

**A Race to the Top?:  
The Aid Transparency Index and the Social Power of Global Performance Indicators**

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ABSTRACT

Recent studies on global performance indicators (GPIs) reveal the distinct power that non-state actors can accrue and exercise in world politics. How and when does this happen? Using a mixed-methods approach, we examine the impact of the Aid Transparency Index (ATI), an annual rating and rankings index produced by the small UK-based NGO Publish What You Fund. The ATI seeks to shape development aid donors' behavior with respect to their transparency – the quality and kind of information they publicly disclose. To investigate the ATI's effect, we construct an original panel dataset of donor transparency performance before and after ATI inclusion (2006-2013) to test whether, and which, donors alter their behavior in response to inclusion in the ATI. To further probe the causal mechanisms that explain variations in donor behavior we use extensive qualitative research, including over 150 key informant interviews conducted between 2010-2017. Our analysis uncovers the conditions under which the ATI influences powerful aid donors. Moreover, our mixed methods evidence reveals *how* this happens. Consistent with Kelley & Simmons' central argument that GPIs exercise influence via social pressure, we find that the ATI shapes donor behavior primarily via direct effects on elites: the diffusion of professional norms, organizational learning, and peer pressure.

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One of the more striking examples of the power and influence exercised by global performance indicators in world politics is the case of the Aid Transparency Index (ATI) – an annual international rating and ranking of international development assistance donor agencies by Publish What You Fund (PWYF). PWYF was established as a non-governmental organization in 2008 to monitor the progress of international donors in publicly disclosing where they spend their aid funds, on whom and for what. PWYF is small. It has nine staff members and a 2017 budget of less than £600,000.<sup>2</sup> Housed in a modest one-room office above an Italian restaurant on London’s South Bank, PWYF has no direct material power with which to coerce change in the behavior of these large multilateral and bilateral donors. Yet, by many accounts, the ATI has played a central role in making global aid transparency happen.

Since the first high level forum on aid effectiveness in Rome in 2003, there has been a cascade of initiatives and organizations dedicated to prying open the spigot of information on donor agencies’ projects and programs.<sup>3</sup> The principles of transparency and open data are now centrally embedded in the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals and the UN’s “Data Revolution.”<sup>4</sup> The presumed benefits of such open aid data include the centralization of information for better donor coordination, country-level development planning and management.<sup>5</sup> Advocates claim that transparency empowers the poor by providing means for citizen voice and feedback. For example, in January 2018, two Sierra Leonean Ebola survivors sued their government, alleging that the Sierra Leonean Government misdirected millions of

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<sup>2</sup> Publish What You Fund Annual Report 2017.

<sup>3</sup> For reviews of transparency and accountability initiatives in global development, including campaigns and initiatives focused on aid transparency, see Darby 2010; Martin 2010; Carothers and Brechenmacher 2014; and McGee and Gaventa 2013.

<sup>4</sup> See [https://unstats.un.org/sdgs/files/meetings/iaeg-sdgs-meeting-06/2017-10-04\\_CCSA%20Guiding%20Principles%20data%20flows.pdf](https://unstats.un.org/sdgs/files/meetings/iaeg-sdgs-meeting-06/2017-10-04_CCSA%20Guiding%20Principles%20data%20flows.pdf).

<sup>5</sup> Interview with Owen Barder, Center for Global Development [date]; interview with Tony German, Development Initiatives, 11 January 2017. See also Florini 2002 and 2007; Collin, Zubairi, Nielson and Barder 2009; Publish What You Fund 2009; Mulley 2010; Carothers and Brechenmacher 2014; Herrling 2015; Barder 2016.

dollars of foreign aid donated to address the Ebola crisis.<sup>6</sup> Transparency, simply put, promises to make aid more inclusive, accountable and effective.

To the extent that transparency has emerged, it represents a sea change for international aid. Ten years ago, if you wanted to find out how much development assistance was going to Kenya, to whom and for what, you would have needed high bandwidth access to the OECD's creditor reporting system and the ability to decipher the complex accounting jargon of elaborate spreadsheets. Even then, only highly aggregated data was available. Attaining actual project documents, which might or might not have contained information on the subnational locations of aid activities, implementing partners and details on project objectives, could only be attained as hard-copy documents for a hefty monetary fee through a few select donors' public information centers. Borrower governments themselves had scant knowledge of where the aid was in their country. As one Malawian Ministry of Finance deputy told us in 2010, "we don't really know where the aid is in our country, what is doing, and who is doing it. How can we plan to properly spend government money to build schools, hire doctors, or provide services when we don't know if our donor partners are already doing this?"<sup>7</sup>

By 2017 the aid information landscape had dramatically changed. It is easy now to go directly to the World Bank's website to find full project documents. Most major donors have created public dashboards, with infographics and interactive maps. The International Aid Transparency Initiative, established in 2008, is rapidly moving towards a common, publicly accessible database with standardized information on the precise geographical locations of aid,

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<sup>6</sup> Inveen 2018.

<sup>7</sup> Interview with Deputy Minister of Finance, Government of Malawi, Nairobi, Kenya, December 2010.

budget data, and activity-level project details. While significant challenges remain, the past decade has been nothing short of a revolution in aid data.<sup>8</sup>

Our empirics support the conclusion that the Aid Transparency Index, as the key global performance indicator in the aid transparency regime, has played a critical role in this global transformation. We find that the ATI induces donors to adopt prescribed transparency policies and practices. How so? As described by Kelley and Simmons in this symposium’s framework chapter, we find that the ATI has attained and exercised significant symbolic and normative power. This power is derived from the ATI’s role in defining clear indicators and benchmarks for donor transparency. Its authority is rooted in the independence of its producer and, as described in this paper, the process through which PWYF works with donors and external reviewer to construct and validate the annual ratings and rankings. The ATI catalyzes behavior change by explicitly comparing and categorizing donors as “good”, “fair” and “poor” performers in a highly-publicized manner, thereby invoking peer reputation and status concerns and mobilizing public pressure for donor reforms.

For an aid industry long beleaguered by public scrutiny, the push for transparency presents a double-edged sword. The transparency agenda promises to deliver desired reputational effects and political support, assuaging NGOs, CSOs and national parliaments who have long demanded enhanced access to donor information and accountability. Yet, according to our interviews with donor staff and management, transparency also threatens to lift the veil on internal processes that many within the industry feel disrupts donors’ relationships with borrowers, introduces onerous reporting burdens, and invites further interrogation and grievances from parties disaffected by aid programs. Moreover, not all donor agency staff agree that the ATI’s 39 indicators represent the “right path” towards transparency. PWYF’s efforts to promote

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<sup>8</sup> Lee 2016.

convergence on the ATI's particular standards are thus not simply a matter of pushing on an open door.

We see PWYF's ATI as a critical case study that can address key questions regarding under what conditions and through what mechanisms an NGO-produced GPI can influence powerful actors to do what they otherwise might not do on their volition. We pose two key questions to this end. First, observation of the ATI over time reveals that the index does not always have the same effect upon all donors, prompting us to ask *when does the ATI have more or less influence upon aid agencies?* Second, for those aid agencies that do display sensitivity to the ATI's effect, *how does the ATI exercise its influence?*

Using statistical analysis and interview-based qualitative research, we find that the ATI does impact donors' transparency practices, but not evenly. We find that agencies that have aid distribution as their primary operational mandate (e.g. USAID) are much more likely to be influenced by the ATI than donors for whom the provision of official development assistance is secondary to their core mandate (e.g. the U.S. Department of Defense). For those agencies who do appear responsive to the ATI, we find that this is because of the ATI's influence on policy elites. As Morse and Bisbee et al (this volume) also argue, in their cases of the Financial Action Task Force and the Millennium Development Goal on education respectively, we find that elites may not be concerned with their performance on the ATI purely on the basis of material payoffs.<sup>9</sup> Rather, elites are concerned with peer status and susceptible to socialization around new norms. Moreover, the very process of being closely monitored, and regularly interacting with the PWYF team during the ATI's annual review has socialization and reactivity effects. This produces inter- and intra-organizational learning, norm diffusion and professionalization of aid staff and management around ATI's standards, eventually contributing to some norm

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<sup>9</sup> Bisbee et al; Morse. This symposium.

internalization and self-regulation around transparency policies. Secondarily, the ATI plays a role in enhancing domestic *political pressure* by equipping transparency reform proponents (particularly those with some material power over aid agencies) with critical information and clear standards to guide policy change.

In our quantitative analysis, presented in section 4, we seek to understand variation in donor performance on, and donor response to, the ATI. We employ regression analysis using a panel dataset of ATI scores with the unit of observation the agency-year. In addition to each agency's overall and indicator-by-indicator score from 2011-2016, our dataset includes independent data on aid agency disclosure and transparency practices from 2006-2013 compiled by AidData at our request.<sup>10</sup> The AidData data allow us to model the presence of the ATI as a treatment, examining whether (and which) agencies are responding to the ATI versus other possible factors of influence.

To further examine mechanisms in section 5, we use qualitative evidence, foremost semi-structured key informant interviews with over 150 subject matter experts between 2010-2017.<sup>11</sup> These interviews were conducted with the staff and management of donor organizations' headquarters and mission (recipient country) offices, national parliamentary and U.S. Congressional staff, relevant think tanks, civil society groups and international non-governmental organizations. The data includes multiple interviews at Publish What You Fund's

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<sup>10</sup> AidData is a "stand-alone development research and innovation lab at the College of William and Mary" (<http://aiddata.org/our-story>). For a given country-year AidData uses the best, most complete data source available. Over the period in question (2006-2013) the primary source is agencies' official reporting to the OECD Development Assistance Committee's Creditor Reporting System, but the source is sometimes agencies' annual reports and public websites. AidData source choice represents a determination by arguably the organization most concerned with finding high quality historic aid data of what source provides the best available data for a given country-year. The source of data is never the IATI data on which the ATI most directly contracts. This does not mean that e.g. the data reported to OECD and that reported to IATI in a given year are independent, of course. This is not a concern, inasmuch as the focus here (and what the alternative scale drawn from AidData's data measures) is changes in the quality of the best data disclosed irrespective of the forum where that disclosure occurs, whether it is via the IATI or not.

<sup>11</sup> Specifically, as part of a broader project on aid transparency between 2010-2017, Weaver personally interviewed or sent trained graduate research assistants to conduct interviews in eight countries, with a concentrated focus on members of the development community based in the US (DC and New York), the United Kingdom, Kenya, Uganda, Malawi, and Nepal. These interviews are listed in the online appendix 1.

office in London and with PWYF's staff in Washington, DC. In addition, we analyzed a wide array of primary and secondary materials, including donor organization press releases, policy documents, parliamentary and congressional hearings and legislation, and the research and advocacy materials of NGOs, CSOs and think tanks.

## **2. Background: The Rise of the ATI**

Achieving transparency in the multibillion dollar global aid industry is not an easy task. Donor agencies have enjoyed relative opacity for most of their existence. Past efforts to enact fundamental changes in national freedom of information acts and organizations information disclosure policies have been met with agencies' resistance and persistent delays.<sup>12</sup> Numerous published analyses and interviews point out pervasive problems of organizational inertia, staff's cultural fears surrounding transparency, and a myriad of technological and economic barriers to change.<sup>13</sup>

At the Fourth High Level Forum on Aid Effectiveness in Busan, South Korea in November 2011, most major donor countries and agencies – including many from the global south – committed themselves to reporting their aid information to a common standard.<sup>14</sup> A rich set of supranational initiatives (such as the EU Aid Transparency Guarantee and the Global Partnership for Effective Development Cooperation), national level policies and open data systems,<sup>15</sup> and international non-governmental organizations and networks have been created to

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<sup>12</sup> Nelson 2001; Florini 2007; Carothers and Brechenmacher 2014; and Ingraham 2015.

<sup>13</sup> Bent 2015; and Weaver and Peratsakis 2014.

<sup>14</sup> The standard combined three complementary systems: the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) Development Assistance Committee (DAC) Creditor Reporting System (CRS++), the OECD DAC Forward Spending Survey (FSS) and the International Aid Transparency Initiative (IATI). See <https://stats.oecd.org/Index.aspx?DataSetCode=CRS1>, <https://stats.oecd.org/Index.aspx?DataSetCode=FSS>, and <http://www.aidtransparency.net> for more on each of the three systems.

<sup>15</sup> For example, many countries – especially lead countries such as Sweden, Britain, Denmark, and the US - adopted National Transparency Guarantees with specific references to aid (Sweden, Britain), integrated aid transparency commitments within their Open Government Partnership National Action Plans, and similar open aid data strategies and policy papers. In the U.S. case, see

advocate for and produce and open aid data.<sup>16</sup> PWYF was established in 2008 by IATI advocates, including founding CEO Karin Christiansen, with funding from the Hewlett Foundation and Open Society Foundation. PWYF acts as a watchdog NGO for the newly launched International Aid Transparency Initiative. Shortly thereafter, PWYF's piloted the ATI. The ATI plays a specific role in this advocacy movement by translating the broad goals of transparency into measurable standards of performance and using ratings and rankings to monitor and enforce donor agencies' compliance with these international commitments.

The ATI works explicitly through engagement with donors and independent experts to collate annual data. Publish What You Fund publishes the evaluation criteria for a given year's index and engages in a three-month dialogue with every aid agency prior to the finalization of annual ATI scores. There were annual releases of the ATI from 2011-2015.<sup>17</sup> While the methodology of the ATI has been modified slightly over time, the ATI has always focused on publishing specific data regarding aid flows at the activity level – meaning the details regarding particular interventions and projects. While the ATI is primarily disseminated to the public via hierarchical rankings of agencies into categories (“good”, “fair”, “poor”, etc.), these rankings draw from a continuous scale drawn from a series of indicators. There are currently 39 indicators in the ATI, which cover information such as project title, description, budget, and objectives of interventions. Table 1 provides greater detail.

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Obama's executive order on open government (Obama 2009) and the Office of Management and Budget's open government director (Orzag 2009). For examples of aid transparency systems, see the UK Department for International Development's DevTracker, Sweden's openaid.se, Denmark's Danida Open Aid USAID's Global Aid Explorer, and the US Government's Foreign Assistance Dashboard. See also Clare, Verhust and Young 2016; Greening 2012.

<sup>16</sup> See, e.g., AidData, Aidwatch, aidinfo, Development Gateway, DevInfo, Development Initiatives, Data2X, Interaction, Modernizing Foreign Assistance Network, Open Aid Partnership, Oxfam International, and many others.

<sup>17</sup> In that time there were five full waves of the ATI – 2011, 2012, 2013, 2014, and 2016, with a 2015 'mid-term review' covering only EU and US agencies. The 2011 data was called a “pilot index”; there was also a 2010 assessment, but at a country level and based on perceptions surveys. While annual through 2016 (the last data included in this paper), the ATI has now transitioned to an 18-month cycle. Email from Elise Dufief, PWYF Research Manager, November 21, 2017.



**TABLE 1: 2016 ATI Indicators and Weights**

*ATI Total Score out of 100%*

- 1. Commitment to Aid Transparency (10%)**
  - Quality of FOIA Legislation (3.33%)
  - Implementation Schedule (for IATI Common Standard) (3.33%)
  - Accessibility of Aid Information through donor portals, databases, etc. (3.33%)
  
- 2. Organizational Level Publications (25%)**
  - Planning: Strategy Documents (2.5%)
  - Planning: Annual Report (2.5%)
  - Planning: Allocation Policy by Themes or Countries (2.5%)
  - Planning: Procurement Policy (2.5%)
  - Planning: Strategy Documents – Country Level (2.5%)
  - Financial: Total Organization Budget (three year forward spending) (4.17%)
  - Financial: Disaggregated Budget (4.17%)
  - Financial: Audits (4.17%)
  
- 3. Activity Level Publications (65%)**
  - Basic Activity Information: Implementer (1.63%)
  - Basic Activity Information: Unique ID (1.63%)
  - Basic Activity Information: Title (1.63%)
  - Basic Activity Information: Description of Activity (1.63%)
  - Basic Activity Information: Planned Dates (1.63%)
  - Basic Activity Information: Actual Dates (1.63%)
  - Basic Activity Information: Current Status (1.63%)
  - Basic Activity Information: Contact Details (1.63%)
  - Classifications: Collaboration Types (1.86%)
  - Classifications: Flow Type (1.86%)
  - Classifications: Aid Type (1.86%)
  - Classifications: Finance Type (1.86%)
  - Classifications: Sectors (1.86%)
  - Classifications: Sub-National Location (1.86%)
  - Classifications: Tied Aid Status (1.86%)
  - Related Documents: Memorandum of Understanding (2.17%)
  - Related Documents: Evaluations (2.17%)
  - Related Documents: Objectives (2.17%)
  - Related Documents: Budget Documents – Activity Level (2.17%)
  - Related Documents: Contracts (2.17%)
  - Related Documents: Tenders (2.17%)
  - Financial: Budget – annual/quarterly; total activity commitments (3.25%)
  - Financial: Commitments (3.25%)
  - Financial: Disbursements & Expenditures (3.25%)
  - Financial: Budget ID (3.25%)
  - Performance: Results (4.33%)
  - Performance: Impact Appraisals (4.33%)
  - Performance: Conditions (4.33%)

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*Source: Publish What You Fund. 2016a. 2016 Aid Transparency Index.*

The comprehensive index largely evaluates national government agencies and international organizations, as well as a few foundations (e.g. Hewlett and Gates). The primary focus is bilateral aid agencies (e.g. the US Agency for International Development or the UK Department for International Development) and major multilateral aid-focused organizations (e.g. the UN Development Program or the World Bank). Notably, the index also includes agencies that disburse significant amounts of foreign aid, even though development assistance is not their primary mandate. For example, the 2016 index includes six such US Government agencies, only three of whom have ODA as a primary mandate.<sup>18</sup> Appendix 2 provides a complete listing of all covered agencies and their inclusion in the various waves of the ATI.

### **3. Hypotheses: When and How Does the ATI Influence Aid Donors?**

A recent survey of staff within U.S. development agencies revealed that over 75% of respondents thought the ATI had a “very positive impact” on their own agency’s transparency efforts.<sup>19</sup> To what extent does empirical evidence support this claim? If indeed the ATI influences organizational practices, under what conditions should we expect to observe this impact? How exactly does the ATI influence targeted donors?

Both theories about social pressure and socialization, as well as our interview evidence, suggest several plausible hypotheses. First, key informants and our examination of agency level documents suggest that not all donors are equally concerned about, or responsive to, the ATI’s

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<sup>18</sup> The three agencies with aid as a primary mandate are the US Agency for International Development (USAID), the Millennium Challenge Corporation (MCC), the President’s Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR). The other three US agencies are the U.S. Department of Defense, the U.S. Department of State, and the U.S. Department of the Treasury. While the US has the greatest number of evaluated agencies in 2016 (and 2014, the year with the broadest coverage), it is not alone in having multiple units evaluated. E.g. in 2014, 5 UK, 3 German, and 3 French agencies were evaluated. Amongst multilaterals, 4 EC and 3 UN agencies were evaluated.

<sup>19</sup> Friends of Publish What You Fund 2016, 10.

assessment of their agencies' performance.<sup>20</sup> Instead, one key mediating factor appears to shape agencies' reaction to the ATI: whether their primary mandate is to provide official development assistance. We thus hypothesize that when aid is the primary mandate (versus a secondary mandate or goal) of an agency, the agency will be more sensitive to the (de)legitimizing effect of poor ATI scores.

Second, as Kelley and Simmons suggest in this symposium, there are several possible channels of influence for GPIs. In the case of the ATI, our interviews<sup>21</sup> indicate that two channels are at play. First, the ATI influences donors by inciting external political pressure, particularly through the provision of critical information to key domestic stakeholders who may then use the ATI's scores to monitor, sanction and reward aid agencies. Second, the ATI plays a direct role in shaping the interests and behavior of elites within aid organizations by translating political broad mandates and commitments regarding transparency into distinct operational policies that can be enacted through internal reforms.

In this first instance, donors act as the agents of principals, notably national legislatures (in the case of bilateral agencies, such as USAID or DoD) or multinational executive boards (in the case of multilateral agencies, e.g. the World Bank, or foundations such as the Hewlett Foundation). In this principal-agent relationship, principals can exercise oversight and control over agents through mechanisms such as mandated audits or threats of changes to financial appropriations. Here, as hypothesized by principal-agent theory,<sup>22</sup> the ATI reduces critical informational asymmetries and provides clear assessments of agents' relative performance. With such information, principals can more easily detect and sanction agents' deviant behavior. This

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<sup>20</sup> Interview with Sally Paxton (Publish What You Fund, October 2015), George Ingram (Brookings Institution, October 2015), Nilmini Gunaratne Rubin (U.S Foreign Affairs Committee, September 2014), and two senior staff at USAID (September 2014).

<sup>21</sup> These observations were offered by several senior staff at USAID, U.S. Congress House Foreign Affairs Committee and Senate Foreign Relations Committee, think tanks and NGOs. See appendix 1.

<sup>22</sup> On PA models, see Hawkins et al 2006.

is consistent with previous scholarship, which has shown that aid agencies are sensitive to demonstrating success to principals, with some agencies much more concerned with appearing successful to principals than others.<sup>23</sup> As a result, the mere presence of the ATI incites these agencies to be more proactive in transparency reforms, often in *anticipation* of increased principal oversight and control even when principals do not actually make overt gestures to this end.<sup>24</sup>

Our interviews also suggest that the ATI shapes what transparency means to the elite professionals who staff aid agencies. This channel focuses on aid professionals' logic of appropriateness rather than the more traditional payoffs that might accrue to organizational reputational changes, such as greater funding, access to markets, or private investment. Donor organizations are often framed by scholars, in our view correctly, as part of an "aid industry."<sup>25</sup> Professionals in that industry see themselves as part of a broader community of peers. By influencing the meaning of what it is to be a "good" aid agency and thus "good" aid professional, the ATI influences the actions of aid professionals.

We hypothesize that both channels — political pressure and direct elite response — are operative, yet we remain agnostic as to which of the two channels is more influential. We thus construct a quantitative test that to generate evidence as to which of these is the more influential mechanism. We believe leveraging variation in agency insulation from the pressure to respond to principals, or as we term it an agency's relative independence, is a way of getting purchase on which of these channels is the dominant means via which the ATI influences agencies. We

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<sup>23</sup> Buntaine 2016; Honig 2018.

<sup>24</sup> This observation was offered by a senior staff member of the U.S. House Foreign Affairs Committee (interview, September 2014) and confirmed by several senior officials working on transparency reforms at USAID, MCC and the World Bank (interviews in Washington, D.C., September 2014, February 2015 and October 2015).

<sup>25</sup> See e.g. Hanlon, Barrientos, and Hulme 2010; Gulrajani 2011; Engel 2014.

hypothesize that the political pressure and direct elite response channels have conflicting implications as to whether more or less independent agency will be more responsive.

If political pressure is stronger, then less independent agencies – those which are more susceptible to that pressure - should be more responsive to the ATI, as measured via their yearly net change on the ATI ratings and rankings. The ATI may, for example, enable the materially weak PWYF and its key allies in the aid transparency movement to capture principals’ “power of the purse” and executive or legislative authority over donor agencies. Consequently, if principals are indeed paying attention to and taking action on the ATI’s information, then aid agencies with higher degrees of dependence on principals’ financial contributions should to be especially sensitive to the ATI’s effects.

However, if elites primarily respond to the ATI’s social power, agencies that have more relative independence may be more responsive. This is because more independent agencies can react faster to emerging standards around transparency policies and practices and to the ATI’s professional norm diffusion and socialization effects. Less independent agencies may hold more limited capacity to enact wide-sweeping operational reforms around transparency and data reporting without the consent and resources of their principals.

To restate our argument: We hypothesize that the ATI does influence donor agencies, prompting them to alter their information disclosure practices. The ATI achieves this both via reducing information asymmetries for political principals (*political pressure*) and by constructing meaning and inducing competition not tied to direct payoffs for the professionals who staff donor agencies (*direct elite effects*). In the sections below we test whether indeed the introduction of the ATI correlates with changes in donors’ practices. We also examine whether either or both of these mechanisms are present, and which seems to be the primary channel of influence.

The next section presents evidence as to whether the ATI has systematically affected donor practices, and for which donors this is the case. It includes agency independence in regression models, thus providing suggestive evidence as to which channel of influence is dominant. The qualitative evidence on mechanisms in section 5 then further explores whether one or both of the channels hypothesized – political pressure and direct elite influence, respectively – are present, and if so which is the primary driver of donor response to the ATI.

#### **4. Quantitative Results: Does the ATI Alter Donor Behavior?**

To explore differing organizational response to “treatment” by the ATI, we build a panel at the agency-year of ATI scores (and thus ATI coverage), complementing this with historic data on agency transparency practices drawn from AidData’s database. We also include a calculation of agency independence and an indicator for whether the aid agency’s primary purpose is the giving of foreign aid (e.g. USAID) or not (e.g. the US Department of Defense). These agencies are hereafter referred to as “aid” and “non-aid” agencies to signal their primary mandate. Forty-five of the eighty-four agencies that appear in the ATI at some time between 2011 and 2016 are coded as aid agencies. The online appendix Table A1 lists every covered agency, their country, their years of ATI coverage, and our assignment of the indicator as to whether the giving of foreign aid is the agency’s primary mandate.

Table 2 provides summary statistics of key variables.

##### **Table 2: Summary Statistics of Selected Variables**

Variable	Obs	Mean	Std. Dev.	Min	Max
ATI Score	333	40.448	24.009	0	93.3
Net Change in ATI Score Over Coverage Period	77	10.15	18.772	-39.3	75.7
Agency Independence (using Gilardi scheme)	84	.435	.154	0	1
AidAgency Status Dummy	84	.536	.502	0	1
AidData Activity Scale	367	90.784	14.941	25	100

To calculate agency independence, we build on Gilardi’s work on Western European regulatory agencies.<sup>26</sup> Gilardi develops a scale of 21 indicators, unique in its attempt to compare the independence of a variety of agencies focusing on different issue areas from a range of countries. In collaboration with research assistants, we applied Gilardi’s scheme to all agencies covered by the ATI using those indicators we were able to consistently code. This data is a mere echo of the full Gilardi measure, thus adding to the suggestive nature of the independence analysis. We were able to find consistent information for just four of Gilardi’s 21 indicators of agency independence: term of office of agency head, source of budget, whether independence is formally stated, and whether the head of the agency is of cabinet rank.<sup>27</sup>

Independence is coded as a time-invariant measure based on the best available data. While this opens up possible measurement error regarding changes in independence within organization over time, we expect this measurement error should be orthogonal to the primary analysis and thus add noise (reducing power) rather than lead to spurious inferences. The measure constructed using the Gilardi method is broad, incorporating both aid and non-aid agencies.<sup>28</sup>

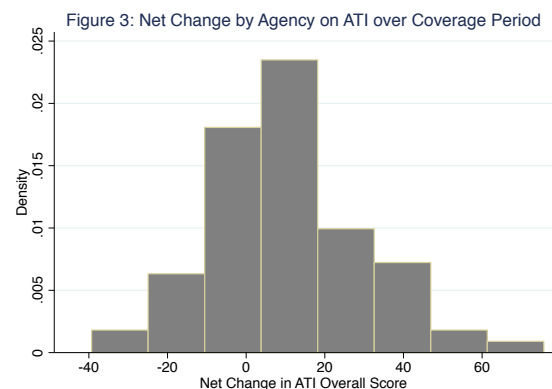
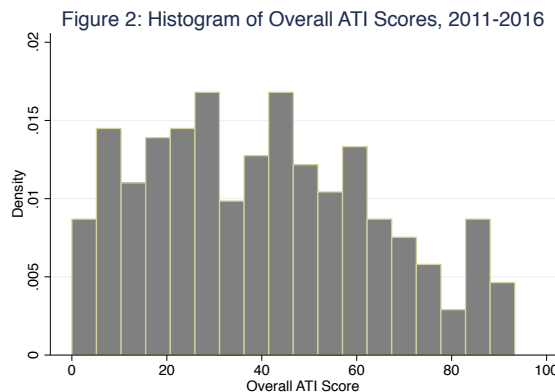
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<sup>26</sup> Gilardi 2002.

<sup>27</sup> While the results presented here apply this scale to multilaterals and foundations – i.e. organizations without cabinet rank by definition, and for whom the scale was not intended by Gilardi – the results are robust to restricting the sample to bilateral (that is, state) organizations.

<sup>28</sup> The online appendix provides additional information on how this variable was coded and its distribution, adding to Table 2’s summary statistics.

A visual examination of ATI scores and changes over time underscores the heterogeneity of agency response to the ATI. The wide differences in donors' behavior are demonstrated in Figure 2, which shows the variation in realized scores, and Figure 3, which compares each agency's score in its last year of ATI coverage to its score in its first year.



While by no means determinative, Table 3 below uses the ATI overall score data to examine differential performance on the ATI with and without country, year, and country\*year fixed effects, allowing us to examine intra-country differences in ATI performance. The results are quite stable with and without these fixed effects. Agencies whose primary purpose is to give foreign aid perform better in the ATI ratings than those for whom foreign aid is a secondary task. This is true looking both across all agencies and within a given country's set of covered agencies.

Table 3 suggests that for non-aid agencies, greater independence has no association with higher ATI scores. For aid organizations, however, the picture is quite different. More independent aid organizations score better on the ATI than less independent aid organizations. The greater the degree of a dedicated aid agencies' independence, the greater the agency's



degree of outperformance of other organizations in their country; the least independent aid agencies perform no better, or on some specifications even worse, than non-aid agencies from their country.

**Table 3: Performance on the ATI: Dedicated Aid Agencies & Independence**

DV: Overall ATI Score	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
Aid Agency Dummy	17.74*** (4.095)	12.86** (5.111)	20.36*** (6.567)	-17.65 (12.98)	-15.31 (24.21)
Independence (Gilardi)				-32.64 (20.46)	12.78 (38.63)
Ind*Aid Agency				82.98*** (27.66)	93.95* (55.88)
Constant	21.96*** (3.297)	30.77*** (11.45)	5.645 (19.23)	38.21*** (10.62)	25.82 (22.35)
Year FEs	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
Country FEs	N	Y	Y	N	Y
Country*Year FEs	N	N	Y	N	N
$R^2$ -Within	.255	.256	.766	.255	.256
$R^2$ -Between	.225	.834	.862	.300	.864
Observations	333	333	333	333	333

Standard errors in parentheses

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

Of course, differential performance on the ATI itself does not mean that it is the ATI that has affected the disclosure and transparency practices of aid agencies. Aid agencies, particularly those with more independence, may simply be more apt to disclose information, irrespective of the ATI's influence.

How can we now explore the within-organization behavior change (or not) in response to inclusion in the ATI? Figure 4 illustrates the broad coverage of the ATI, with the ATI including

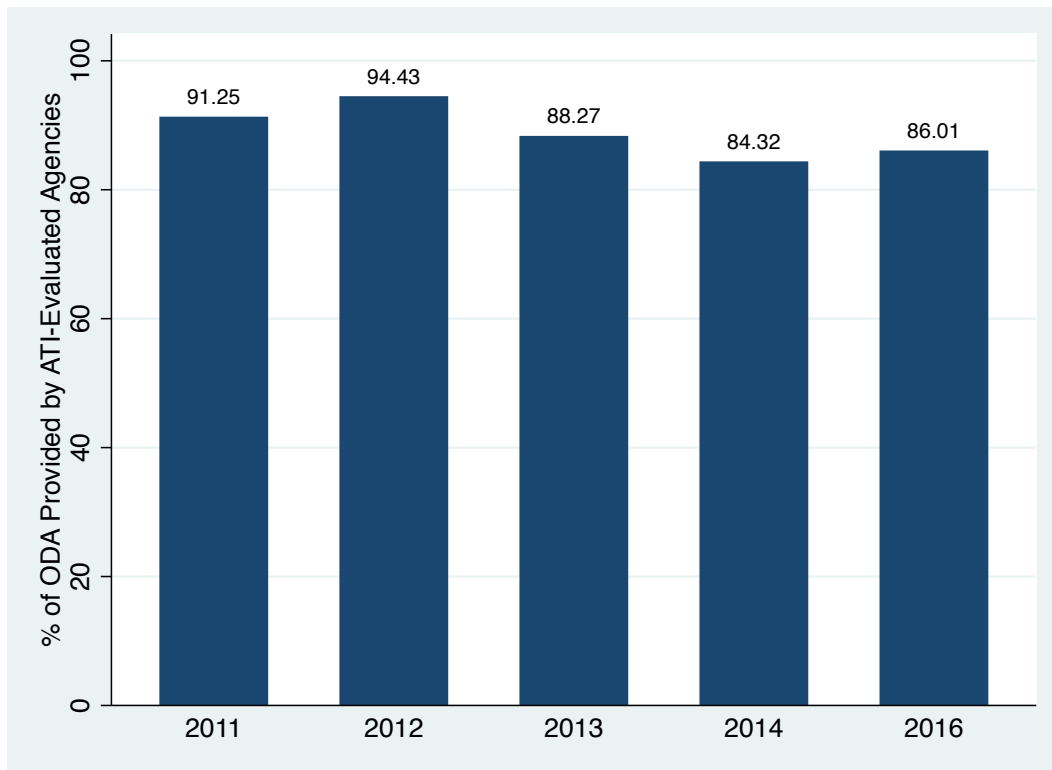
the agencies responsible for the lion's share of official development assistance.<sup>29</sup> Figure 4 mitigates concerns about the possible bias introduced by PWYF's choice of what agencies to include. It indicates PWYF began in the very first year (2011) to include a great deal of total aid volume. PWYF's first (2011) ATI report describes their initial outreach as "all OECD DAC [Development Assistance Committee] donors, all EU Members States and all IATI [International Aid Transparency Initiative] signatories and observers."<sup>30</sup> The ATI covers a near-universe of aid giving agencies, rather than a selected sample of agencies. The broad coverage also unfortunately precludes matching strategies of included agencies to agencies never included in the ATI, as there are few, if any, plausible untreated agencies with which to match those covered by the ATI.

**Figure 4. The ATI covers the vast majority of Official Development Assistance (ODA) providers, lessening concerns about PWYF coverage decisions.**

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<sup>29</sup> Figure 4 is the proportion of Official Development Assistance (ODA) reported to the OECD Development Assistance Committee's Creditor Reporting System (CRS) at [www.stats.oecd.org](http://www.stats.oecd.org) represented by those agencies included in both the ATI and the CRS. This necessarily underestimates the actual aid provided by agencies included in the ATI, inasmuch as some agencies (e.g. Chinese development aid, the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development, the Hewlett Foundation, the European Investment Bank) are covered by the ATI but do not report to CRS. This calculation uses the year of reporting and net disbursements when possible; e.g. the 2011 statistic is the proportion of 2011 net disbursements accounted for by agencies covered by the 2011 ATI. The 2016 calculation is done with 2014 data due to a lack of DAC data availability, and 2015 is omitted due to its interim review status.

<sup>30</sup> Publish What You Fund 2011, 14.



This is not to say there is no inter-temporal variation in ATI coverage across agencies. Indeed, our primary econometric test exploits just this variation. Of the 84 agencies in our sample to *ever* be included in the ATI, 58 are included in the first full year of the ATI (2011). In 2012, 72 are covered. In 2013, 67 agencies receive ATI scores. PWYF staff engage in a three-month dialogue with covered agencies prior to the generation of an ATI rating for a given agency in a given year. As such, agencies are clearly aware of whether and when they will be covered and thus have the ability to alter their practices accordingly. PWYF frames this dialogue and the ability of agencies to improve scores in response to knowledge of ATI coverage as a critical part of ATI's method.<sup>31</sup> The empirical strategy in Table 4 exploits this within-organization and across time variation, including both agency and year fixed effects in examining agency responsiveness to the ATI.

<sup>31</sup> Interview with Elise Dufief, PWYF research manager, 2016.

To examine whether it is the ATI itself that is systematically shaping aid agency behavior, Table 4 shifts to modeling inclusion in the ATI over time as a treatment variable, examining whether inclusion changes within-agency transparency practices. For the dependent variable in Table 4, we draw on disclosure quality measures from AidData’s historic aid flow reporting data described above. AidData generously provided these data to us on request. This data commences five years prior to the ATI’s first year of coverage and two years prior to the launch of PWYF. It runs through 2013, thus capturing only the first three years of the ATI. Table 4 thus cannot speak to how the ATI has come to influence donors in the past few years if the pattern of influence has changed. We use a subset of the AidData historic data that is quite similar in thrust to the ATI’s “Activity Level” component (see Table 1). These data focus on the completeness of individual aid activity reporting. We take AidData’s measures of the percent of projects for a given donor in a given year that provide a project title, a project description, report the source of the project’s funding, and describe the type of flow (e.g. a grant as opposed to a loan). We take the simple average of these four measures, and call this the *AidData Activity Scale*.<sup>32</sup> The AidData Activity Scale is a distinct measure of items on which the ATI focuses, begins before the ATI, and allows for use of the ATI as a treatment variable and thus organization fixed effects. We can thus examine whether inclusion on the ATI is in fact associated with a change in a covered agencies’ disclosure behavior, leveraging the variation in agency years of coverage discussed above.

The model for the score of agency  $i$  in year  $t$  in models 1 and 2 of table 4 examines the effects of the ATI in a given year  $t$  as a treatment, and can be described as

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<sup>32</sup> Table 2’s summary statistics and a histogram in the appendix (figure A2) provide fuller information on the measure’s distribution.

$AidData\ Activity\ Scale\ Score_{i,t} = \beta_1 * Covered\ by\ ATI\ in\ year\ dummy\ variable_t + \beta_2 * Covered\ by\ ATI_t * Aid\ (vs.\ non-aid)\ agency\ dummy\ variable_i + Fixed\ Effects_t + Fixed\ Effects_i + \varepsilon_i$

In models 3 through 6 of Table 4, agency independence is included and treatment effect heterogeneity examined in non-aid (models 3 and 4) and aid (models 5 and 6) agencies. The model for the score of agency  $i$  in year  $t$  is

$AidData\ Activity\ Scale\ Score_{i,t} = \beta_1 * Covered\ by\ ATI\ in\ year\ dummy\ variable_t + \beta_2 * Covered\ by\ ATI_t * Agency\ Independence_i + Fixed\ Effects_t + Fixed\ Effects_i + \varepsilon_i$

In models with both year and agency fixed effects, then, this analysis indicates whether within-agency performance rose in years where the agency was covered by the ATI, over and above secular time trends.

**Table 4: ATI as Treatment**<sup>33</sup>

DV: AidData Activity Scale Sample:	(1) All Agencies	(2) All Agencies	(3) Non-Aid Agencies	(4) Non-Aid Agencies	(5) Aid Agencies	(6) Aid Agencies
Covered by ATI (Treatment)	5.960*** (2.183)	0.229 (3.082)	-1.830 (6.413)	-7.785 (6.926)	-5.467 (6.153)	-9.038 (7.425)
Treatment*Aid Agency	4.697* (2.688)	4.852* (2.655)				
Treatment*Independence			16.85 (13.20)	17.15 (13.20)	39.16*** (14.41)	37.97*** (14.10)
Constant	88.03*** (0.667)	94.93*** (2.738)	91.49*** (0.922)	97.48*** (3.427)	85.52*** (0.918)	91.28*** (4.800)
Organization FEs	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
Year FEs	N	Y	N	Y	N	Y
R <sup>2</sup> -Within	0.148	0.212	0.080	0.145	0.215	0.281
R <sup>2</sup> -Between	0.008	0.013	0.017	0.003	0.007	0.000
Observations	367	367	152	152	215	215

Standard errors in parentheses

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

<sup>33</sup> Specifications 3-6 have interaction terms but no 'base' term for independence (calculated using the Gilardi scale) as independence does not vary within organization and is thus absorbed in the organization fixed effect. This is also why specifications 1-2 do not have a 'base' term for aid agency dummy.

Table 4 strongly suggests that inclusion in the ATI changes aid agencies' behavior. Models 1 and 2 indicate that the quality of covered agencies' reporting at the "activity level" – the level of individual projects and interventions – improves when agencies are covered by the ATI. This finding is only robust in the case of dedicated aid agencies, however. When year fixed effects are included, *the disclosure practices of aid agencies correlate with inclusion in ATI assessments, but there is no evidence that this holds for non-aid agencies.*

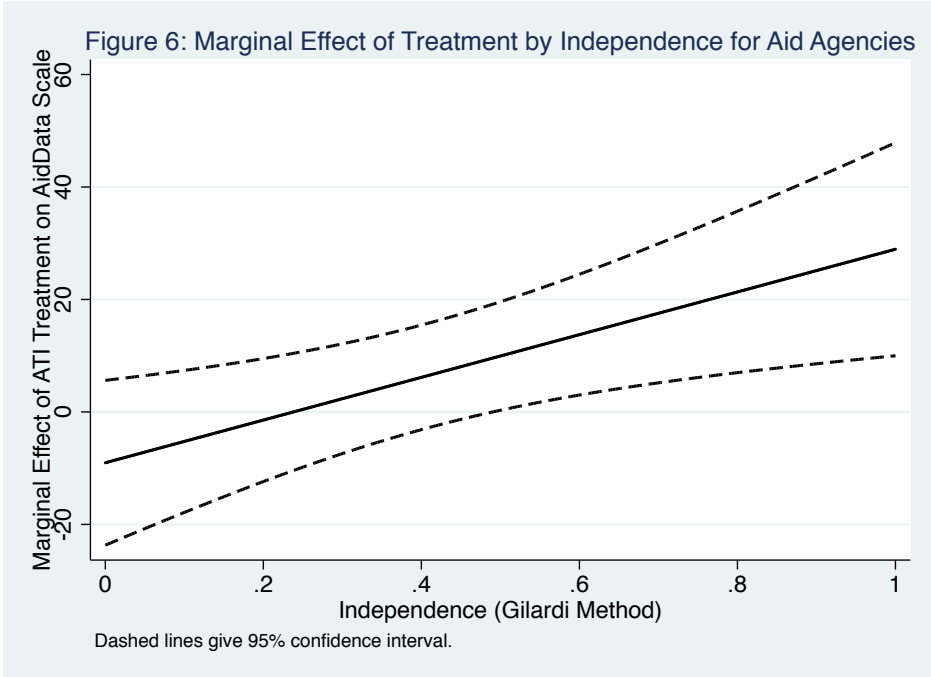
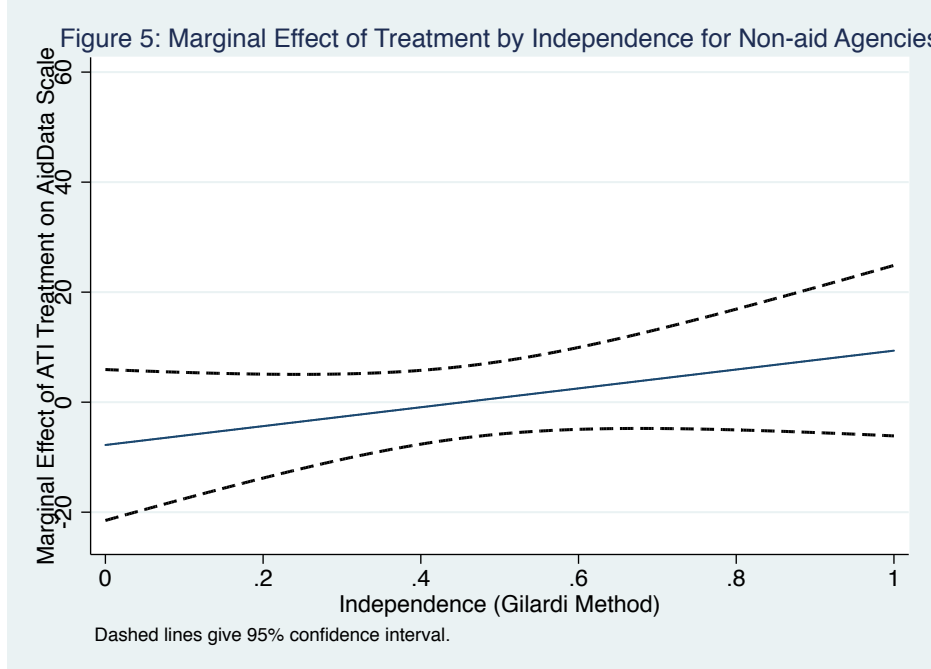
This relationship is further conditional on agency independence. Models 3 through 6 of Table 4 examine the role of agency independence for aid and non-aid agencies. While there is no evidence of a relationship between independence and response for non-aid agencies, for aid agencies greater independence is associated with greater improvement on the AidData scale associated with coverage by the ATI, *ceteris paribus*. Indeed, for the median aid agency on the independence scale (independence=.375), there is no statistically significant effect of ATI inclusion. For a firm at the 75<sup>th</sup> percentile, however (independence=.5), there is a ten-point treatment effect statistically distinguishable from zero.<sup>34</sup> This ten point effect would raise the median aid agency (score=89.1) to a near-perfect 99.1.<sup>35</sup>

Figures 5 and 6 graphically represent the role of independence for aid and non-aid agencies respectively (Table 4, Models 4 and 6), demonstrating the importance of agency independence for aid but not non-aid agencies.

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<sup>34</sup> Drawn from Model 6, Table 4. Net treatment effect is the sum of the beta on the interaction term (37.97) and the beta on the effect of ATI coverage (-9.038).

<sup>35</sup> The maximum possible score on the AidData Activity Scale is 100 (full disclosure of all information fields for all projects, in percentage point terms). This ceiling effect means the test in Table 4 may in fact understate the effect of ATI inclusion on covered agencies.



In substantive terms, what the AidData Activity Scale captures is the completeness of the information donors are disclosing about projects (titles, descriptions, financing agency names,

and flow types) in percentage point terms. The ten-point treatment effect for an aid agency at the 75<sup>th</sup> percentile of independence is equivalent to a shift from non-disclosure to full disclosure of ten percentage points of a given agency's projects. For example, in 2012 USAID had \$17 billion US dollars of total disbursements and over 8500 activities.<sup>36</sup> This means an increase of ten percentage points of transparency for USAID would cover about 1.7 billion US dollars of aid flows and 850 activities. For these 850 activities, observers could now know what USAID's programs were doing, where, and who was financing them. Individuals and civil society organizations in recipient countries could access information that would help them hold foreign donors and their own governments accountable. Individuals and politicians in the US could better understand where their tax dollars are going. Other donors could better understand what 1.7 billion dollars of USAID funding was doing, allowing for better coordination and planning.

There are multiple reasons for caution in interpreting these findings as regards mechanisms. Appendix Table A2 runs a robustness check using a categorical variable interpretation of the data AidData disclosed and an ordered logit model, and finds robust support for the overall treatment effect. However evidence on the treatment effect's heterogeneity by level of agency independence is far less clear cut.<sup>37</sup> In addition, as noted earlier in this section, the independence scale itself is a patchy measure; it is a mere echo of the original Gilardi measure on agency independence. As such, these econometrics provide strong evidence that ATI coverage is associated with changes in the disclosure practices of (some) covered agencies. This analysis can, however, only be suggestive as regards the mechanisms underlying any ATI coverage effect.

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<sup>36</sup> Data drawn from USAID's "Foreign Aid Explorer", [explorer.usaid.gov](http://explorer.usaid.gov). The explorer covers all US Government assistance; these are the USAID-only 2012 disbursement statistics reported as of December 30, 2017.

<sup>37</sup> See Appendix Table A2 for more details. The ordered logit specification precludes fixed effects, instead using random effects models.



In sum, we find that ATI inclusion is associated with more transparent disclosure practices by agencies. We also find suggestive evidence that this effect is concentrated in aid agencies that are more independent. This finding on aid agency independence as articulated in section 3 is suggestive of direct elite influence as the primary channel via which the ATI alters the behavior of the agencies it evaluates: if agencies primarily responded to pressure from their principal(s), then more dependent agencies should perform better on the ATI. This does not mean that direct elite influence is the only channel of influence, however; these findings are perfectly consistent with the presence of multiple mechanisms. To further explore how the ATI drives donors to change we turn in section 5 to a closer examination of the nature of the ATI's power and its key mechanisms of influence over donor agencies.

## **5. How Does the ATI Affect Donors? Qualitative Evidence on Mechanisms and Channels of Influence**

In this section, we return to our qualitative evidence to further probe the results and explore the mechanisms through which the ATI influences donors. We find the ATI does indeed shape donor behavior through both its indirect role in facilitating external political pressure and direct role in shaping elite norms and interests, with interviews signaling that direct elite response is the more prominent channel of influence. We begin by further exploring direct elite influence and then turn to political pressure.

### ***Direct Elite Response to the ATI's Social Power***

Donor agencies clearly care about their reputation and perceived legitimacy even when such status is not tangibly linked to materials rewards or sanctions. In both interviews and in

organizational documents, donors agencies often point to their ATI ratings and rankings to draw positive attention to themselves (self-promote), direct negative attention to others (distract), or signal their own good intentions and commitments. Landing in the “very good” category grants bragging rights with large legitimacy gains -- something that organizations value independently from any direct link to financial sanctions or rewards.<sup>38</sup> Moreover, as Kelley and Simmons note, the very act of the ATI’s regularized monitoring triggers reactivity, meaning that target actors change their behavior (if not their underlying interests) in reaction to being evaluated, observed and measured.<sup>39</sup>

The ATI’s ability to incite status and reputational concerns has two effects on organizations. The ATI’s peer rankings serve to motivate poorly performing donor organization to communicate their renewed commitments and refocus organizational resources on transparency reforms.<sup>40</sup> At the same time, the ATI peer rankings and release of annual reports provide opportunities for well-performing organizations to send signals to their external constituents that they have made good on their transparency promises and, in some instances, achieved compliance with international commitments, national law and open data standards. According to numerous interviews, there is a fair amount of institutional rivalry that reifies organizations’ desire for status and positive reputations. This appears to especially resonate in countries with multiple aid agencies that jostle for favorable positions in the eyes of the same political authorizers.<sup>41</sup> This is clearest in the case of the U.S., with a palpable rivalry between the

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<sup>38</sup> See Clare, Verhust and Young 2016, 4 (Sweden’s SIDA); George 2012 (World Bank IDA); Greening 2-12 (UK DFID).

<sup>39</sup> Espeland and Saunder 2007.

<sup>40</sup> Interviews with PWYF staff (London 2014 and 2015), CRS and GAO staff (DC, October 2015), and senior officials at USAID (DC and Uganda), UNDP (Nepal, Uganda and New York), World Bank (Uganda), SIDA (Nepal), GIZ (London), and DFID (Nepal and London). Various dates; see Appendix 1.

<sup>41</sup> Interviews with senior staff and management at MCC, USAID, U.S. State Department, DFID, UNDP, and UNICEF (various dates). In addition to the US, three other countries have at least two agencies assessed by the ATI, including France (MINEFI and MAEDI), Japan (JICA and MOFA), and Germany (BMZ-GIZ and BMZ-KfW). Four multilateral groups also have multiple agencies in the ATI: United Nations (UN DP, UNICEF, UN OCHA), the World Bank (IFC and IDA) and the European Communities (EBRD, EIB, DG-NEAR, DG-DEVCO, DG ECHO and DG Enlargement).

Millennium Challenge Corporation (MCC) and the US Agency for International Development (USAID), both of whom have mandates that solely focus on official development assistance.<sup>42</sup> The MCC and USAID report directly to the U.S. Congress, which controls both agencies' budgets.

The peer pressure invoked by the ATI motivates key reforms in US agencies that have performed poorly in past ATI rankings, particularly at USAID and the U.S. Department of State. In the first months after then-Secretary of State Hillary Clinton announced that the US would become a signatory to IATI in November 2011, these agencies (especially State) argued vigorously through back channels against an aggressive timeline and benchmarks for implementation. They argued this was because of the anticipated high costs of required changes in underlying data technology systems. They also needed time to build capacity and buy-in from staff to report to new standards and dashboards, including the newly established U.S. Foreign Assistance Dashboard. Subsequent key informant interviews with actors within US aid agencies, the US General Accounting Office, and US Congress reveal that much of the rationale behind this argument fell by the wayside when the Millennium Challenge Corporation quickly enacted an ambitious transparency agenda and vaulted to number one on the ATI in 2013. The MCC's success on the ATI, and the need for other US agencies to 'catch up' to the MCC, was discussed in congressional hearings.<sup>43</sup> While few interview subjects would state on the record that the MCC's success was an official reason for the significant shift in USAID's approach to a more aggressive IATI implementation plan shortly thereafter, several remarked that this competition

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<sup>42</sup> This rivalry became evidence in interviews with senior staff at USAID and MCC (various dates). Such rivalry was also noted by senior staff in the US House Foreign Affairs Committee.

<sup>43</sup> This was noted in the very first question asked to Dana Hyde in her 2013 confirmation hearing as MCC CEO, by Senator Markey (D-MA). Senate Foreign Relations Committee 2013.

had a lot to do with getting the attention of top USAID management and putting data transparency reforms “on the front burner.”<sup>44</sup>

Policy and behavior change in response to the ATI need not emerge solely from the gain or loss of professional status. As Kelley & Simmons note, GPI processes can alter identity and professional norms through knowledge production and socialization. The ATI shapes how the concept of aid transparency is collectively understood and acted upon.<sup>45</sup> Interviews and public comments made at the annual ATI launches in DC indicate that circulation of elite staff between organizations and the sharing of “best practices” spurred by the ATI foster inter-organizational learning and diffusion of new policies.<sup>46</sup> Annual ATI releases are also often accompanied by donor-level narrative reviews and open discussion forums, which provide critical information on the experiences of peer institutions in building organizational cultures around transparency reforms, overcoming technological barriers, and building staff capacity in needed areas. This is an effect quite synergistic, but distinct, from that of peer naming and shaming. In the words of Brookings scholar George Ingram, such inter-organizational learning helps organizations learn to “stop hugging data” and to release more of the information they gather.<sup>47</sup> Agencies performing well on the ATI are able to demonstrate to other organizations that implementing seeming “costly” or “risky” transparency reforms are, contrary to expectations, neither costly nor risky.<sup>48</sup>

Similarly, the process of constructing the annual ATI itself is critical to understanding the ATI’s social power and influence over elites within donor agencies. First, the inclusive nature of the ATI review process, which provides opportunities for target organizations to participate in the collection of data and validation of results, lends considerable authority to Publish What You

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<sup>44</sup> Interviews with senior USAID staff, October 2015 and January 2016.

<sup>45</sup> Interview with Sally Paxton from Friends of Publish What You Fund, February 2015.

<sup>46</sup> Tvedt 2006.

<sup>47</sup> Interview with George Ingram, Brookings Institution, January 2016.

<sup>48</sup> See also Clare, Verhust and Young 2016, 10; see also Hansen and Marchner 2015.

Fund and the ATI. Because donors are directly involved in reporting to the index, and have opportunities to review the data before the index is finalized, the results are rarely openly contested.<sup>49</sup> Second, interviews with the staff of PWYF and aid agencies across the board reveal that the process of collating the ATI results every year, which takes several months and repeated interaction between PWYF staff and the targeted donor groups, provides further opportunities for organizational learning and diffusion of transparency policy norms. During the busiest months of the review process, donors are compelled to reflect on their progress towards transparency. Moreover, because the ATI grants some points in donors' overall score for organizational commitments and implementation plans even in the absence of actual policy changes in reporting, the period of review becomes an opportune time to double down on public statements in support of transparency reforms.<sup>50</sup> The costs of inattention to this process is a stagnant or bad score, leaving agencies' stakeholders with a lingering sense of "what have you done lately?"<sup>51</sup>

The period of review also enhances the reactivity effects of the ATI's monitoring. Amongst staff, the process reifies the sense that the annual review is deep and rigorous, with layers of independent analysis from subject matter experts to serve as a check against agencies' self-assessments. This prompts organizations to steer away from loose coupling or rhetorical commitments that might otherwise be used to "game" the assessment process (a form of shallow behavioral change) to tight coupling around meaningful policy and operational change on transparency.

The ATI also empowers elites to mobilize support for reforms by clearly defining what transparency looks like and setting specific benchmarks for success. References to the results of ATI rankings and ratings help "reform champions" to persuade reticent staff of the merits of

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<sup>49</sup> This is similar to the repeated social interaction learning affect, discussed in Kelley 2017, chs.3 and 6.

<sup>50</sup> Clare, Verhust and Young 2016, 9; Hansen and Marschner 2015; UK DFID 2015.

<sup>51</sup> Interview with George Ingram, Brookings Institution, January 2016.

policy change.<sup>52</sup> Specifically, the ATI's detailed set of indicators reduces uncertainty on the part of agency leaders in terms of identifying precisely what policies and practices need to change to meet basic expectations set in international commitments and national law. For example, the Millennium Challenge Corporation (ranked first in the 2014 ATI), attributes its success to this: "...through the Aid Transparency Index process, Publish What You Fund and other advocacy groups have made specific recommendations to MCC in the interest of moving the field of aid transparency forward, particularly regarding how to prioritize improvements to IATI data."<sup>53</sup> The ATI, in essence, becomes the "blueprint for reform." This shows up repeatedly in interviews and in internal and published organizational strategy papers and operational policies. Notably, this happens even when there continues to be some disagreement within organizations on the importance or fit of those ideals and standards within the overall transparency agenda and core values of the organization.<sup>54</sup>

Consider for a moment a key shift in USAID's transparency agenda. In July 2015, after struggling in prior years in the ATI rankings, USAID published a strategy paper on open data depicted as the agency's "roadmap" to transparency.<sup>55</sup> The strategy paper, also known as the IATI Implementation Cost Management Plan (CMP – Phase 2), explicitly stated that one of the four central goals of the strategy was to increase USAID's ATI score.<sup>56</sup> A month later, Alex Their, then Assistant to the USAID Administrator for the Bureau of Policy, Planning and Learning, stated "...after we implemented Phase One of the CMP, our Publish What You Fund Aid Transparency Index....increased more than 20 points and moved USAID from 'Fair' to

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<sup>52</sup> Interviews with senior staff, USAID and World Bank (September 2014, January 2016, February 2017)

<sup>53</sup> Hansen and Marschner 2015. For similar statements by the Canadian International Aid Agency, see Bhusan and Bond 2013.

<sup>54</sup> Interviews with staff and management at USAID and World Bank. See also Koeberle 2016.

<sup>55</sup> Hamilton 2015; see also Thier and Crumbly 2015.

<sup>56</sup> USAID 2015a.

‘Good’. This was an exciting, tangible way to demonstrate our progress, and this success raised awareness around the Agency on these important efforts.”<sup>57</sup>

### ***The ATI’s Power via Political Pressure***

While we find more evidence of direct elite responses to the ATI, we also find that the ATI does indeed reduce information asymmetries and induce greater principal attention to the disclosure practices of donor organizations. Via the lobbying and advocacy campaigns of PWYF and like-minded members of the epistemic community, the ATI creates awareness and support among political principals for aid transparency. As such, the ATI is a useful tool for resolving the information asymmetries that hinder principal oversight and control. In providing detailed, regularized data on agencies’ transparency performance, the ATI essentially acts as an information intermediary for politicians who may have neither the capacity nor inclination to closely monitor their agent’s behavior.<sup>58</sup> According to one senior staff member in the U.S. House Foreign Affairs Committee, the ATI is “great for letting us know when there’s a problem [with US aid agencies].... We don’t have time to follow that stuff that closely.”<sup>59</sup>

In other instances, it is quite apparent that the ATI is empowering third party actors (watchdogs and police patrols, in the parlance of principal-agent theory). In the U.S. for example, there is a thriving group of think tanks, academic and NGOs around aid reform that pays close attention to the ATI. The rankings and ratings inform their analytical reports, lobbying and

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<sup>57</sup> Quoted in Hamilton 2015.

<sup>58</sup> Interviews with staff in the US House Foreign Affairs Committee and Senate Foreign Relations Committee, senior staff at the UK Department for International Development, and think tanks scholars both in the U.S. and U.K. (various dates; see appendix 1). In addition, we found that the ATI’s detailed information on where donors are lagging in transparency performance is used by principals to inform specific policies within national legislation on open data standards. Several national “aid transparency guarantees”, such as in the UK and Sweden, and even the 2016 US Foreign Aid Transparency Act makes specific recommendations that align with the indicators and goals of the ATI.

<sup>59</sup> Interview with senior staff member, USHFAC, February 2015.

activism.<sup>60</sup> Interviews with senior congressional staff in the U.S. House Foreign Affairs Committee and the U.S. Senate Foreign Relations Committee reveal that a great deal of their information on the transparency performance of US aid agencies comes from this epistemic community, with frequent reference to the ATI as a primary source of evidence.

Consistent with the hypotheses in section 3, political pressure does appear to play a stronger role with respect to less independent aid agencies. Staff at agencies with relatively low levels of independence from principals (e.g. USAID relative to the U.S. Congress) fear that the ATI's score may influence the way their agencies' political masters decide to appropriate funds.<sup>61</sup> By contrast, interviews on the evolution of the transparency initiative at the World Bank, whose funds comes from a more diverse set of sources (including trust funds and profits from non-concessional lending and bonds) make no mention of the shadow of appropriations, even when asked directly.<sup>62</sup> The World Bank has consistently placed in the top ten of all donors and in the "good" category of the ATI since 2011. Interestingly, our interviews also reveal that staff in less independent agencies do not always wait for clear threats or actual principal exercise of oversight and control. Instead, they can act *in anticipation* of possible greater oversight and control by principals, exhibiting a desire to "get ahead of the game" by taking proactive steps to implement data reporting standards that would be fully compliant with IATI and aligned to the metrics in the ATI.<sup>63</sup>

## **6. Conclusion: Critical Reflections on the ATI's Social Power and Influence**

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<sup>60</sup> USAID 2015a.

<sup>61</sup> Interviews with staff in the U.S. Congressional Research Service, U.S. General Accounting Office, and USAID (2014-2017).

<sup>62</sup> Interviews with World Bank staff, February 2011, June 2013, February 2017.

<sup>63</sup> Interviews with staff at the U.S. General Accounting Office, Congressional Research Service, and USAID. See also Marks 2012.



As Kelley and Simmons argue, GPIs can enable weak actors to exercise considerable influence upon powerful actors in world politics. The ATI is a remarkable case in point. Created nearly ten years ago by a small NGO with no direct material power, the ATI has assumed a major role in defining best practices in aid transparency. The ATI has exercised influence via political pressure and elite channels to invoke important socialization, learning, and peer pressure effects that discernibly shape many donors' transparency. A few donors remain relatively immune to the ATI's influence. However, we find strong evidence that agencies with aid as their primary mandate are especially responsive to the ATI's assessments, particularly when those agencies are relatively independent and thus more able to act in response to a change in aid professionals' priorities and understandings. Direct response by elites to professional social pressure drives donor agencies to alter their reporting practices in response to coverage by the ATI. The ATI case thus demonstrates that a GPI creator (in this case, Publish What You Fund) can strategically use normative channels to substantially alter behavior it considers important within a relatively tightly knit professional community. More pointedly, the ATI instantiates that NGO "Davids" can sometimes influence the behavior of state actor "Goliaths", with GPIs a potentially important stone in the slingshot.

Thinking in real world terms about the potential power of GPIs, the case of the ATI suggests that there may be advantages to focusing on elite channels and construction of meaning in professional communities. By creating common understandings in the absence of material rewards, the ATI arguably lessens the degree of concern that donors will "teach to the test". By reducing the material benefits or structuring the review process in a way that makes it more difficult to game the index, the ATI may also reduce the likelihood that those evaluated will

focus on their scores to the expense of the broader purpose those scores are meant to serve; i.e., genuine behavioral change in donor policies and practices.

At the same time, we learn from this case that a GPI that operates via social pressure will be unlikely to influence those who overtly reject the importance of the goal (such as China or the United Arab Emirates) or are not part of the community in which social pressure operatives (including aid providers that are primarily focused on other matters). The ATI's efforts to affect change in these agencies, such as the U.S. Department of Defense (DoD) or Department of the Treasury (whose ODA activities are a small fraction of their responsibilities) may be of limited usefulness.

In sum, the ATI has assumed a significant role in drawing critical attention to the aid transparency commitments and performance of donors. The ATI by many accounts is now an industry leader in assessing aid transparency and setting accountability standards for donors. The ATI alters what transparency means in practice even as it encourages greater disclosure. The ATI is more than a mere assessor of transparency practices, it is an active creator of what it in fact means to be "transparent."

At the same time, a more existential question revolves around the ATI's core norms. What is the end goal of aid transparency? What does our study of the supply-side of transparency really tell us about the demand for, or actual use, of that data once we finally get it out there? The lack of demonstrable evidence that vested stakeholders are actually using the data produced through transparency initiatives detracts from the case for transparency at a key time when reaching the movement's goal demands renewed investments in open data standards.<sup>64</sup> PWYF's CEO noted this in a recent blog post, saying "The impact of our work has been less than we

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<sup>64</sup> Fung et al 2008; Gaventa and McGee 2013; McGee 2013; Davies, Fernando and Alonso 2013; Carter 2014; Rank and Steele 2014; Davies 2014; USAID 2015b; Simons 2016; Weaver 2016.

hoped, however, because of limited use of our data. Much of our early work assumed that techies would build tools to visualize aid data, and developing country citizens would find ways to use these tools. The experience of the past five years suggests that isn't enough."<sup>65</sup> It is thus an open question: while the ATI has proven effective in moving the needle on donor transparency, will the ATI have substantive impact on the planning, execution, and assessment of development projects either by the agencies that fund them or in the countries at the coalface of project implementation? If not, with the momentum behind aid transparency wane, and with it the influence of the ATI?

Finally, it is worth noting that the ATI's influence is not always seen as positive. Like other studies that focus on the unanticipated and undesired effects of GPIs, in our interviews we discern some sentiments within the international aid community regarding the possible negative effects of the ATI. When asked if the ATI presented any concerns or risks, several key informant interviewees were quick to point out that the systems put in place in response to pressures induced by the ATI did not always represent the quickest or most efficient route to full transparency for their organization.<sup>66</sup> It is thus interesting that conformity around the ATI's norms of transparency has taken hold, despite reservations about the appropriateness of the ATI's assessment criteria and specific indicators.

Critically, this qualitative observation may portend a varying level of normative power over time as the ATI ages. Contestation over the operationalization of 'transparency' may lead to some discrediting or distancing from the ATI. It might also create pressure to alter the index to be more inclusive of other indicators and weights, or perhaps even the rise of new GPI

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<sup>65</sup> Simons 2016.

<sup>66</sup> Interviews with senior staff at USAID, World Bank, GIZ, UNICEF, JICA, NORAD (various dates; see appendix 1)

competitors that reflect changing norms regarding the structure and goals of aid transparency.<sup>67</sup>

When and how GPIs continue to exercise influence is thus an interesting question for future research, especially for those GPIs whom we determine to have real effects upon the world.

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<sup>67</sup> At the fourth High-Level Forum on Aid Effectiveness in Busan, South Korea in November 2011, the Global Partnership on Effective Development Cooperation<sup>67</sup> was created and mandated to monitor donor progress towards the Busan agreement, including commitments to transparency. The first Global Monitoring Report 2014 was released just prior to the 2015 Fifth High Forum on Aid Effectiveness in Mexico. The monitoring framework thus far appears to depend upon voluntary reporting by participating countries and organizations and a vague methodology and set of indicators; as such, it does not appear to be emerging yet as a viable competitor to the ATI. However, the clear overlap in the indices' purposive goals may indicate some movement in the competitive landscape, with yet unknown consequences for its power and influence of the ATI.

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## Online Appendix

### *Interviews*

*Note:* Interviewee's titles and institutional affiliations listed below reflect positions held at the time of the interviews. Overall, between 2010-2016, Kate Weaver conducted approximately 400 interviews, approximately 150 of which touched upon issues related to the ATI and its effects. The interviewees relevant to our ATI case study are listed below. Interviews who requested partial anonymity are listed according to institutional affiliation, but not names directly in cited interviews. Interview subjects who requested full anonymity, or were exempt from attribution in our IRB protocols, are not indicated in this list.

### Malawi

**Twaib Ali**, Assistant Director, Debt & Aid Coordination Unit, Ministry of Finance  
**Mr. Archanjel**, US Agency for International Development  
**Agnes Lumphezi Banda**, Humanitarian Response Officer, Danish Church Aid  
**Aaron Batten**, Oversees Development Institute Economist, Malawi Ministry of Finance,  
Oversees Development Institute Economist  
**Uta Borges**, Country Director, GTZ  
**Patrick Brenny**, Country Coordinator, Joint United Nations Program on HIV/AIDS  
**Chancy Chilimbila**, Title unknown, Ministry of Economic Planning and Development (MEPD)  
**Augustin Chilkuni**, Programme Officer, Royal Norwegian Embassy  
**George Chimseu**, MVAC Technical Advisor, Malawi Vulnerability Assessment Committee  
(MVAC), Ministry of Development, Planning and Cooperation  
**Vitumbiko Chinoko**, Programme Officer, Christian Aid  
**Martin Dawson**, Deputy Head of Office, UK Department for International Development  
**Adrian Fitzgerald**, Head of Development, IrishAid  
**Demetrio Kachingwe**, Senior Budget Control Assistant, United Nation's Children's Fund  
**Ms. Kadewere**, UNAIDS  
**Sam Kakhobwe**, Coordinator and Point of Contact, Millennium Challenge Account- Malawi  
**Vera Kamtumkule**, Title unknown, IrishAid  
**Chrissie Kamwendo**, Senior Operations Officer, World Bank  
**Godfrey Kapalamula**, Senior Program Office, Japanese International Cooperation Agency  
**Prince Kapondamgaga**, Officer in Farmers Union Malawi  
**Titus Kavalo**, United Nations Development Program  
**Walusungu Kayira**, Chief Economist, Ministry of Local Government  
**Niall Keleher**, Country Director, Innovations for Poverty Action  
**Mr. Nathan Khuthe**, Flemish International Cooperation Agency (FICA)  
**Karolyn Kuo**, Democracy and Governance Officer, USAID – Malawi  
**Eric Leventhal**, Program Manager, Health Financing, Clinton Health Access Initiative  
**Madalitso Lowole**, Programme Budget Officer, United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF)  
**Charles Machinjili**, Commissioner of Statistics, National Statistics Office of Malawi  
**Chrispin Magombo**, Program Director for Food Security/Economic Development, Director of  
Food Security, Regional Program Coordinator, CARE  
**Paul Makwinja**, Operations Manager, United Nations Population Fund

**Michael Malewezi**, Program Officer, Assistant Resident Representative, Japanese International Cooperation Agency  
**Ken Matekenya**, Program Officer, ActionAid  
**Ernest Misomali**, Assistant Resident Representative for Capacity Development, United Nations Development Program  
**Michael Mkoko**, ICT Division, Ministry of Finance  
**Chisimphika Mphande**, Communications Officer, CEPA  
**Sampson Msungama**, United Nations Development Program (with four staff members)  
**Mr. Lawrence Munthali**, Monitoring & Evaluation Advisor, IrishAid  
**Stephen Raphael Mwale**, Governance Program Management Specialist, USAID – Malawi  
**John Mussa**, Director of Land Resources Conservation, Ministry of Agriculture, Department of Land Resources Conservation  
**Mary Ng'ambi**, Development Outreach and Communications Specialist, Project Management Specialist, USAID – Malawi  
**Delight Ngwira**, African Development Bank  
**Alick Nkhoma**, Assistant Representative, United Nations Food & Agricultural Organization  
**Tamani Nkhono Mvula**, National Coordinator for Civil Society Agriculture Network  
**Lamulo Nsanja**, Country Economist, KfW  
**Agnes L. Nyirenda**, Humanitarian Officer, Danish Church Aid  
**Jacob Nyirongo**, Norwegian Church Aid  
**Mr. Oghale Oddo**, US Agency for International Development  
**Mr. Kenji Ohara**, JOCV Coordinator, Japanese International Cooperation Agency (JICA)  
**Vincent O'Neil**, Head of Development Coordination, Irish Aid  
**Patrick Pollard**, Overseas Development Institute Fellow, Ministry of Health  
**Koorosh Raffli**, Chief of Planning, Monitoring and Evaluation, United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF)  
**Jan Rijpma**, Assistant Resident Representation, Environment, Energy & Climate Change, United Nations Development Program –  
**Lauren Shear**, Program Manager, Global Health Fund, Clinton Health Access Initiative  
**Marita Sorheim-Rensvik**, Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation  
**Howard Standen**, Climate Change Advisor, UK Department for International Development  
**Alexander Stevens**, Department for International Development  
**Jane Swira**, Programme Manager, National Climate Change Programme, Ministry of Economic Planning and Development (MEPD)  
**Chimvano Thawani**, Debt & Aid Coordination Unit, Ministry of Finance

### **Kampala, Uganda**

(16-23 March 2015, interviews conducted in collaboration with Kelly Steffen, Steven Damiano, Tanlyn Roelofs, and Jacqueline Homann)

**Richard Okello**, Aid Coordinator & GIS Specialization, USAID Uganda  
**Phillip Greene**, Mission Economist, USAID Uganda  
**Asger Hallberg Borg**, Country Officer, World Bank  
**Franklin Mutahakana**, AMP Focal Point, World Bank  
**Sybille Schmidt**, Operations Advisor, Delegation of the European Union

**Theo Hoorntje**, First Counsellor- Head of Cooperation, Delegation of the European Union  
**Cate Jaijuma**, Senior Program Advisor, DANIDA  
**Charlotte Rosen**, Financial Manager, DANIDA  
**Pontian Muhwezi**, Country Program Officer, IFAD  
**Ann Turinayo**, Knowledge Management & Communications Consultant, IFAD  
**Josephat Byaruhanga**, Senior Policy Officer, Agriculture & Agribusiness, MINBUZA  
**Peter Michael Oumo**, Economic Adviser, Irish Aid  
**Virginie Leroy**, Agency of French Development  
**Mr. Weber**, Head of Development Cooperation, German Embassy  
**Birgitta Grosskinsky**, Desk Officer for Development, German Embassy  
**Yasumichi Araki**, Senior Representative, JICA  
**Agnes Ndamata**, UNDP  
**Christine Mugoyo**, UNDP  
**Ronald Kansere Bwanika**, UNDP  
**Alexis Rwabizambuga**, Chief Country Economist, African Development Bank  
**Cary McCormick**, UNICEF  
**Diego Angemi**, UNICEF  
**Nakayima Esther**, Uganda National NGO Forum  
**Peter Wandera**, Transparency International Uganda  
**George Bogere**, Research Fellow, ACODE  
**Winnie Nabiddo**, Research Fellow, ACODE  
**Alex Talwangire**, Research Fellow, ACODE  
**Harry Kiragga**, Research Officer, ACODE  
**Daphne Kobugabe**, Research Intern, ACODE  
**Bernard Sabiti**, Development, Research & Training  
**Sophie Nampewo**, Analyst, Development Initiatives  
**Ellen Hoxha**, Chief of Party, Strengthening Decentralization for Sustainability (SDS)  
**Juliet Akello**, Program Officer, Governance & Rights, Uganda Debt Network  
**Gilbert Musinguzi**, Quality Assurance Manager, Uganda Debt Network

**Nairobi, Kenya (December 2010, names omitted due to IRB protocol)**

Africa Center for Technology Studies (1)  
African Development Bank (3)  
Embassy of Finland (1)  
FEWSNET (3)  
GTZ (1)  
Heinrich Boll Stiftung, Nairobi Office (2)  
Institute for Security Studies, Kenya (3)  
Integrated Regional Information Networks (IRIN)  
International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC) (1)  
Ministry of Finance, Kenya (2)  
Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs (1)  
Office of the Kenyan Prime Minister (2)  
Regional Center for Mapping of Resources for Development (RCMRD) (1)  
PACT Kenya (1)

United Nations Development Programme (1)  
United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA) (2)  
United Nations Food & Agricultural Organization (6)  
United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (1)  
United States Agency for International Development – Kenya (2)  
World Bank (1)  
World Food Program (1)  
World Vision (1)

### **Washington, DC\***

(Meetings conducted February 2011; June 2013; September 2014, February 2015, October 2015, January-February 2016, September 2016, February 2017. Note: several interviews were conducted with senior Congressional staff who requested the interviews be conducted for background information only and that their names not be listed in any publications).

**Augusta Abrahamse**, US Global Development Lab, U.S. Agency for International Development  
**Gregory Adams**, Director, Aid Effectiveness, Oxfam America  
**Carolyn Anstey**, Managing Director, World Bank  
**Joan Atherton**, Senior Policy Advisor for Aid Effectiveness, USAID/Policy, Planning and Learning Bureau, Office of Donor Engagement  
**Shaida Badiee**, Open Data Watch  
**Owen Barder**, Center for Global Development / AidInfo  
**David Beckman**, President, Bread for the World  
**Brian Bingham**, AAAS Fellow, USAID, HESN Program  
**Danila Boneva**, UNDP and IATI  
**Jeremiah Carew**, Deputy Director, Strategic and Program Planning Bureau for Policy, Planning and Learning, U.S. Agency for International Development  
**Tom Carothers**, Senior Fellow, Carnegie Endowment  
**Jeff Chelsky**, World Bank  
**Nancy Choi**, Senior Director of Operations, Development Gateway and co-Executive Director, AidData  
**Samantha Custer**, Director of Policy and Communications, AidData  
**Steve Davenport**, Director of Citizen Engagement, World Bank  
**Taryn Davis**, Development Gateway  
**Porter Delaney**, Kyle House Group  
**Chad Dobson**, Bank Information Center  
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### **Kathmandu, Nepal**

(Meetings conducted on 8-17 December 2014; 16-20 March 2015. December interviews conducted in collaboration with Brian O'Donnell, Shelby Carvalho, and Zehra Akbar. March 2015 interviews conducted by Krista Rasmussen, Robbie Paras, Nadia Sabat-Pererya, and Erin Cusack)

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*In addition to formal interviews, this research was informed by informal discussion with participants in the Aid Management Platform Workshop, 10-12 December 2014, Kathmandu, Nepal. These participants included individuals from Development Gateway and numerous country delegations, including:*

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**Florim Canolli**, Kosovo Delegation  
**Mahamat Mamadou Addy**, Chad Delegation  
**Abdel-Hosky Nassour**, Chad Delegation  
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**Senior officials**, European Commission (Brussels) (in person, July 2013)

***Agencies Covered by the ATI***

The ATI covers a range of agencies, from a variety of “countries” (we use “country” to mean both a nation – e.g. the US – and an entity which has multiple agencies – e.g. the United Nations). There are also a number of stand-alone agencies and foundations covered by the index. Table A1 provides a full accounting of agencies covered by the ATI (and thus included in the data), their years of inclusion, their country, and whether we consider them an agency primarily devoted to distributing foreign aid.

Table A1: Agencies in the ATI

Organization	Country	Covered by ATI						Aid Agency
		2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	
Australian Agency for International Development	Australia	•	•	•				Yes
Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade	Australia				•		•	No
Austrian Development Agency	Austria	•	•	•	•			Yes
Belgian Development Agency	Belgium	•	•					Yes
Directorate General for Cooperation and Development	Belgium			•	•	•	•	Yes
Brazilian Cooperation Agency	Brazil		•	•	•			Yes
Ministry of Foreign Affairs	Bulgaria	•	•	•	•			No
Canadian International Development Agency	Canada	•	•	•				Yes
Department of Foreign Affairs, Trade and Development	Canada				•		•	No
Ministry of Commerce	China	•	•	•	•		•	No
Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs	Croatia				•			No
CyprusAid	Cyprus			•	•			Yes
Planning Bureau	Cyprus	•	•					No
Czech Development Agency	Czech	•	•	•	•			Yes
Danida	Denmark	•	•					Yes
Ministry of Foreign Affairs	Denmark			•	•	•	•	No
DG Development and Cooperation	EC	•	•	•	•	•	•	Yes
Humanitarian Aid Department of the European Commission	EC	•	•	•	•	•	•	Yes
DG Enlargement	EC	•	•	•	•	•	•	No

Foreign Policy Instruments Service	EC		•	•	•	•		No
Ministry of Foreign Affairs	Estonia	•	•	•	•			No
Ministry of Foreign Affairs	Finland	•	•	•	•	•	•	No
French Agency for Development	France	•	•	•	•	•	•	Yes
Ministry of Foreign Affairs	France		•	•	•		•	No
Ministry of Economy and Finance	France		•	•	•		•	No
Foreign Office	Germany			•	•			No
Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ)-GIZ	Germany	•	•	•	•	•	•	Yes
Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ)-KfW	Germany	•	•	•	•		•	Yes
HellenicAid	Greece	•	•	•	•			Yes
Ministry of Foreign Affairs	Hungary	•	•	•	•			No
Irish Aid	Ireland	•	•	•	•		•	Yes
Ministry of Foreign Affairs	Italy	•	•	•	•	•	•	No
Japan International Cooperation Agency	Japan	•	•	•	•		•	Yes
Ministry of Foreign Affairs	Japan		•	•	•		•	No
Economic Cooperation Development Fund	Korea	•	•					Yes
Korean International Cooperation Agency	Korea	•	•	•	•		•	Yes
Ministry of Foreign Affairs	Latvia	•	•	•	•			No
Ministry of Foreign Affairs	Lithuania	•	•	•	•			No
Lux-Development	Luxembourg	•	•					Yes
Ministry of Foreign Affairs	Luxembourg			•	•			No
Ministry of Foreign Affairs	Malta	•	•	•	•			No
Ministry of Foreign Affairs	Netherlands	•	•	•	•	•	•	No
New Zealand Aid Programme -	New Zealand	•	•	•	•			No
Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation - Ministry of Foreign Affairs	Norway	•	•	•	•		•	No
Ministry of Foreign Affairs	Poland	•	•	•	•			No

Portuguese Camões – Instituto da Cooperação da Língua	Portugal		•	•	•			No
Portuguese Institute for Development Assistance	Portugal	•						Yes
Ministry of Foreign Affairs	Romania	•	•	•	•			No
Slovak Agency for International Development Cooperation	Slovakia	•	•	•	•			Yes
Ministry of Foreign Affairs	Slovenia	•	•	•	•			No
Spanish Agency for International Development Cooperation -	Spain	•	•	•	•	•	•	No
Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency	Sweden	•	•	•				Yes
Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency - Ministry of Foreign Affairs	Sweden				•	•	•	No
Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation	Switzerland	•	•	•	•		•	Yes
Department of finance	UAE						•	No
Department of Defense	U.S.	•	•	•	•	•	•	No
Millennium Challenge Corporation	U.S.	•	•	•	•	•	•	Yes
President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief	U.S.	•	•	•	•	•	•	Yes
Department of State	U.S.	•	•	•	•	•	•	No
Department of the Treasury	U.S.	•	•	•	•	•	•	No
United States Agency for International Development	U.S.	•	•	•	•	•	•	Yes
CDC Group	UK	•	•					Yes
Department of Energy and Climate Change	UK		•					No
Department for International Development	UK	•	•	•	•	•	•	Yes
Foreign and Commonwealth Office	UK		•	•	•			No
Ministry of Defence	UK		•	•	•			No
United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs	UN		•	•	•		•	Yes
United Nations Development Programme	UN	•	•	•	•		•	Yes
United Nations Children's Fund	UN		•	•	•		•	Yes

International Development Association - International Bank for Reconstruction and Development	WB	•	•	•	•		•	Yes
International Finance Corporation	WB	•	•	•	•		•	Yes
Adaptation Fund			•					Yes
African Development Bank		•	•	•	•		•	Yes
Asian Development Bank		•	•	•	•		•	Yes
Clean Technology Fund			•					Yes
European Bank for Reconstruction and Development		•	•	•	•	•	•	Yes
European Investment Bank		•	•	•	•	•	•	No
Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation			•	•	•		•	Yes
Global Alliance for Vaccines and Immunization		•	•	•	•		•	Yes
Global Environment Facility			•					Yes
The Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria		•	•	•	•		•	Yes
Inter-American Development Bank		•	•	•	•		•	Yes
International Monetary Fund				•	•		•	No
William and Flora Hewlett Foundation		•	•					Yes

### *Gilardi Independence Measure*

- Coding scheme and decisions

The Gilardi measure is, as noted in the main text, a construction using the four indicators in Gilardi 2002 that we could code consistently – term of office of agency head, source of budget, whether independence is formally stated, and whether the head of the agency is of cabinet rank. These are coded using Gilardi’s original coding scheme. This scheme is as follows:

1. Cabinet rank minister
  - Yes- 1
  - No-0
2. Independence Formally stated-
  - Yes-1
  - No-0
3. Term of of office (Gilardi Index)
  - over 8 years 1.00
  - 6 to 8 years 0.80
  - 5 years 0.60
  - 4 years 0.40
  - fixed term under 4 years or at the discretion of the appointer 0.20
  - no fixed term 0.00
4. Source of funding (Gilardi Index)
  - external funding 1.00
  - government and external funding 0.50
  - government 0.00

In the case of multilaterals and foundations we coded cabinet rank as 0 because of the simple fact that the agency is autonomous of any government participation. For term of office we looked up the director/president of the foundation and coded it as per his or her term of office. We also considered all multilaterals formally independent.

- Distribution of the measure

Figure A1 displays the distribution of scores for each of the 84 agencies for whom a score is calculated. In part because only government agencies could receive a “1” for cabinet rank minister, very few agencies receive high scores on the index we construct. That said it is reasonably normally distributed, save a gap in the top quartile.

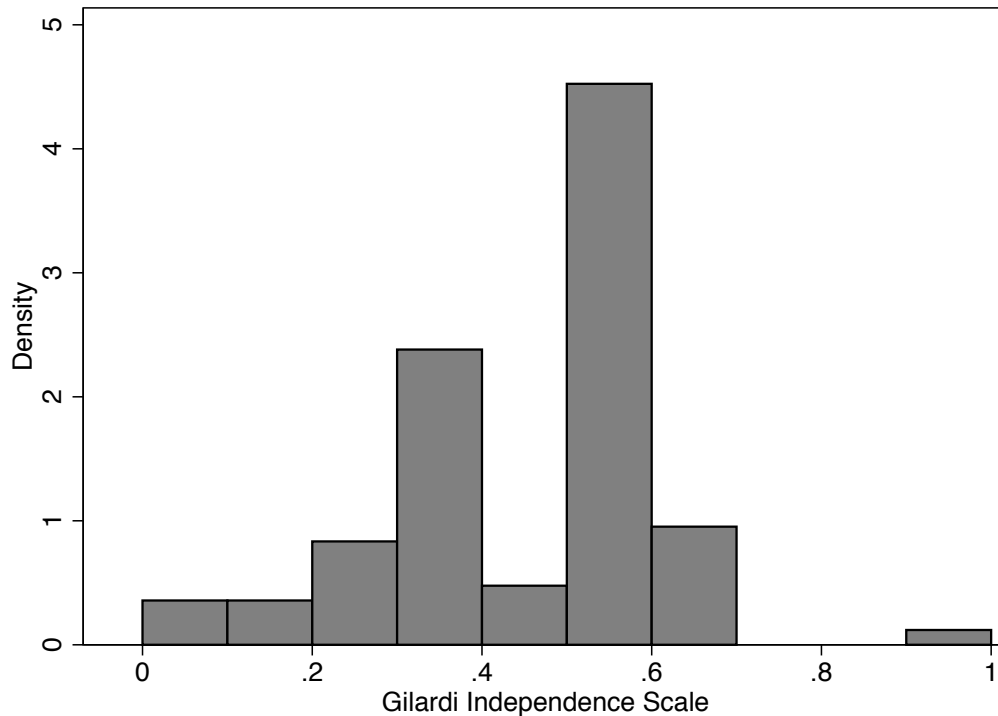


Figure A1: Distribution of the Gilardi measure

### *The Aiddata Activity Scale*

As noted in the main text, the AidData Activity Scale is a measure from 0 to 100. It is a simple average of the percentage of fields “filled out” (that is, non-missing) for project titles, descriptions, financing agencies, and types of flow for a given agency-year. The data was provided by AidData, and covers the years 2006-2013.

The data is far from normally distributed. Indeed, 43% of the total observations – 158 of 367 – have the highest possible value, 100. Even of those below this maximum score, there is clear skewing towards the top end of the distribution, as depicted in figure A2.

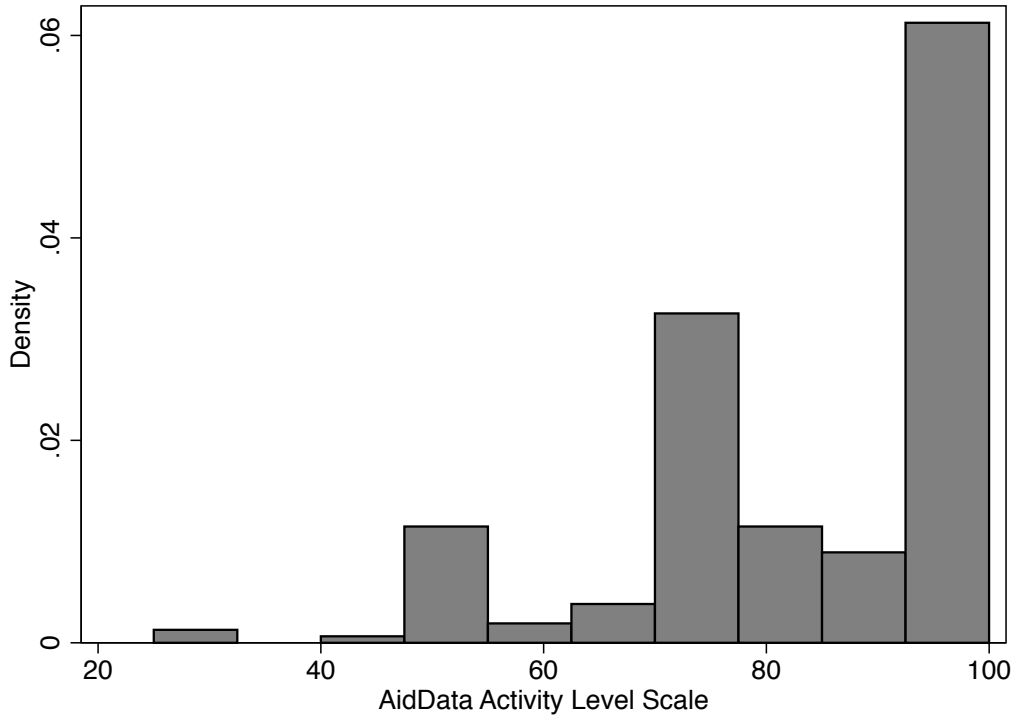
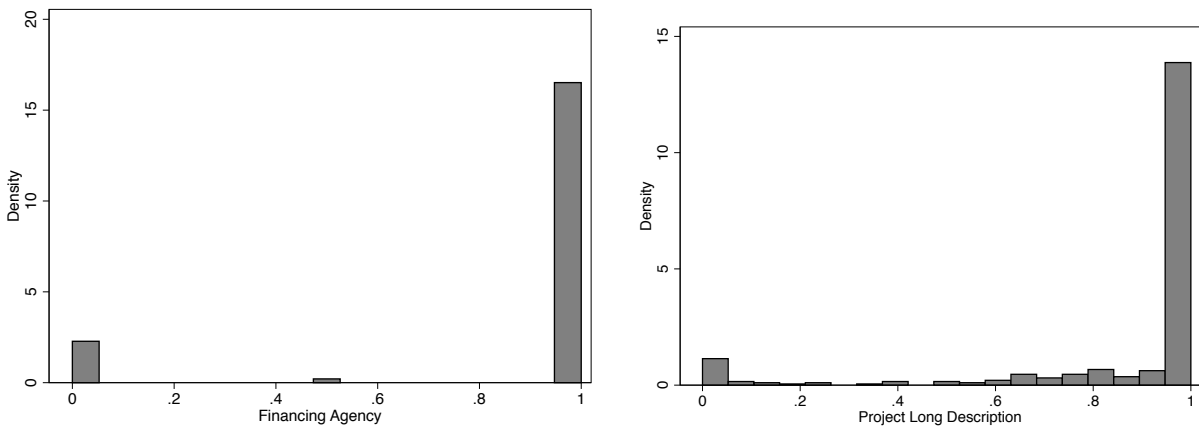


Figure A2: Histogram of the AidData Activity Scale (if score < 100)

Figure A2 looks almost as if a noisy categorical variable (with local max at 25, 50, 75, and 100) has been mis-represented as a continuous variable. But the AidData Activity Scale *is* a continuous variable; it is the percentage (from 0-100) of complete data for each of four fields. The clustering is due to the non-reporting of particular fields; e.g. if a given donor has complete (or near-complete) reporting of 3 of 4 fields, but no reporting of the fourth field, that donor’s score will be at or near 75 on the combined measure. Figures A3 and A4 display this ‘all or nothing’ pattern for two of the underlying variables in the scale, financing agency



Figures A3 and A4: Bi-modally distributed measures – financing agency and project description



In some ways, these continuous variables operate in practice in a quasi-categorical variable, with a bimodal “all” or “nothing” distribution.

To ensure model dependence is not driving the results in Table 4, we convert our continuous AidData Activity Scale into a categorical variable. We do this by converting the underlying measures (e.g. financing agency, project description) into binary variables taking the value of 1 if reporting is at or above the overall mean for that variable in a given agency-year and 0 if reporting is below the mean. We then sum the four binary variables into a categorical version of the AidData Activity Scale at the agency-year level, taking the values of zero to four.

Table A2 below fits an ordered logit model to this categorical data using the same regressors as did Table 4 in the main text. Given the well known problems with fixed effects in ordered probit and logit models, this table uses random effects. Table A2 is consistent with Table 4’s findings regarding an overall treatment effect of ATI coverage. The findings on agency independence (or differences between aid and non-aid agencies) are, however, not found in this alternative specification. As noted in the main text, these findings suggest caution in interpreting the econometric results as to mechanisms; that said, these findings must be interpreted in the context of random (rather than fixed) effects, which are known to be inconsistent when fixed effects would be more appropriate if implementable (as is the case here). Table A2 does provide some confidence that changes in agency disclosure practice are indeed correlated with the presence of ATI assessments.

DV: AidData Activity Scale (Categorical)	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
Sample:	All Agencies	All Agencies	Non-Aid Agencies	Non-Aid Agencies	Aid Agencies	Aid Agencies
Covered by ATI (Treatment)	2.036*** (0.702)	2.131** (0.945)	4.816 (5.370)	5.221 (5.023)	1.638 (1.385)	0.921 (1.753)
Aid Agency Dummy	-0.827 (0.584)	-0.771 (0.626)				
Treatment*Aid Agency	-0.408 (0.787)	-0.683 (0.857)				
Treatment*Independence			-5.869 (10.50)	-4.925 (9.679)	0.188 (3.163)	0.734 (3.289)
Constant (cut1)	-5.786*** (0.676)	-5.811*** (0.975)	-5.906*** (1.148)	-4.762*** (1.618)	-5.010*** (0.690)	-5.753*** (1.377)
Constant (cut2)	-2.907*** (0.490)	-2.746*** (0.837)	-2.507*** (0.499)	-1.285 (1.246)	-2.307*** (0.463)	-2.769** (1.260)
Constant (cut3)	-0.688 (0.452)	-0.370 (0.812)	-0.729* (0.423)	0.571 (1.227)	0.210 (0.411)	0.0124 (1.238)
Organization FEs	N	N	N	N	N	N
Year FEs	N	Y	N	Y	N	Y
Observations	367	367	152	152	215	215

Ordered Logic Models, Random Effects; Standard errors in parentheses

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

Table A2: Ordered Logit Model on Categorical AidData Activity Scale