most of the Ugandan citizens in our study believe that aid projects are government funded or implemented, and give credit to their political representatives at baseline. When provided with information that the projects are foreign financed and NGO implemented, these citizens reduce the credit given to politicians, but the effects are concentrated among politicians who hold political offices with a low likelihood of involvement in foreign aid projects. Citizens

[10] The human subjects protocol for this research was approved by Institutional Review Boards at Yale University (1507016212), the University of Illinois (16141), Innovations for Poverty Action (14282), and MildMay Uganda (0509-2015).

[11] For a definition of "bypass aid," see Dietrich 2013.

continue to credit politicians for projects identified as foreign aid if the politicians' offices have a high capacity for involvement in aid projects.

Third, we consider the external validity of our experimental findings by drawing on observational data from Malawi, Nigeria, Senegal, and Uganda. Turning around the outcome variable to look at credit attribution to foreign actors, we use Afrobarometer data and geocoded AidData to study how the effect of aid projects on credit given to international donors and NGOs depends on both information made available to citizens and state capacity.[12] We show that proximity to aid projects increases individual beliefs that donors and NGOs are helpful only where state oversight capacity is low and citizen information is high. This finding supports our claim that citizens interpret information about foreign aid and nongovernmental service provision with an eye to the extent to which their elected politicians are likely to have been involved in the work that these entities have undertaken.

Foreign Aid and Domestic Political Accountability

Does foreign aid undermine political accountability? Prominent research suggests that aid may prolong the rule of undemocratic leaders, especially when the aid is fungible and can be directed toward the suppression or cooption of potential regime opponents.[13] But even aid targeted for specific projects may undermine political accountability if it inflates support for incumbent politicians who would otherwise be thrown out of office on the basis of their performance.

In standard models of political accountability, voters face an adverse selection problem: incumbent politicians may be better or worse than an alternative, and voters want to use their observations about the state of the world to make inferences regarding the quality of the incumbent politician and whether he or she should be retained.[14] If voters are rational and incorporate positive signals into their voting calculus, then voters who observe particularly well-executed government projects should update positively their views about the political representatives responsible for the projects. That is, the voters take the quality of execution as a signal of the politicians' competence. A number of existing

[12] For the cross-national data analysis, it is necessary to flip the dependent variable due to data availability, and also because more diverse political offices are likely to be involved in aid projects across the various political institutions and projects included in this data set.

[13] Djankov, Montalvo, and Reynal-Querol 2008; Bueno de Mesquita and Smith 2009; Morrison 2009; Bermeo 2016.

[14] Ferejohn 1986; Fearon 1999; Przeworski, Stokes, and Manin 1999; Ashworth 2012.

studies suggest that voters in new democracies increase their support for incumbents upon receiving information about well-executed government projects that can clearly be attributed to these politicians.[15]

If that is how rational voters should update their beliefs based on government projects, what inferences should voters make about well-executed foreign aid projects? A large strand of the literature views foreign aid projects—and especially bypass aid projects that are administered by NGOs—as circumventing the government.[16] From this perspective, the outcomes of these projects are independent of the quality of the political representatives in the areas where the projects are executed. As a result, fully informed rational voters should not update their views about local political representatives if they observe an internationally funded aid project, particularly one that is NGO implemented. If they do update based on the presence of a high-quality foreign aid project, having misattributed the project to the government, this will result in inflated support for politicians.

Empirically, do foreign aid projects increase support for politicians? In Table 1, we review existing literature that examines the effects of internationally funded aid projects on incumbent support. Current studies find inconsistent effects. We categorize the studies by the type of aid (that is, whether it is traditional aid to governments or bypass aid); our assumption is that government actors, on average, are less involved in providing bypass aid.[17] We also classify the studies, where possible, according to the amount of information voters were likely to have about the organizations formally responsible for the foreign aid project.

The top four rows of Table 1 show studies that rely on projects funded by the World Bank or regional development banks. In these projects, the most common implementer is the government, and the role of the international development organization is usually not widely advertised to project beneficiaries. As a result, it is not surprising that we see consistently positive relationships between the presence of projects and support for the government among these studies: the government likely has been directly involved in these projects, and the role

[15] Harding 2015; Harding 2020; Martin and Raffler 2021; although see Jablonski et al. 2021 and the overall conclusions of Dunning et al. 2019. Among studies of the effects of information about government performance, there is an important distinction to be made between studies that give respondents information about the quality of services without additional information on the actors responsible for these outcomes, and studies that give respondents information about actors' involvement in achieving outcomes. Our study falls in the latter category.

[16] Dietrich 2013; Dietrich 2016.

[17] Survey data collected among Ugandan politicians provide evidence for this claim; see Figure A1 in the supplementary material.

Table 1
Existing Evidence on Foreign Aid and Incumbent Support

Study	*Location*	*Source of Aid*	*Aid Implementer*	*Level of Information about Aid*	*Credit Attribution Outcome*	*Method*	*Impact of Aid on Credit Attribution*
Jablonski (2014)	Kenya	World Bank, African Development Bank	Gov't	Unknown	Vote for incumbent national government	Observational	Positive
Knutsen and Kotsadam (2020)	Africa	World Bank	Gov't	Unknown	Intended vote for incumbent national government	Difference-in-difference	Positive
Briggs (2012)	Ghana	World Bank	Gov't	Unknown	Vote for incumbent national government	Observational	Positive
Cruz and Schneider (2017)	Philippines	World Bank	Gov't	Low	Reelection of incumbent local government	Observational / RDD[a]	Positive
Briggs (2015)	Africa	OECD–DAC Donors	Mixed	Unknown	Reelection of incumbent national government	Observational	Positive
Briggs (2019)	Nigeria, Senegal, Uganda	All donors reporting to aid info management system	Mixed	Unknown	Intended vote for incumbent national government	Difference-in-difference	Negative

Table 1 *cont.*

Study	*Location*	*Source of Aid*	*Aid Implementer*	*Level of Information about Aid*	*Credit Attribution Outcome*	*Method*	*Impact of Aid on Credit Attribution*
Springman (2020)	Uganda	Donors reporting to aid info management system	NGO	Unknown	Vote for incumbent national government	Difference-in-difference	Positive
Springman (2022)	Uganda	NGO	NGO	Unknown	Perceptions of local and national incumbents	Ancillary experiment	Null for local incumbents; positive for national incumbents
Guiteras and Mobarak (2015)	Bangladesh	NGO	NGO	Low and then high	Perceptions of local incumbents	Experiment	Positive, then null
Knutsen and Kotsadam (2020)	Africa	China	China	High	Intended vote for incumbent national government	Difference-in-difference	Null

[a] RDD = regression discontinuity design

of foreign funding may not have been widely advertised. The fifth and sixth rows show studies that include a diverse group of aid projects, most of them probably traditional aid to governments. Here we see mixed results about how the presence of such projects affects support for incumbent governments. In the last four rows of the table, we consider studies of aid projects that largely bypass government. Again, we see mixed evidence.

The patterns in Table 1 suggest that the characteristics of aid projects and information levels are important for explaining when incumbents gain support from aid. In general, incumbents appear to receive more credit for foreign aid projects channeled through the government. For foreign aid projects channeled through NGOs, politicians appear to get credit in low-information settings but not when information levels are high.[18]

The characteristics of the aid projects and the information level of citizens help to explain the variation observed in Table 1, but they cannot explain all the variation. In particular, significant variation appears to occur in the effects of foreign aid projects across countries, even when no large differences exist in types of aid or information levels. For example, Ryan Briggs and Ryan Jablonski find that internationally funded projects have positive effects on support for incumbents in Kenya and Ghana,[19] but in a different article, Briggs finds that these types of projects have negative effects on incumbent support in three African countries, especially Nigeria.[20] In comparing the differential effects observed in Kenya, Ghana, and Nigeria, we note that the first two countries have stronger state capacity, defined as a government's ability to make and implement policy.[21] This distinction helps to motivate the variable that we emphasize: the oversight capacity of political offices for foreign aid projects.

We use the term *aid oversight capacity* to refer to the capacity of a political office for involvement in all stages of foreign aid projects. Offices with high aid oversight capacity are likely to be involved in lobbying donors for the projects, facilitating bureaucratic approvals, mobilizing community support for the project, securing the secondary funding often required for projects to come to fruition, and monitoring project operations. Politicians holding particular offices are conceivably

[18] See Guiteras and Mobarak 2015; Springman 2022; as compared to Knutsen and Kotsadam 2020.

[19] Briggs 2012; Jablonski 2014.

[20] Briggs 2019.

[21] According to either the Mo Ibrahim Index or the Worldwide Governance Indicators.

involved in overseeing multiple stages of project development and implementation, and we care about their general capacity to be involved across all stages, summarizing it as *aid oversight capacity*.[22]

Some political offices have greater capacity than others to oversee foreign aid projects. This capacity is likely to vary across and within countries and locations. In general, political offices in Botswana probably have more capacity for oversight than those in Uganda, but political offices in Central Uganda likely have more capacity for oversight than those in Northern Uganda. Within a particular location, aid oversight capacity can vary across political offices (for example, local councillors are likely to have less capacity for overseeing aid projects than executive mayors have in the same community).[23]

Because a particular office has oversight capacity does not necessarily mean that a politician will use that capacity in ways that increase the number of high-quality projects in their constituency. That is, oversight capacity, in our conceptualization, is a characteristic of political offices, and those political offices may be held by individuals who are "good" or "bad" in terms of their preferences and/or competence. Our key argument is that the aid oversight capacity of political offices conditions the effects of information about foreign aid on citizens' support for political incumbents. This variation occurs because oversight capacity influences the extent to which the realization of aid projects provides a signal of a politician's quality. In contexts of high aid oversight capacity, foreign aid projects are informative signals of a politician's quality; indeed, they may be as informative as government projects, or even more informative, in helping citizens to evaluate a politician's performance. In contexts of low oversight capacity, on the other hand, foreign aid projects are not informative signals of a politician's quality, because politicians are less likely to have played a role in the project.

Critically, aid oversight capacity is a characteristic of political offices, rather than of politicians. As a result, we expect citizens to be better informed about the oversight capacity of offices vis-à-vis aid projects than about the involvement of different actors in a typical development project. In many aid-dependent contexts, citizens have high uncertainty about the actors responsible for funding and implementing a particular

[22] Note that we do not necessarily think that citizens must be able to enumerate all the ways politicians might be involved in projects; we believe that citizens can have a general, encompassing idea of oversight capacity.

[23] The capacity of political offices to oversee international aid projects is likely to vary more than their capacity to oversee government-funded and -implemented projects. (For example, both legislative and executive politicians oversee financing and/or implementation of government projects.)

project; even citizens who have interacted directly with the project may be uncertain about the actors involved in funding, implementing, and overseeing it, which creates an attribution problem.[24] But citizens can develop fairly accurate knowledge of the capacity of particular political offices to facilitate aid projects, as long as they can occasionally observe informative clues about the actors involved in funding, implementing, and overseeing projects in their communities. Over multiple political terms, citizens can develop an informed understanding of the likelihood of a particular political office being involved in donor and NGO projects.[25]

Thus, even if voters are uncertain about the actors involved in a particular aid project, they are likely to know something about the political oversight capacity of a political office and the plausibility of a politician who holds that office being involved in a foreign aid project. This limits the ability of politicians to take credit for foreign aid projects.

Table 2 summarizes our expectations about the credit that voters will give to politicians for high-quality aid projects, based on their level of information about the organizations formally responsible for foreign-funded and NGO-implemented aid projects and their understanding of a political office's capacity to oversee international projects. We focus on this dimension of information about aid projects, given that donors and NGOs try to advertise these facts, but with varying levels of effort and success. Where little information is available, we expect that most people assume the project is a government project, and, therefore, give credit to politicians. But when citizens are well informed about a project, we expect them to credit politicians only if the politician's office has high oversight capacity. So politicians may receive credit either because they likely deserve it (the right-hand column in Table 2) or because voters lack information (the upper-left quadrant). When politicians hold offices that lack oversight capacity and citizens are well informed, those politicians will not receive credit. In our study, we experimentally manipulate the level of information that citizens hold, and ask questions about politicians holding offices with low and high oversight capacity.

In the next section of the article, we provide novel evidence about the existence of variation in aid oversight capacity across political offices

[24] Winters 2010.

[25] This is consistent with other scholars' findings that citizens are aware of the varied capacity of state actors across different institutional and social contexts. See Auerbach and Kruks-Wisner 2020 on India, and Martin and Raffler 2021 on Uganda.

Table 2
Expectations for Credit Given to Politicians for High-Quality Projects

	Political Office with Low Aid Oversight Capacity	*Political Office with High Aid Oversight Capacity*
Low citizen information about aid project funder and implementer	High credit to politician	High credit to politician
High citizen information about aid project funder and implementer	Low credit to politician	High credit to politician

in Uganda, drawing on data collected from aid project implementers. We then present results from an information experiment that provided different information on the funding and implementation of aid projects to randomly assigned respondents, thereby moving them between the top and bottom rows of Table 2. Our experiment provides empirical evidence of the interaction effect highlighted in Table 2: it is only for offices with low oversight capacity that information about aid projects will lead to less credit for politicians. In the article's final section, we show complementary evidence from a wider sample of countries—Malawi, Nigeria, Senegal, and Uganda—indicating that this combination of information and political oversight capacity affects how people think about local projects. In that section, we consider the inverse form of credit attribution—credit given to international donors and NGOs—and show how aid projects increase the perceived helpfulness of donors and NGOs only in contexts of low state oversight capacity and informed citizens.

Aid Oversight Capacity: Under What Circumstances Are Politicians Involved in Aid Projects in Uganda?

We begin by asking a descriptive question: Under what circumstances do politicians play a role in providing foreign aid projects that are formally implemented by NGOs (that is, bypass aid)? Though official government organs may not be implementing these projects, in some settings government officials nonetheless facilitate, approve, and monitor such projects. Among a set of bypass aid projects in Uganda, we show that domestic politicians are often significantly involved, but we also show that this involvement varies across offices and contexts, which suggests variation in aid oversight capacity.

Uganda is an appropriate country in which to explore this question for three reasons: the important role played by foreign aid in its economy; the significant decentralization of political authority, which allows for service delivery to be attributed to a variety of political and nonpolitical actors; and the within-country variation in state oversight capacity. For the past twenty years, official development assistance as a percentage of gross national income has averaged almost 10 percent in Uganda, putting it in the 80th percentile for aid dependence. Also, at the time of this study, a considerable portion of foreign aid flowed through NGOs.[26] Despite the prominence of aid in the economy, we show below that most Ugandans do not have precise information about specific aid projects.

Service provision is a highly salient issue, and the ruling National Resistance Movement (NRM) uses claims of successful service delivery as a means to legitimate its rule.[27] At the same time, Uganda is highly decentralized, with political representatives empowered at the village (local council 1; LC1), subcounty (LC3), and district (LC5) levels; this opens the door for voters to attribute service delivery to a variety of politicians. At the subcounty and district levels, Ugandans elect politicians to both the executive and legislative branches, which have varying responsibilities and capacities vis-à-vis foreign aid. Considerable geographic variation in state capacity also exists within Uganda. The long-running civil war weakened local government capacity in the conflict-affected northern regions, and local politicians were frequently excluded from the forums set up to coordinate foreign aid for postconflict reconstruction.[28]

To understand the involvement of different politicians in bypass aid projects, we analyze responses from a survey of the implementing partners of eighteen aid projects throughout Uganda, all of which received funding from a prominent foreign source of bypass aid.[29] The eighteen bypass aid projects that we study were funded through Japan's Grant Assistance for Grassroots Human Security Projects (GGP) program. We chose to conduct our research around GGP projects because they made

[26] Several political controversies after 2010—a 2012 corruption scandal in the Office of the Prime Minister and the 2014 passage of the Anti-Homosexuality Act—led some donors to suspend aid and others to shift it toward nongovernment channels.

[27] Springman 2021; Springman 2022.

[28] In the postwar period, a large portion of foreign aid for Northern Uganda came via the Peace, Recovery and Development Plan, which was run in a centralized manner through the Office of the Prime Minister.

[29] These eighteen aid projects also define the sample for the experimental analysis in the next section.

up the largest share of geographically identifiable bypass aid projects found in Uganda's Aid Information Management System.[30] From the complete list of GGP projects, we selected those that were (a) either in the water, education, or health sector; (b) initiated in the five years prior to our survey; and (c) complete enough that a commissioning ceremony had either been held or was planned. As we wanted to restrict our sample to bypass aid, we excluded GGP projects that funded government-implemented projects.[31] The resulting sample includes projects in all four of Uganda's regions, as indicated in Figure 1.

For all eighteen projects, the Embassy of Japan provided funds to an NGO or endline service provider, such as a clinic or school, that had applied for the funding as part of a competitive annual solicitation. By focusing on projects funded through the same mechanism, we can hold relatively constant many aspects of the projects, including the selection criteria and the approximate amount of funds provided. All of these projects received approximately US$100,000 through a highly competitive and professional selection process.[32] All of the selected projects were successful and impactful within their communities. In survey interviews, the subcounty (LC3) chairperson usually listed the GGP as the first or second most important project in the subcounty in the previous five years. In the survey data that we describe below, nine out of ten respondents said that the project was of "good" or "very good" quality, with almost 60 percent saying "very good."[33] And 56 percent of our respondents said that they or someone in their household had gone to a site associated with the project.

[30] GGP projects made up three-quarters of the active bypass aid projects in the Uganda Aid Information Management System that could be matched to specific districts in 2015. Because we sampled only GGP projects, we cannot say that the sample is representative of all bypass aid projects in the Uganda Aid Information Management System, but the sample allows us to hold many project details constant across projects in a way that helps the experiment we present in the next section. We address issues of representativeness in Appendix A in the online supplementary material, showing similarities in politician involvement in GGP projects compared to other bypass aid projects in the same communities.

[31] We also excluded projects where it was already known that one politician was not seeking reelection, because we wanted to study voting intention as an outcome.

[32] The program accepts applications from NGOs, medical and educational institutions, and local governments; these must have a full-time paid staff, at least two years' experience implementing development projects, and a track record of handling at least 50 percent of requested funds. The rigorous application process involves submission of a concept paper, interviews, site visits, and then recommendations to the Japanese Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Tokyo, which makes the final decision. Only 5 percent of applications are funded. Between 1992 and 2018, 235 projects were funded through this mechanism in Uganda, and 68 were funded during the time period we consider (between the elections in 2011 and 2016). The majority of projects are in the areas of education, health, and water.

[33] In every project location in the study, a majority of respondents said that the project was of at least good quality.

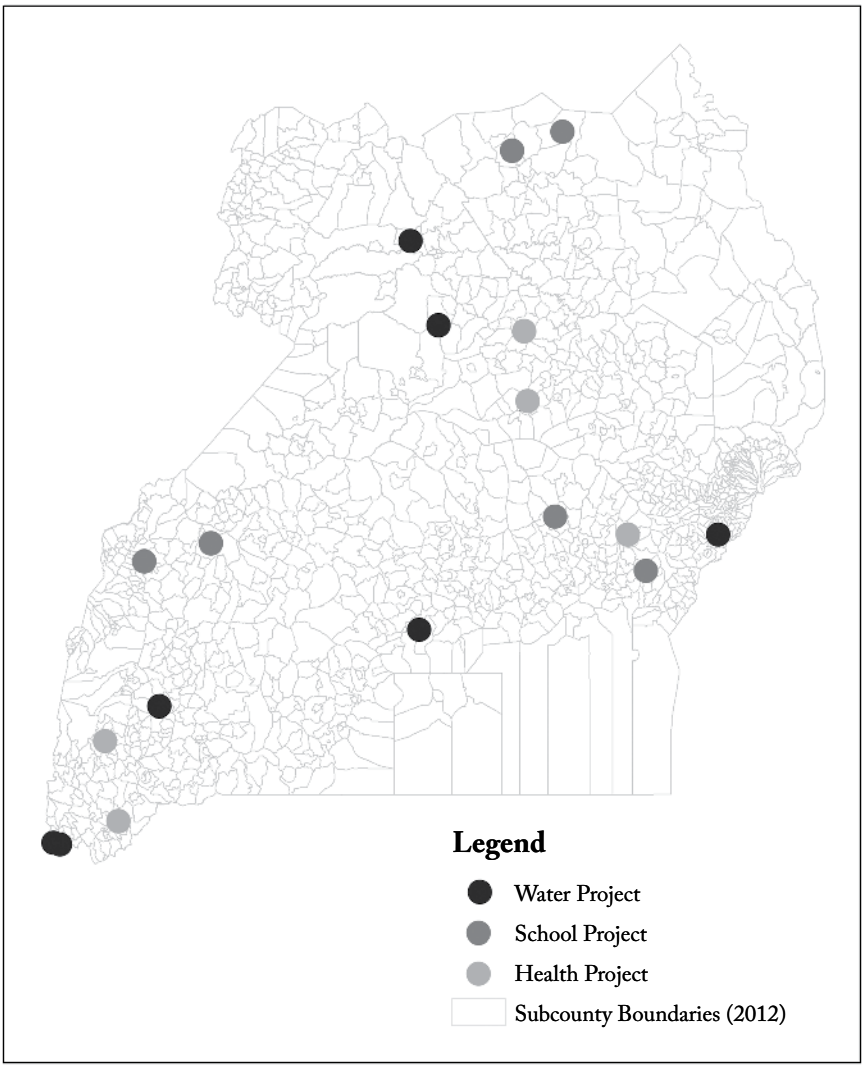

FIGURE 1
MAP OF COMMUNITIES WITH GGP PROJECTS SELECTED FOR INCLUSION IN THE STUDY

To measure the extent and ways that politicians are involved in these projects, we conducted structured interviews with the local director or manager of the implementing partner responsible for each GGP project.[34] These interviews asked whether various political representatives—

[34] In selecting respondents for our implementing partner survey, we instructed that "the respondent should be of a sufficiently high rank in the organization to be able to answer questions about the

subcounty (LC3) chairpersons, district (LC5) councillors, and Members of Parliament (MPs)—had assisted the project by helping to lobby for it, facilitating bureaucratic procedures, serving on the oversight committee to monitor the project, organizing the community, or otherwise.[35] We focus on these three political representatives because initial research suggested that they were the politicians most likely to claim credit for the GGP projects, and because they provide a mix of executives (subcounty chairperson) and legislators (district councillors and MPs).[36] Subcounty chairpersons and district councillors represent constituencies of the same size (the subcounty) but in two different levels of local government; MPs represent larger constituencies in the national government. The research team conducting the interviews had no affiliation with the GGP projects, and the questions they asked were about specific types of involvement, which should mitigate social pressure on the implementing partners to overstate political involvement.

The left panel of Figure 2 shows that many politicians helped to facilitate these bypass aid projects but that the type and extent of involvement varied by political office. Overall, subcounty chairpersons were the most involved.[37] The implementing partners reported that the majority of subcounty chairpersons were involved in providing bureaucratic assistance, sitting on oversight committees, and organizing community support. The only activity in which they were infrequently involved was lobbying. District councillors and MPs were less consistently involved, but a significant number of them still took part in some activities. In 40 percent of the cases, MPs helped to lobby for the project, and in 50 percent of the cases, district councillors helped to mobilize community members. Together, these findings suggest substantial

organization's day-to-day operations and about the project on which the survey is focused." We asked the implementing partners for the names of the individuals who had signed the grant contract with the Japanese Embassy, and in every case we began by reaching out to them to arrange an interview. In about half the cases, we were subsequently directed to interview another member of the organization. In general, we found the respondents to be highly knowledgeable, with none consistently replying "don't know" to our questions about the organization and the project.

[35] The question about MP involvement was added after the first interviews had been conducted, so responses to that question are available for only ten of the eighteen projects. These projects are dispersed across all regions and sectors.

[36] In our surveys with implementing partners, we asked about incidents of politicians claiming credit for projects. Constituency MPs and women's district MPs were the most likely to claim credit for projects (two incidents for each type of MP), with only one instance of an LC3 chairperson doing so and only one of an LC5 chairperson. The greater incidence of MPs claiming credit for projects encouraged us to study credit to MPs in the survey's second round.

[37] In a parallel result about citizens' perceptions of responsibility for public goods, Martin and Raffler ask a sample of Ugandans whether the elected subcounty chairperson or the unelected chief bureaucrat in the subcounty is more responsible for the quality of roads in the subcounty. Two-thirds of the respondents (across various treatment conditions) report that the elected official is more responsible; Martin and Raffler 2021.

levels of political involvement in facilitating GGP projects, particularly by subcounty chairpersons, the executive position among the three.

Our survey of implementing partners also revealed important differences in political involvement in Northern Uganda compared to the country's three other regions—Eastern, Central, and Western, which we refer to collectively as non-Northern Uganda. These results are displayed in the right panel of Figure 2. Across all three political offices, between one-half and two-thirds of politicians are involved in providing bureaucratic assistance, project oversight, and community mobilization in non-Northern Uganda. In Northern Uganda, in contrast, the proportion of politicians involved in these three activities is between one-quarter and two-fifths. Across all three political offices, the capacity of politicians to facilitate projects appears lower in Northern Uganda, which is consistent with the state's generally weaker capacity in this postconflict region.[38]

We can further analyze the role of political office and region in influencing the extent of involvement in the GGP projects by using a regression framework. Our outcome (π_{jk}) is the number of ways the implementing partner indicated that a particular politician assisted in the project (with the count plausibly ranging from 0 to 5, but with an observed maximum of 4 in the sample). We estimate

$$\pi_{jk} = \beta_1 X_j + \beta_2 X_k + \epsilon_{jk}, \quad (1)$$

where j indexes each subcounty, k indexes political office, and standard errors are clustered by subcounty.

The first model in Table 3 examines whether the amount of involvement varies by political office (with district councillor as the excluded category). We find that subcounty chairpersons are significantly more likely to be involved than are other politicians ($p < 0.05$), engaging in almost one more activity per project than other political representatives. In the second model, we also consider whether politicians from the national incumbent NRM party and those from Uganda's Northern region are systematically more or less involved. We do not find a significant difference in the involvement of government and opposition politicians in the GGP projects, but we do find that politicians in the Northern region are less likely to be involved ($p < 0.10$), engaging in about one fewer activity per project than politicians outside the north. The third model is our minimalist model, predicting political involvement using only indicator variables for subcounty chairpersons ($p < 0.05$) and

[38] We do not find significant differences in involvement between incumbent party (NRM) politicians and opposition politicians; see Figure A2 in the supplementary material.

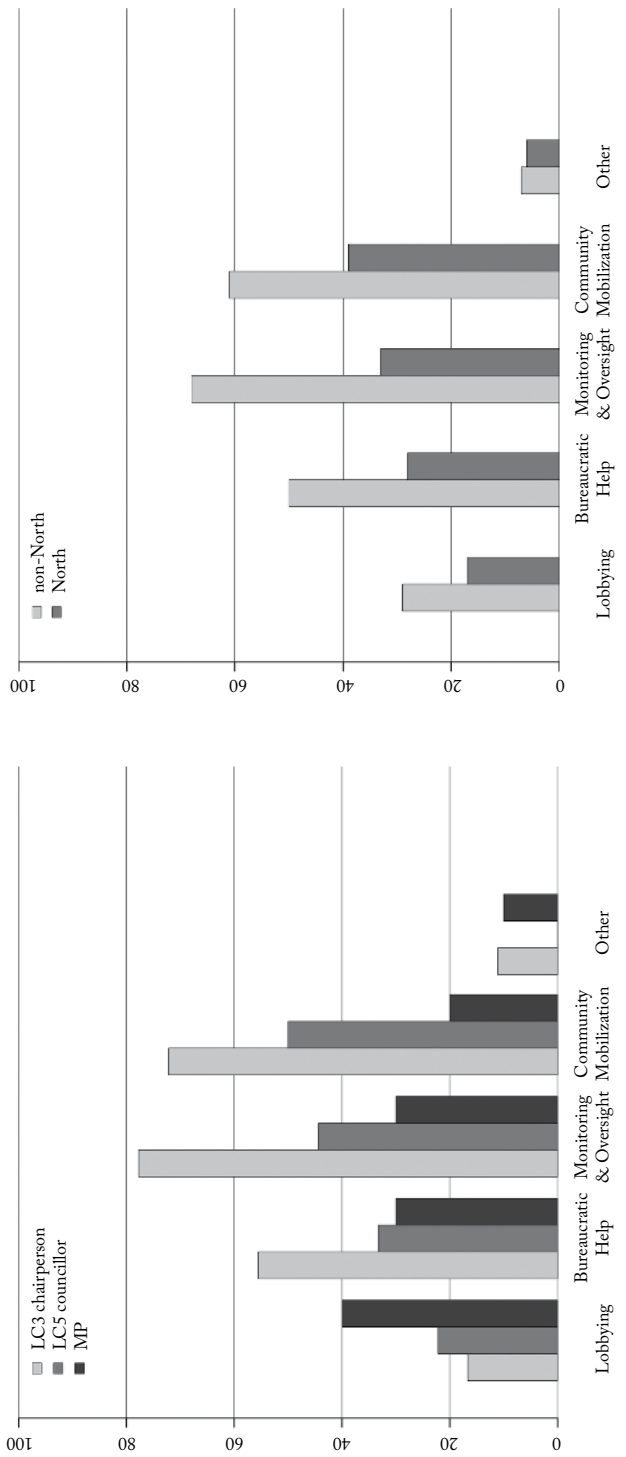

FIGURE 2
POLITICIANS' INVOLVEMENT WITH BYPASS AID PROJECTS BY POLITICAL OFFICE AND REGION[a]

[a] Percent of interviewed implementing partners describing such involvement.

Table 3
Contexts of Political Oversight for Bypass Aid Projects[a]

	(1) Number of Ways Politician Involved in Project (0–5)	*(2) Number of Ways Politician Involved in Project (0–5)*	*(3) Number of Ways Politician Involved in Project (0–5)*
Subcounty chairperson	0.83**	0.96***	0.82**
	(0.31)	(0.32)	(0.32)
MP	−0.20	0.03	
	(0.55)	(0.48)	
NRM politician		−0.55	
		(0.41)	
Northern region		−1.09*	−0.84
		(0.58)	(0.48)
Constant	1.50***	2.20***	1.79***
	(0.34)	(0.52)	(0.37)
N	46	46	46

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

[a] Effects estimated from ordinary least squares (OLS) regression models. Outcome variable measures the number of ways subcounty chairpersons, district councillors, or MPs were involved in GGP project management, with observations representing politician-project pairs and standard errors clustered by project.

Northern Uganda (p = 0.10). Subcounty chairpersons in non-Northern Uganda are expected to be involved in almost two more ways than are district councillors and MPs in Northern Uganda. Thus, some politicians are substantially involved in facilitating the GGP projects, but their capacity for involvement depends on the nature of their political office and the state's bureaucratic capacity in their region.

Should this involvement lead citizens to positively update their priors about politicians? Politicians' involvement might be superficial, failing to improve a project's quality. Even worse, politicians might involve themselves in projects as a form of holdup, trying to extract rents and ultimately making it harder for the projects to succeed.

We selected a sample of projects that were all ultimately of high quality, so our research design does not allow us to compare the effects of political involvement on the overall success of projects. But we have two pieces of evidence that political involvement in these projects is associated with competence rather than corruption. First, the more ways that politicians were involved in these projects, the more likely the implementing partners were to say that the politicians were critical to the projects' success, as demonstrated in the left panel of Figure 3 ($p < 0.05$).[39]

[39] These p-values are calculated from OLS regressions with standard errors clustered by subcounty.

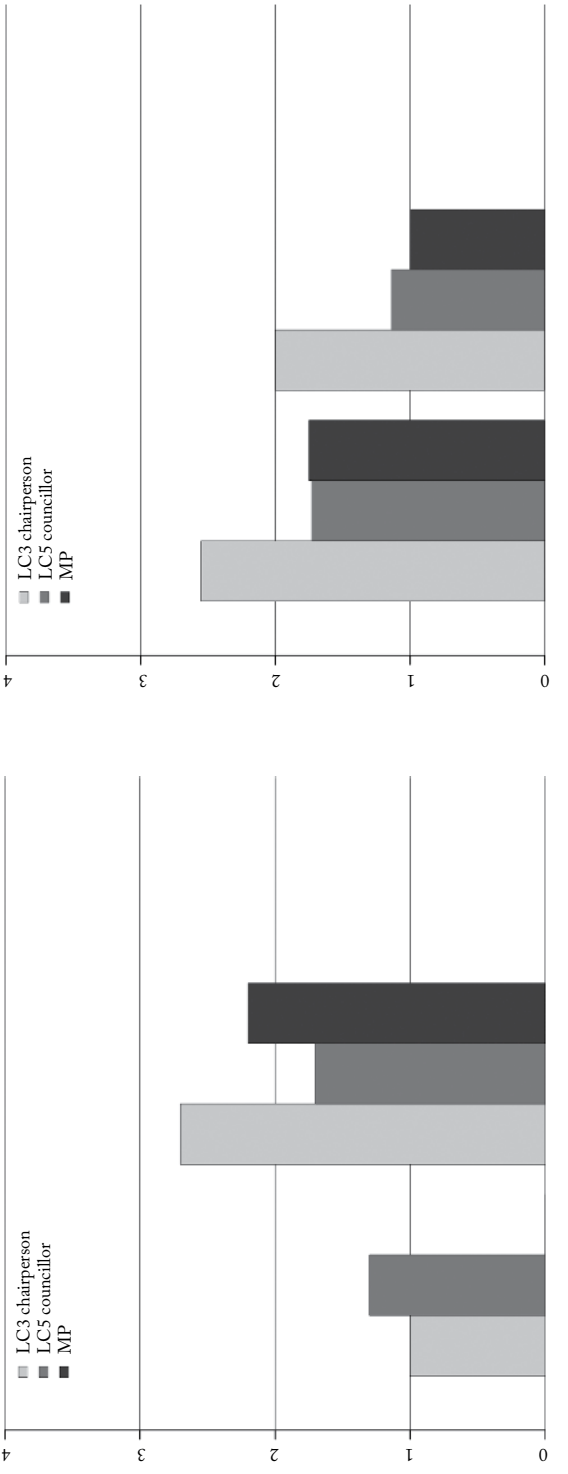

FIGURE 3
NUMBER OF WAYS POLITICIANS WERE INVOLVED BY WHETHER THE IMPLEMENTING PARTNER VIEWED THEM AS CRITICAL TO THE SUCCESS OF THE PROJECT AND WHETHER THE PROJECT WAS COMPLETED ON TIME[a]

[a] Data from implementing partner survey.

Second, politicians were somewhat more involved in projects that were completed on time, compared to those that were not, as demonstrated in the right panel of Figure 3 ($p = 0.19$). These findings suggest that their involvement facilitated the projects rather than holding them back.

Experiment on Information and Aid Oversight Capacity in Uganda

We have shown that politicians are differentially involved in donor-funded and NGO-implemented projects in Uganda depending on the aid oversight capacity of their political offices. If voters incorrectly assume that bypass aid projects are government funded and implemented (which, as we demonstrate below, is the case in our context), then this assumption will confound political accountability in those instances where politicians actually are not significantly involved in these projects. That is, voters may give credit to politicians for the projects despite the politicians' lack of involvement. In contrast, if politicians are significantly involved in facilitating aid projects, whether voters misattribute aid projects as government projects should not matter: in either case, the presence of a project provides a signal of politician quality.

In this section, we present the results of an experimental study that tests whether the effect of informing citizens that local infrastructure projects are bypass aid projects varies by the capacity of politicians' offices to be involved. Even if voters cannot observe politicians' precise levels of involvement in a given project, we assume that they have a general sense of the political oversight capacity of particular offices, and thus know whether a politician holding a given office could plausibly be involved in an aid project. Our expectation is that information about the foreign funding and nongovernmental administration of these projects should only influence voters' level of support for politicians when those politicians do not hold offices that have the capacity for involvement in such projects.[40]

[40] This research was preregistered with Evidence in Governance and Politics (EGAP), the first round of data collection as ID no. 20160113AB (http://egap.org/registration/1673) and the second round as ID no. 20170505AB (http://egap.org/registration/2507). This article presents results registered in our first preanalysis plan under the heading "electoral accountability." We preregistered our expectation that "the amount of support politicians receive when citizens receive information about a project [will] be conditional on politicians' perceived and real levels of involvement with the project." Aid oversight capacity provides the theoretical link between real (but, for voters, unobserved) levels of involvement and voters' perceptions of involvement. Baldwin and Winters 2020 looks at preregistered analyses on the outcomes discussed in other parts of this preanalysis plan. We discuss our preanalysis plans in detail in Appendix B in the supplementary material.

Context: Citizens' Information about Aid Projects and Aid Oversight Capacity

By designing our study around eighteen successful and high-impact infrastructural projects funded through the GGP mechanism, we hold constant whether respondents received "good news" or "bad news." In all cases, our experimental manipulations are changing information about a popular, high-quality project from which politicians could gain support. The previous section already discussed the overall quality of these projects and respondents' familiarity with the project sites.

Yet despite widespread familiarity with the projects, the vast majority of community members were uninformed about the donor and implementer, a pattern that research has also observed in other settings.[41] We solicited citizens' prior beliefs about the funder and implementer of the GGP projects immediately before our informational intervention; the responses are displayed in Table 4. The two most common responses were either that respondents said the government was both the funder and implementer (27 percent of respondents), or that they admitted ignorance as to which actors were involved in the project (19 percent of respondents). Only 8 percent of respondents expressed prior beliefs that the project was both donor funded and NGO implemented. Citizens' lack of information about the funder and implementer of GGP projects allows us to design an informational intervention around these projects that varies respondents' information about the actors involved.

As the previous section discusses, substantial variation exists in the extent of political involvement in GGP projects by political office and location: subcounty chairpersons are more involved than district councillors or MPs, and politicians outside of the Northern region are more involved than politicians in the Northern region. On the first dimension, the subcounty chairperson holds an executive position and is, therefore, more likely to become directly involved in a project's mobilization and implementation. On the second dimension, the civil war and its aftermath made it harder for individual politicians to play leading or supervisory roles in aid projects. We argue that voters are likely aware of this variation in the capacity of political offices for involvement in bypass aid projects, even if voters lack information about the precise levels of involvement of different actors in particular projects; we provide evidence consistent with this claim.

[41] E.g., Cruz and Schneider 2017; Dietrich, Mahmud, and Winters 2018.

Table 4
Prior Beliefs about the GGP Projects[a]

	Prior Beliefs about GGP Project Funder						
Prior beliefs about GGP project implementer	*Government*	*Japan*	*Other international donor*	*NGO*	*Other*	*Volunteered "Don't Know"*	*Row total*
Government	27.1% (662)	0.9% (23)	2.0% (50)	0.4% (10)	3.1% (77)	1.8% (44)	35.4% (866)
Actual implementing entity	4.8% (118)	2.8% (69)	3.4% (82)	4.3% (106)	1.3% (33)	1.3% (31)	18% (439)
Other NGO	0.6% (15)	0.1% (3)	0.3% (7)	0.0% (1)	2% (50)	0.2% (5)	3.3% (81)
Community	2.8% (68)	0.3% (8)	1.3% (33)	0.4% (10)	1.8% (44)	0.7% (16)	7.3% (179)
Other	0.8% (20)	0.4% (11)	1.3% (31)	0.3% (7)	0.5% (13)	0.1% (3)	3.5% (85)
Volunteered "don't know"	7.2% (177)	0.9% (22)	1.8% (43)	1.3% (33)	2.2% (53)	19.1% (467)	32.5% (795)
Column total	43.4% (1,060)	5.6% (136)	10.1% (246)	6.8% (167)	11% (270)	23.1% (566)	100% (2,445)

[a] Table reports the percentage and frequency of respondents falling in each cell. Note that due to rounding, the percentages in the cells in each row and column do not always sum exactly to the column and row totals.

Experimental Design

Our experiment varied the information presented to citizens about the recent GGP project in their community for which we had collected information on politicians' level of involvement. We conducted the informational interventions in the context of a household survey, with surveying in two phases, in 2016 and 2017. For each of the eighteen GGP projects in our sample, we randomly sampled 138 households in the parish where the project was located.[42] Within households, enumerators randomly sampled from among male and female respondents, alternating gender between households. After conducting an introductory survey module, respondents received different levels of information about the GGP project in their community, as described below, with respondents randomly assigned to each informational treatment.[43]

In all treatment arms, enumerators read respondents a description of the project, informing them of its purpose, start year, and cost, and showed a photo of the project site.[44] Then respondents indicated if they had previously heard of the project, who they thought had funded it, who they thought had managed the funds and run the project, and how certain they were regarding these answers.[45]

After this, enumerators gave some respondents additional information on the project's donor and/or implementing partner. In the donor treatment, enumerators told respondents that the funding came from Japan and presented a photo of the Japanese ambassador signing off on a GGP grant. In the implementing-partner treatment, enumerators told respondents that a specific NGO was in charge of the project and presented a photo of the NGO's signboard. The full informational treatment combined both donor and implementing-partner treatments, making it clear that the project was neither government funded nor government administered. By crafting these informational treatments with regard

[42] Some water projects spanned multiple parishes, and in those cases we sampled the parish that the implementing partner deemed to have benefited most. To create the sample, our team worked with the village chairpersons (LC1) to map these villages. We then sampled every *n*th household along a route that circled through the whole village to achieve an even sampling density. We compare the characteristics of our study sample to the Ugandan population in Table C1 in the supplementary material.

[43] Table C2 in the supplementary material shows that the randomization created well-balanced groups of respondents across treatment conditions.

[44] In the first phase of surveying, 184 respondents were also assigned to a delayed control condition in which they were not provided with this information until after measuring one of our outcome measures—the likelihood of voting for incumbent local politicians. We do not find significant differences between the delayed control and the baseline treatment conditions, possibly due to the dense information possessed by respondents about these well-known projects in advance of the survey. We pool these respondents with the baseline treatment in our main analysis. The results are robust to dropping them, as indicated in Table D1 in the supplementary material.

[45] We used these data to construct the measures of prior beliefs about the project reported above.

to a well-known project, we were able to manipulate information about foreign funding and NGO implementation without changing perceptions of the project's quality.[46]

We are interested in how the informational treatments change the credit given by voters to politicians for the project. We measured credit attribution through a series of survey questions administered after treatment. We used a question asking how likely or unlikely the respondent would be to vote for their current representatives if elections were held to measure individual-level support for politicians, with responses coded on a four-point scale ranging from "very unlikely" to "very likely." Respondents indicated their support for multiple politicians, with each respondent answering questions about an executive political office with relatively higher oversight capacity (their subcounty chairperson) and a legislative political office with relatively lower oversight capacity (either their district councillor or MP).[47] We randomized across respondents the order in which we asked about different politicians. After the vote choice questions, the enumerators directly asked respondents whether they thought the same politicians had taken actions that made sure the project helped people in their community. In the second phase of surveying, we also asked whether respondents thought the project should earn politicians votes in the next election.

Figure 4 maps out the variation in informational treatments and oversight capacity employed in this study, with darker shading indicating political offices with higher oversight capacity. The figure shows the two sources of variation in a political office's oversight capacity: the location of the project, with oversight capacity lower in Northern Uganda; and the type of office, with executive offices having higher oversight capacity. Following our theoretical framework, we assume that citizens do not perfectly observe actual effort by politicians but that citizens are aware of the oversight capacity of political offices.[48]

[46] See Table E1 in the supplementary material.

[47] We selected these political offices because their geographic constituencies matched the breadth of the GGP projects, making them plausible project facilitators, and our interviews with implementing partners confirmed them as the politicians most frequently involved.

[48] Citizens could possibly use proxies other than the ones we use (region and executive vs. legislative office) to gauge an office's oversight capacity. So it is reassuring that our results are broadly similar if we interact politicians' actual involvement with our full information treatment. See Appendix F in the supplementary material.

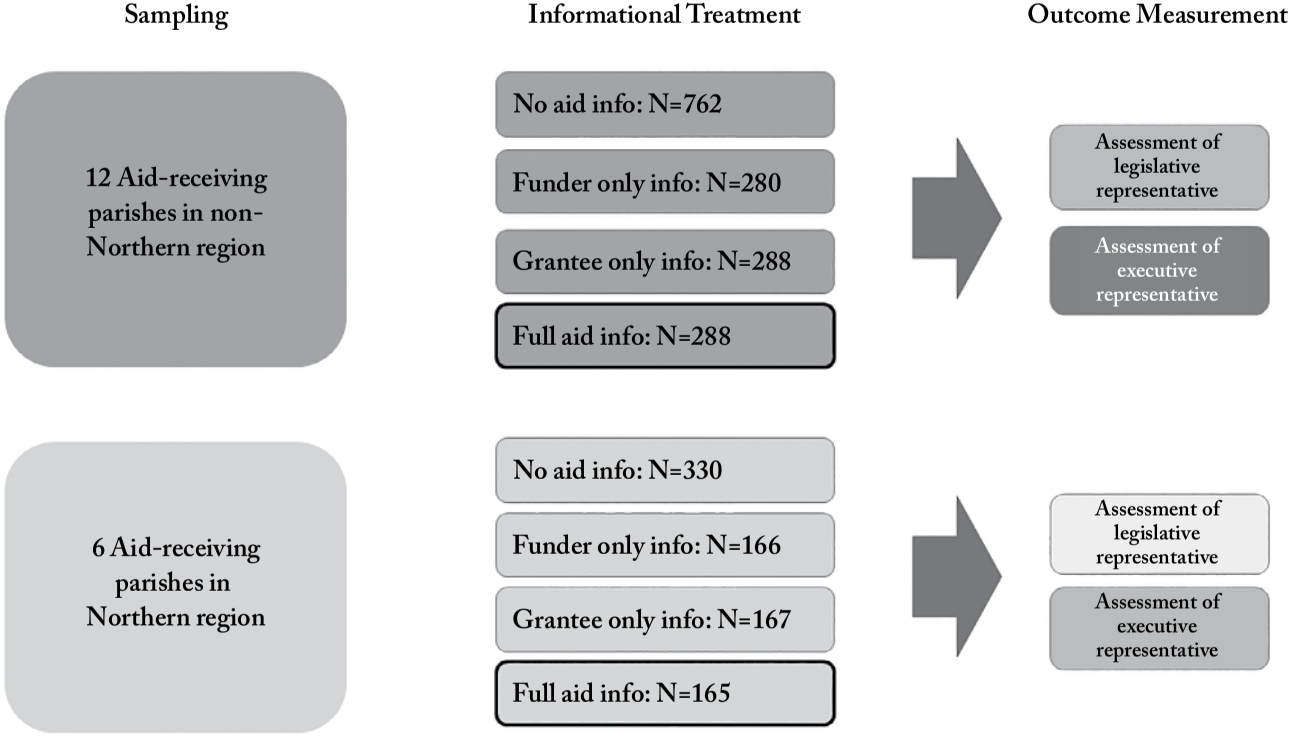

Figure 4
Variation in Informational Treatment and Political Office's Aid Oversight Capacity[a]

[a] Darker shades represent cases with more aid oversight capacity.

Experimental Analysis: Information Effects as Moderated by Aid Oversight Capacity

The variation in the involvement of politicians in aid projects leads us to expect heterogeneity in the effects of correcting misinformation about a project's donor and implementing partner. As shown above, all of these projects can be considered a success, and the majority of citizens believe that the projects are government funded or government administered at baseline. As a result, prior to the informational treatments, a majority of citizens credit politicians for the projects.[49]

In contexts where politicians are likely to have been significantly involved in bypass aid projects, we do not expect citizens to change their opinions of the politicians if they find out the project is donor funded and NGO administered. In contrast, in contexts where politicians are unlikely to have been significantly involved in bypass aid projects, we expect citizens to negatively update their opinions of politicians if they find out the project is donor funded and NGO administered. In other words, we hypothesize that citizens will only negatively update their views of politicians when they learn a project is donor funded and NGO implemented in contexts where politicians have low oversight capacity.

We test these predictions by examining whether informing citizens that the local infrastructural projects provided through the GGP funding mechanism are donor funded and NGO implemented differentially changes citizens' support for politicians depending on the oversight capacity of those politicians' offices. In particular, we draw on the analysis in Table 3, which suggests that political office (in particular, the office of subcounty chairperson) and region (non-Northern regions) have approximately equal positive effects on political oversight, and we generate a three-point scale (0–2) that measures a political office's oversight capacity in a particular location based on these two variables.[50] The survey asked each respondent about one politician from an office with relatively higher oversight capacity (the subcounty chairperson) and one politician from an office with relatively lower oversight capacity

[49] In the baseline conditions, when replying to questions asking if specific politicians took actions to make the project a success, 57 percent of respondents give credit to at least one of the two politicians about whom they were asked; 46 percent credit the subcounty chairperson; and 41 percent credit the legislator about whom they were asked (43 percent for MP, 38 percent for LC5 councillor).

[50] Specifically, for district councillors and MPs in Northern Uganda, the aid oversight measure equals 0; for district councillors and MPs in non-Northern Uganda or for subcounty chairpersons in Northern Uganda, it equals 1; and for subcounty chairpersons in Northern Uganda, it equals 2. This is consistent with the estimates in models 2 and 3 in Table 3, which suggest approximately equal-sized effects of each correlate of political involvement. In Table G1 in the supplementary material, we break apart the two components of the aid oversight measure.

(either the district councillor or the MP, depending on the survey phase). Overall, our observations are well balanced on relevant demographic characteristics and prior information about projects by aid oversight capacity.[51] We interact the aid oversight variable with our full informational treatment, comparing responses to outcome questions from those respondents who were informed that a project was donor funded and NGO implemented (that is, respondents who received the treatment that comprehensively corrected beliefs about government involvement) against all other respondents.[52] We treat respondents' support for each political office as a distinct observation, and we cluster standard errors at the respondent level.

Specifically, we estimate the effects of the intervention using the following equation:

$$y_{ijk} = \beta_1 Info_i + \beta_2 \pi_{jk} + \beta_3 Info_i * \pi_{jk} + \alpha_{ij} + \epsilon_{ijk}, \quad (2)$$

where i indexes individual respondents, j indexes parishes, and k indexes political offices. The oversight capacity of a specific political office in a particular parish is captured by π_{jk}; α_{ij} represents fixed effects for thirty-five of the thirty-six strata employed in the randomization (gender by parish); and β_3 captures any interactions between the informational treatment and oversight capacity.

Table 5 shows the average effect of the informational treatment and then the conditional effects by oversight capacity. We begin by examining the effect of the informational treatment on credit attributed to the politician, which is the main intermediary outcome that we posit is manipulated by our informational treatments.[53] Model 1a shows an average negative effect of the full information treatment on credit given to politicians (significant at the 95-percent confidence level). But model 1b shows that the average effect hides important heterogeneity by oversight capacity. In instances where a political office has weak oversight capacity, citizens who are informed that a project is donor funded and

[51] We provide these statistics in Table C2 in the supplementary material.

[52] Table H1 in the supplementary material shows the results from an alternative specification, separately interacting oversight capacity with all three arms of the informational treatment (information on donor funding only; information on nongovernmental implementation only; and full information). For the two lighter informational treatments, which allow for the possibility of the government either administering or funding the project, respectively, there are no effects. Table I1 shows the results when an indicator is used for exposure to any of the three informational treatments.

[53] Alternatively, one could posit that the manipulation influenced perceptions of government corruption insofar as it revealed that the government had a bigger budget vis-à-vis the number of projects it had provided. But we find no evidence that knowledge about the project being donor funded and NGO implemented influenced perceptions of government corruption. We present these results in Table E1 in the supplementary material.

Table 5
Heterogeneous Treatment Effects on Credit-Giving[a]

	(1) *Politician Deserves Credit for Project (0/1)*		(2) *Others Should Vote for Politician because of Project (1–4)*		(3) *Likelihood of Voting for Politician (1–4)*	
	(1a)	*(1b)*	*(2a)*	*(2b)*	*(3a)*	*(3b)*
Full aid info treatment	−0.04**	−0.12***	−0.22***	−0.45***	−0.003	−0.15*
	(0.02)	(0.03)	(0.06)	(0.09)	(0.05)	(0.09)
Oversight capacity x full aid info treatment		0.07***		0.26***		0.13**
		(0.02)		(0.07)		(0.06)
Oversight capacity of political office		0.04***		0.02		0.07**
		(0.01)		(0.03)		(0.03)
Baseline mean	0.43	0.42	2.62	2.44	2.80	2.89
N	4765	4765	2614	2614	4341	4341

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

[a] Effects estimated from OLS regression models with an indicator for the full aid information treatment, a politician-specific measure of oversight capacity, an interaction between the two, and thirty-five random-assignment strata fixed effects. Observations represent respondents' views on different politicians (subcounty chairpersons, district councillors, and MPs), with standard errors clustered by respondent. The outcome in column 2 was asked only in the 2017 wave of the survey. The baseline mean row reports the average value across respondents not receiving the full aid information treatment (a columns) and for politicians with low oversight capacity (b columns).

NGO implemented indicate that incumbent politicians should receive less credit—a negative effect that is significant at the 99-percent confidence level. But in instances where a political office has strong oversight capacity, this effect disappears, with the interaction effect significant at the 99-percent confidence level. The attenuation of the negative effect with the increasing oversight capacity of political offices is indicated clearly in the left-hand panel of Figure 5.

In a follow-up question, we asked respondents about the type of action they thought the politician had taken to make sure the project helped people in the community. We find that political oversight capacity attenuates the negative effect of the full information treatment on citizens' views about whether politicians helped to secure project financing and whether they mobilized the community to support the project.[54] This finding is consistent with citizens having an informed understanding of political oversight capacity vis-à-vis bypass aid projects.

A similar pattern emerges when citizens are asked whether other voters should support the incumbent politician as a result of the project. Model 2a in Table 5 shows an average negative effect (statistically significant at the 99-percent confidence level), but model 2b reveals that this varies by oversight capacity. Information that projects are donor funded and NGO implemented yields a clear negative effect when politicians are from a political office with weak oversight capacity (statistically significant at the 99-percent confidence level), but the effect loses significance (and the point estimate even becomes positive) in contexts of strong aid oversight capacity, as demonstrated in the middle panel of Figure 5. The effect of the informational treatment is significantly more positive under conditions of stronger aid oversight (at the 99-percent confidence level).

The third set of models in Table 5 shows the effects of the full information treatment on respondents' reported likelihood of voting for the politician. This question asked respondents about their overall likelihood of supporting the politician, without reference to the GGP project.[55] Once again, we see a similar pattern: for politicians in low-capacity offices, the full information treatment reduces respondents' likelihood of saying they would vote for the politician, but this effect disappears among politicians in high-capacity offices.

The effects in Table 5 may be depressed by the fact that a portion of respondents had accurate prior beliefs about the funder and/or

[54] See Appendix J in the supplementary material.

[55] The question was asked before the questions about whether the politician deserved credit for the project and whether the project should be a voting factor for other citizens.

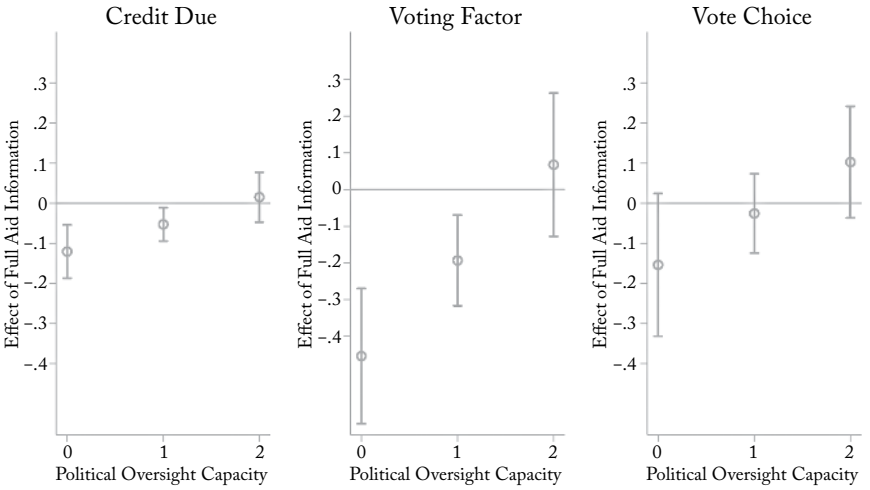

Figure 5
Heterogeneous Treatment Effects on Credit-Giving by Aid Oversight Capacity[a]

[a] Based on coefficient estimates reported in models 1b, 2b, and 3b in Table 5.

implementer of the projects in our study (as seen in Table 4), and those respondents are, therefore, unlikely to update their beliefs and attitudes based on the information that we provide. Table 6 reruns the same models found in Table 5, dropping respondents who knew either the project funder or implementer prior to our informational intervention. The effects estimated in Table 6 are also displayed graphically in Figure 6. As expected, when looking only at the set of respondents with incorrect or uncertain prior knowledge, we estimate larger negative effects of the informational intervention on credit given to and support for politicians whose offices have weak oversight capacity. Correspondingly, we estimate a larger positive interaction effect between the informational intervention and offices' oversight capacity.

Together, these results suggest that citizens update differently about politicians depending on characteristics of their offices that, as shown above, predict politicians' likelihood of involvement in aid projects. We argue that even if voters do not know who funds, implements, or is involved with a particular project, they understand the overall oversight capacity of politicians with regard to aid projects. As a result, information that projects are actually donor funded and NGO implemented has different effects on credit-giving depending on

Table 6
Heterogeneous Treatment Effects on Credit-Giving by Uncertain or Incorrect Prior Beliefs[a]

	(1) *Politician Deserves Credit for Project (0/1)*	*(2)* *Others Should Vote for Politician because of Project (1–4)*	*(3)* *Likelihood of Voting for Politician (1–4)*
Full aid info treatment	−0.15***	−0.56***	−0.22**
	(0.04)	(0.11)	(0.10)
Oversight capacity × full aid info treatment	0.09***	0.36***	0.18**
	(0.03)	(0.08)	(0.07)
Oversight capacity of political office	0.04***	−0.01	0.03
	(0.01)	(0.04)	(0.04)
Baseline mean	0.44	2.49	2.96
N	3765	2133	3423

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

[a] Effects estimated from OLS regression models with an indicator for the full aid information treatment, a politician-specific measure of oversight capacity, an interaction between the two, and thirty-five random-assignment strata fixed effects. Observations represent respondent's views on different politicians (subcounty chairpersons, district councillors, and MPs), with standard errors clustered by respondent. The outcome in column (2) was asked only in the 2017 wave of the survey. The baseline mean row reports the average value across respondents not receiving the full aid information treatment and for politicians with low oversight capacity.

context: citizens penalize only those politicians whose office is unlikely to have been involved.

In the online supplementary material, we provide evidence against plausible alternative explanations for these patterns. As discussed above, respondents across Uganda's different regions had similar levels of prior information about projects; as a result, we can rule out the possibility that respondents outside Northern Uganda are less influenced by aid information because they are better informed or better educated.[56] We also show that respondents do not update differentially depending on whether they are project beneficiaries.[57] And we show that our results cannot be explained by voters differentially crediting politicians based on whether the voters share a party identification with the politician or whether the politician is a member of the governing party.[58]

[56] See Table C2 in the supplementary material.
[57] See Table K1 in the supplementary material.
[58] See Tables K2 and K3 in the supplementary material.

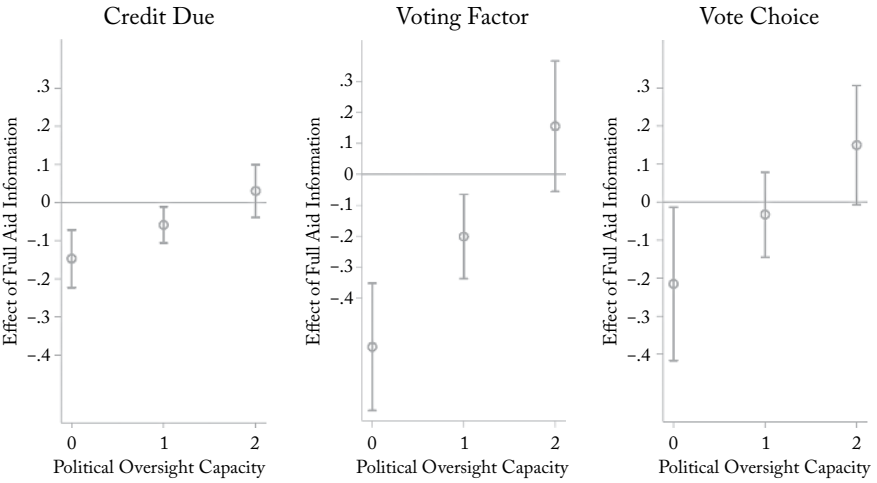

Figure 6
Heterogeneous Treatment Effects on Credit-Giving by Aid Oversight Capacity (Respondents with Uncertain or Incorrect Priors)[a]

[a] Based on coefficient estimates reported in Table 6.

Cross-National Evidence on Variation in Credit for International Aid by State Capacity and Citizen Information

Our experimental results provide evidence that respondents' information and politicians' oversight capacity interact to influence whether respondents give politicians credit for successful aid projects. In addition, our analysis of politicians' engagement with aid projects in Uganda suggests the types of circumstances under which politicians are likely to have oversight capacity. In Uganda, the type of political office matters, with politicians in local executive office having more oversight capacity. But the strength of state administration also matters, as proxied by region. In this final section of the article, we move beyond the Ugandan case to consider how information and oversight capacity interact across a wider range of projects and countries to affect how citizens allocate credit for aid projects. Whereas the Ugandan experiment focused on the heterogeneous effects of information by aid oversight capacity conditional on an aid project being present, our cross-national analysis includes communities without recent aid projects. In doing so, we move

beyond the experimental analysis to examine how proximity to aid projects affects credit attribution conditional on both citizens' information and the state's oversight capacity, in a triple interaction. Due to data availability, we focus on an inverted version of the credit attribution variable used above: we look at the amount of credit that people give to international donors and NGOs in different contexts.[59] Table 7, which parallels Table 2, summarizes our predictions about the effects of aid projects on credit attribution under different combinations of citizens' information and state oversight capacity.[60]

The analysis in this section requires nationally representative survey data, including responses to questions about credit-giving for international aid projects and comprehensive information on the location of aid projects within countries during the corresponding period. We identified four countries in which both types of data are available: Malawi, Nigeria, Senegal, and Uganda. We measure credit-giving for aid projects by considering citizens' responses to a question in the 2008 Afrobarometer survey round about how much international donors and NGOs help their country, on a 1–4 scale. We view this as the flip side of the question that we asked in Uganda about whether particular politicians took actions to make sure aid projects helped people in the community. We assume some rivalry in how credit is bestowed among actors for projects with an observed level of success. The inverted question is necessary because existing public opinion surveys do not contain questions equivalent to the ones that we asked citizens in Uganda about whether politicians deserve credit for ensuring that aid projects

TABLE 7
EXPECTATIONS FOR THE EFFECT OF AID PROJECTS ON CREDIT GIVEN TO DONORS/NGOS

	Low Aid Oversight Capacity	*High Aid Oversight Capacity*
Low citizen information	Null effect of aid projects on credit to donors/NGOs	Null effect of aid projects on credit to donors/NGOs
High citizen information	Positive effect of aid projects on credit to donors/NGOs	Null effect of aid projects on credit to donors/NGOs

[59] Giving credit to international donors and NGOs does not necessarily imply taking credit away from domestic politicians in a one-to-one ratio, but we do expect some trade-off in credit-giving, which is reflected in how people answer this question.

[60] The predictions assume that projects are—on average—of high quality.

help people. The inverted question also allows us to make comparisons across countries and aid projects where different levels of political offices are likely to be relevant for overseeing those projects.

We measure citizens' information levels using the Afrobarometer question about the respondent's level of interest in public affairs, on a four-point scale.[61] We expect that citizens with greater interest in political affairs are more likely to know the donor and implementer of aid projects. In contrast to other possible measures of information included in the Afrobarometer survey, the measure correlates well with information sources and political knowledge in diverse contexts. The general nature of this question allows us to make comparisons across contexts in which respondents obtain information about local government from different sources, and live under political institutions that make different political knowledge salient.[62] In the supplementary material, we show that our results are similar if we instead use radio news exposure as our proxy for information.[63]

We proxy for aid oversight capacity by measuring whether a respondent's community is closer or farther than the median distance from the capital city. This measure builds on a long line of research that suggests that state capacity in Africa radiates out from a country's capital city,[64] and it has the advantage of capturing variation within each of the four countries in our sample. In the supplementary material, we show that our results are similar if we instead use recent conflict exposure as a proxy for weak state capacity.[65]

[61] If necessary, enumerators added, "You know, in politics and government" to define public affairs. The available responses were "very interested," "somewhat interested," "not very interested," or "not at all interested."

[62] Responses to the political interest question correlate positively with access to newspapers, access to radio, and knowledge of the local MP's name in both urban and rural areas in our sample. In contrast, radio access and newspaper access do not correlate positively with knowing the local MP's name in rural areas. Respondents in Nigeria and Senegal know the names of their MPs at much lower rates than respondents in Uganda and Malawi, likely due to differences in political institutions. See Tables L1 and L2 in the supplementary material.

[63] See Table M1 in the supplementary material for the main results; see Table N1 and Figure N1 for results with the alternative operationalizations. The operationalization of radio news exposure follows Conroy-Krutz's 2018 study of media exposure and information in Uganda. We note that both of our informational measures are broader than the stimulus in the experiment and may convey information about both the project and the oversight capacity of political offices. But if media exposure proxies for information about state capacity (rather than the actors involved in projects), we would expect slightly different patterns in the interactions, with less support for donors and NGOs in contexts of high information and high state capacity.

[64] Herbst 2000; Brinkerhoff, Wetterberg, and Wibbels 2018; Roessler and Ohls 2018.

[65] We measure conflict exposure in the previous five years using Conflict Site Data from the Peace Research Institute Oslo. See Table N1 and Figure N1 in the supplementary material. We thank an anonymous reviewer for this suggestion.

We combine these survey data with information on the location of recent foreign aid projects in the country, available from government Aid Information Management Systems that have been georeferenced by AidData. The Aid Information Management Systems for Malawi, Nigeria, Senegal, and Uganda provide data on the location of aid projects from dozens of donors during the period prior to 2008. Although their donor coverage is not complete, these data sets provide the most comprehensive publicly available data on aid project locations for the Afrobarometer countries. The data sets include a wide range of projects, including traditional aid and bypass aid. We measure exposure to recent aid projects by considering whether respondents live within a five- (or ten-) kilometer radius of an aid project initiated during the previous two years. The bands that we use to define aid exposure are narrower than those used by other research on the spatial effects of aid because we consider exposure to aid from all donors included in a country's Aid Information Management Systems: across the four countries, 47 percent of respondents live within ten kilometers of a new aid project, and 40 percent of respondents live within five kilometers.[66]

We use the following equation to estimate the effects of the presence of aid projects:

$$y_{ijk} = \alpha + \beta_1 Aid_j + \beta_2 Informed_i + \beta_3 \pi_j + \beta_4 Aid_j * Informed_i + \beta_5 Aid_j * \pi_j + \beta_6 Informed_i * \pi_j + \beta_7 Aid_j * Informed_i * \pi_j + X\beta + \alpha_k + \epsilon_{ijk}, \quad (3)$$

where i indexes individual respondents and j indexes the respondent's town, village, or neighborhood. Aid_j indicates whether a new aid project has been started within a certain number of kilometers from a respondent's town, village, or neighborhood in the previous two years; $Informed_i$ indicates whether the respondent reports being "very interested" in public affairs; and π_j is a proxy for government oversight of aid projects. The model also includes interactions between each of these variables and a triple interaction to determine whether the effect of aid projects on the credit assigned to international donors and NGOs depends on both government oversight and respondent information. X is a vector of individual-level control variables, including rural residency,

[66] Many existing studies use a fifty-kilometer radius from different types of aid to measure exposure; see Briggs 2019; Knutsen and Kotsadam 2020. For some types of aid, awareness of and benefits from the project will not radiate this far. In our data, 100 percent of respondents in Malawi and 94 percent of respondents in Uganda live within fifty kilometers of an aid project initiated in the previous two years.

age, and the respondent's level of education, and α_k represents a set of country fixed effects.

In each plot of Figure 7, we show the marginal effects of being near an aid project on the credit given to international donors and NGOs by different combinations of state capacity and citizen information. The left plot shows the marginal effects of being within five kilometers of an aid project started in the previous two years, and the right plot shows the marginal effects of being within ten kilometers of such a project. Mirroring the results above, where high information in relation to a low-capacity political office results in reduced credit to domestic politicians, we find the largest marginal effect of aid on credit to international actors—and the only statistically significant marginal effect—when the government has low capacity and voters are informed. In instances where either the government has high capacity or voters are uninformed, the relationship between the presence of foreign aid projects and credit going to international donors and NGOs is positive but not statistically distinguishable from zero. These results can be viewed as the converse of our experimental results: governments get credit for projects unless they have low capacity and voters are informed.

Conclusion

Does foreign aid lead to accountability problems? On one hand, voters in aid-receiving countries often have little information about who is funding and implementing development projects in their vicinity. Well-executed foreign aid projects might, therefore, inflate support for incumbents because of erroneous credit-giving. On the other hand, in many cases, politicians may have played a role in bringing a project to fruition or in its successful operation, even if it is nominally a non-government project. In such cases, giving credit is appropriate. As we have demonstrated in the Ugandan case, many politicians are significantly involved in providing aid projects, even projects that ostensibly bypass the government in the sense that they are administered by NGOs. In these instances where politicians are involved in such projects, we would expect fully informed rational voters to use these projects to update about the quality of their politicians.

Our experimental evidence from Uganda supports this hypothesis. In instances where politicians hold political offices with low capacity for involvement in the provision of aid projects, voters reduce the amount of credit they give to incumbent politicians, and their support for them, when they learn that the projects are internationally funded

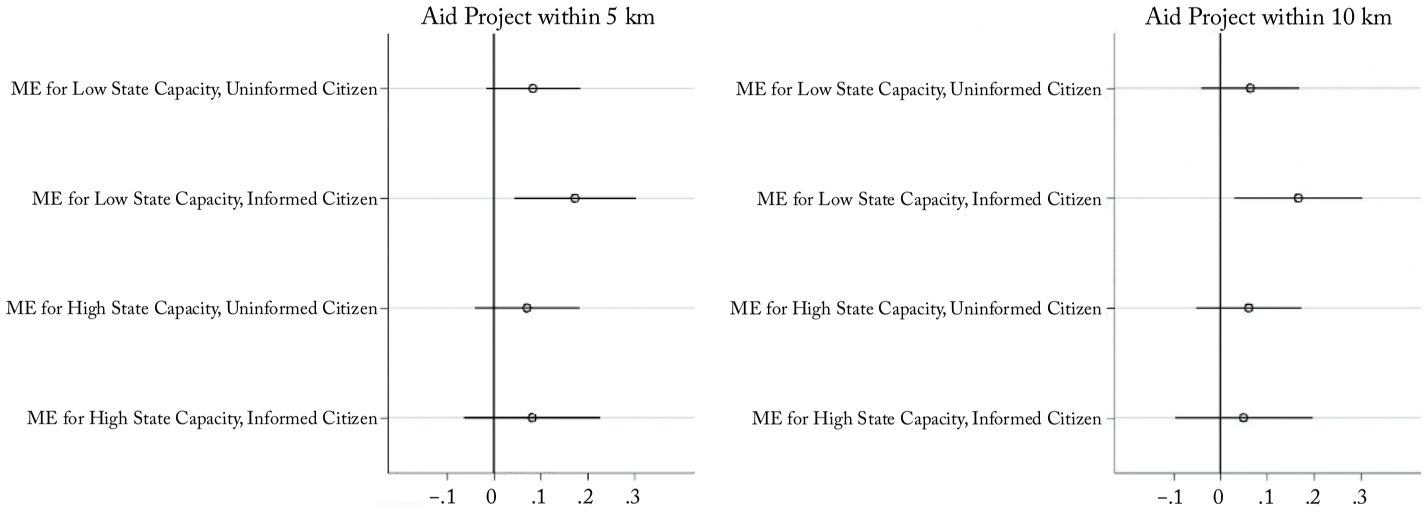

Figure 7
Marginal Effects of Presence of Aid Project on Credit to International NGOs and Donors by State Capacity and Citizen Information[a]

[a] Based on coefficient estimates reported in columns 1 and 2 of Appendix Table M1. Coefficients are from OLS regressions of credit to international actors on indicators for aid project presence, state capacity, citizen information, and their interactions. Models also include controls for a respondent's level of education, whether the respondent is in a rural area, falls into the seventeen-to-thirty-five-year age range, falls into the sixty-four-plus age range, and country fixed effects. Standard errors clustered at the survey enumeration area.

and NGO implemented. But in instances where politicians hold political offices with high capacity for involvement in such projects, voters do not reduce credit or support for politicians when they receive the same information. These patterns support a theoretical model where information is differentially processed based on expectations about what politicians can do and are doing.

We conducted our main analysis using evidence from Uganda, which receives particularly high levels of (bypass) aid and has significant political decentralization. In this type of setting, local politicians may be especially likely to be significantly involved in donor-funded and NGO-implemented projects. Still, we believe that the claim made in this article—that politicians at some level of government play critical roles in ensuring the success (or failure) of aid projects—is likely to hold across aid-dependent countries, with variation in the level of political representative who is involved depending on political context and type of aid project. In our cross-national analysis, we examined how information and oversight capacity condition credit-giving to donors and NGOs in countries that are more centralized (Malawi, Senegal) and less aid-dependent (Nigeria), finding broadly consistent results in these contexts. These results suggest that the dynamic is not specific to the Ugandan context, the specific foreign aid donor, or the particular type of aid projects around which we base the Ugandan study.[67]

Our framework implies that misinformation about the organizations formally responsible for aid projects has different implications for accountability depending on a political office's aid oversight capacity. Information that projects are donor funded or NGO implemented does not necessarily mean that these projects are uninformative signals of a politician's quality; their information content depends on the aid oversight capacity of the politician's office. This finding underscores the importance, when studying the relationship between service delivery and accountability, of further examining how particular information interacts with the capacity of different political offices to influence citizens' perceptions of different kinds of projects.[68] Our conclusions about the effects of aid on democratic accountability are more optimistic than the conventional wisdom has allowed: citizens respond to new information; they update their priors based on important contextual information.

[67] The parallels between our cross-country results and the Uganda results might be taken as an example, like Briggs 2020, that many cases exist where results from a study of a single donor generalize well to other donors.

[68] For related work that studies variation in the relationship between service delivery and accountability, see Batley and Mcloughlin 2015 and Bauhr and Carlitz 2021.

Supplementary Material

Supplementary material for this article can be found at http://muse.jhu.edu/resolve/171.

Data

Replication files for this article can be found at https://doi.org/10.7910/DVN/UIJRGM.

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