Women's Group Empowerment Can Increase Political Participation:

(Preliminary) Evidence from Five Coordinated Field Experiments

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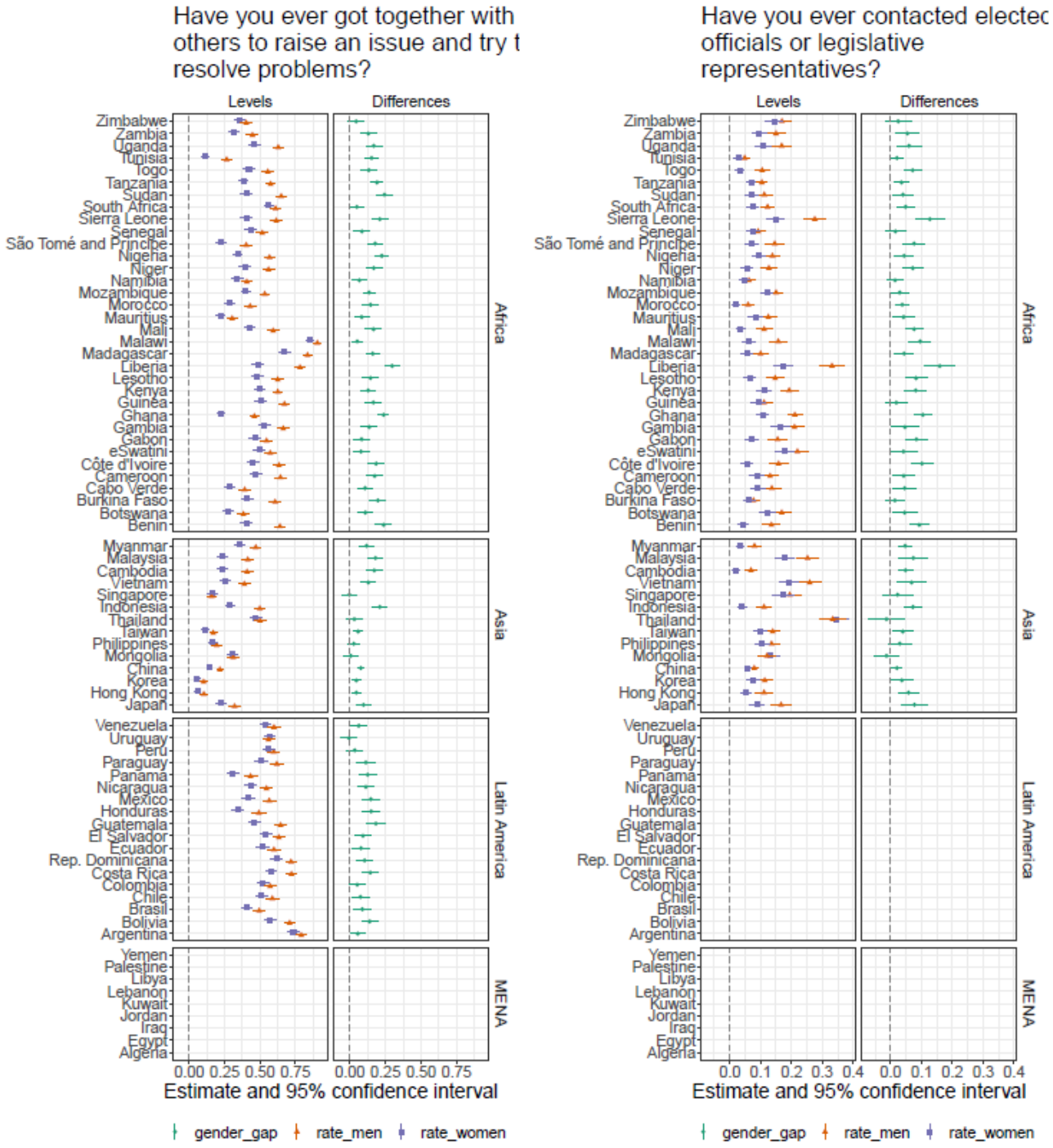
Motivation:

Global Gender Gap in Women's Non-Electoral Participation



Motivation: Current Challenges

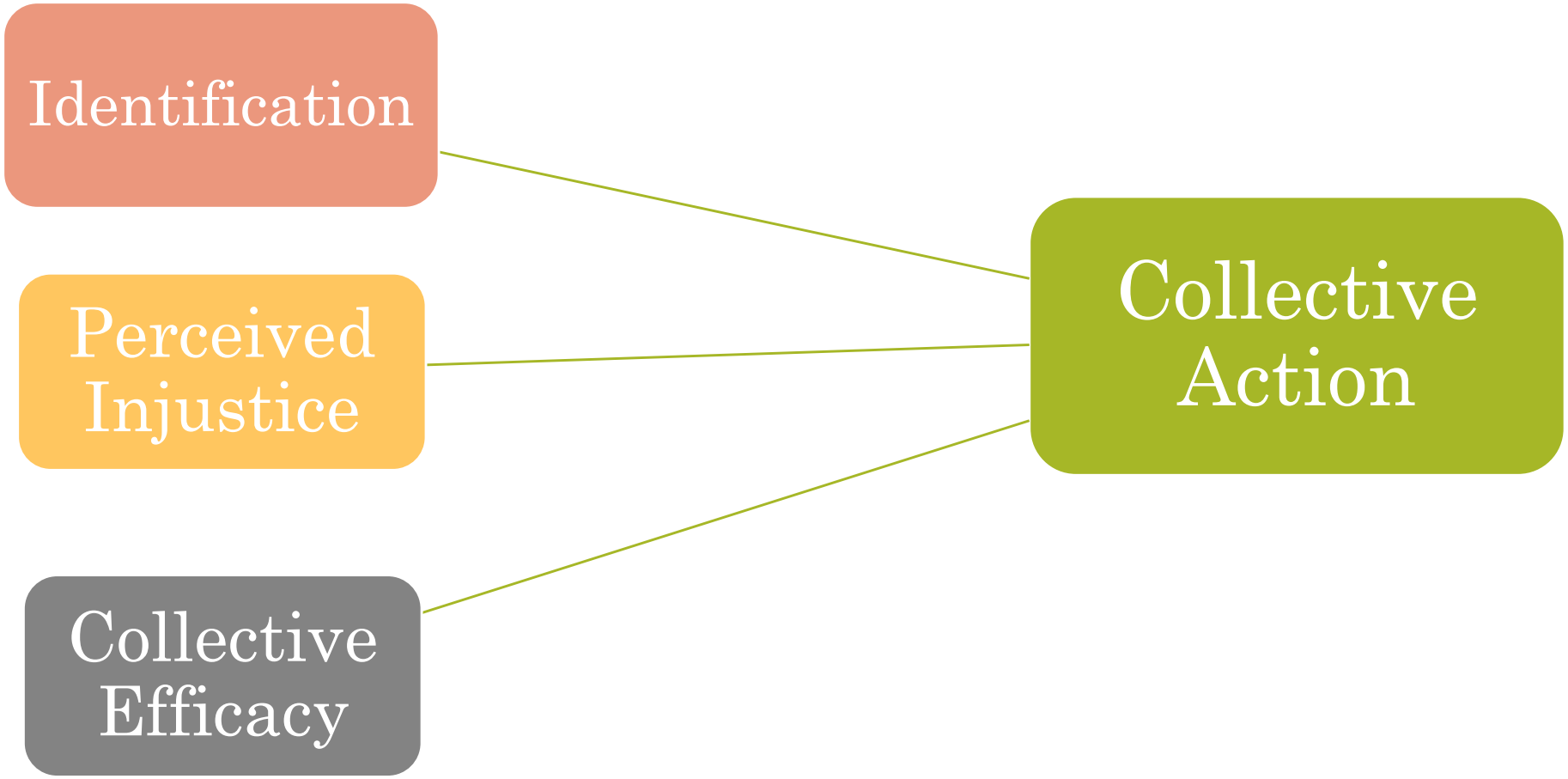
- What can be done to increase political participation among disadvantaged groups? Can participatory interventions succeed in making governments more responsive to citizens?
- Many existing interventions focus on increasing citizen participation, with mixed results
- Field experimental work also mixed:
  - Resource constraints (Grossman, Humphreys and Sacramone-Lutz, 2014; Finkel and Lim, 2023)
  - Information constraints (Bjorkman and Svensson, 2009; Lieberman, Posner and Tsai, 2014; Gottlieb, 2016a)
- Greater focus on electoral participation
- Rumored file drawer problem

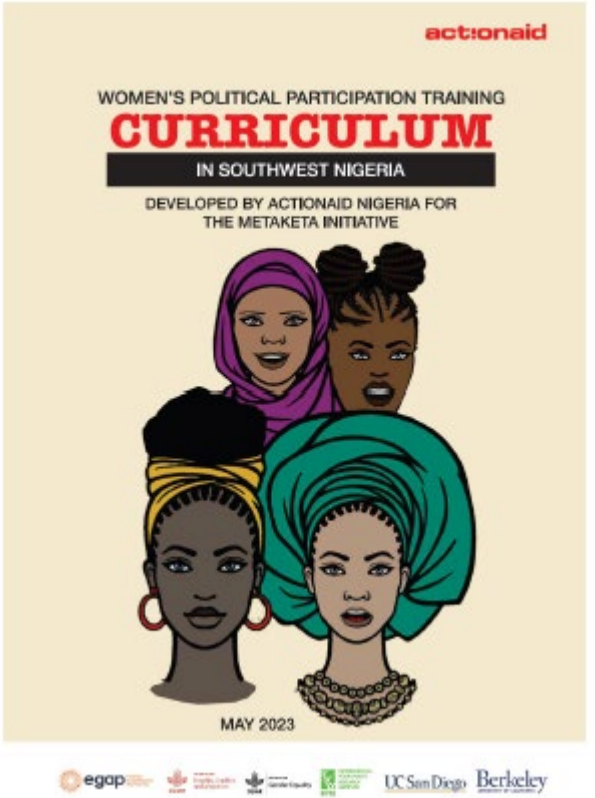
Theory of Change

Core Theoretical Concepts

- **Group Empowerment:** activities aimed at increasing groups' ability and willingness to attempt to influence political affairs (Bobo and Jr, 1990; Gay, 2001; Poertner, 2023).
- **Collective Action:** any action undertaken by an individual as a representative of the group and aimed at improving the conditions of the group as a whole (Van Zomeren, Spears and Leach, 2008, Olson 1971, Ostrom 2008).
- **Political Participation:** acts aimed at influencing the government either by affecting the choice of government personnel or by affecting the choices made by government personnel (Verba and Nie (1987, p. 22)). Includes voting campaigns, but also contacting officials, signing petitions, attending town council meetings, and donating money.
- **Responsiveness:** politicians or bureaucrats taking policy actions after receiving clear signals of citizen preferences expressed through direct contact, surveys, or support for well-articulated party platforms (Manin, Przeworski and Stokes, 1999).
- **Perceived Efficacy**: people's belief in their agentic ability to select, create, and transform the environments in which they live. People's actions are motivated and guided by their perceptions of self- and collective efficacy (Bandura, 1997).

Inspiration:
Social Identity *Model* of Collective Action (SIMCA)





egap UC San Diego Berkeley

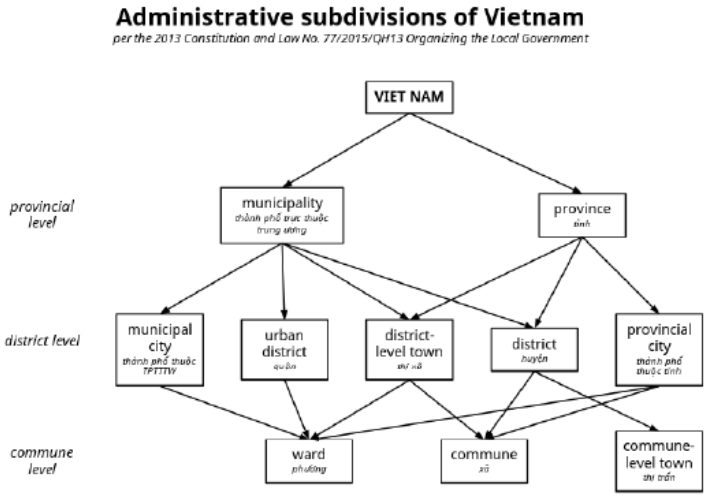
Intervention

Women's Actions Committees

- Facilitated group meetings inspired by SIMCA model
- Adapted from existing (common) training programs
- With concerns about non-responsive elites, WACs were given opportunity to practice in realistic environments that allowed engagement in role-playing.
- New groups created in Pakistan and Nigeria, existing groups in Vietnam (Women's Union), Malawi (Village Savings and Loan Associations), and Kyrgyzstan (Village Health Associations)
- In both new and existing organizations, previously unengaged women were recruited to be part of the organization to understand whether inactive women could be motivated to participate.

Placebo Intervention

- Local units not assigned to WAC intervention were assigned to placebo condition. Features of placebo included:
- Information treatment on local political process, performance, and service delivery
  - to distinguish WACs from existing information interventions
- Did not include any guidance on identity, grievance, or efficacy beliefs
  - to isolate social-psychological features of treatment
- Delivery in a *unidirectional* manner
  - to avoid inadvertently generating common identity



Burn-In Meeting

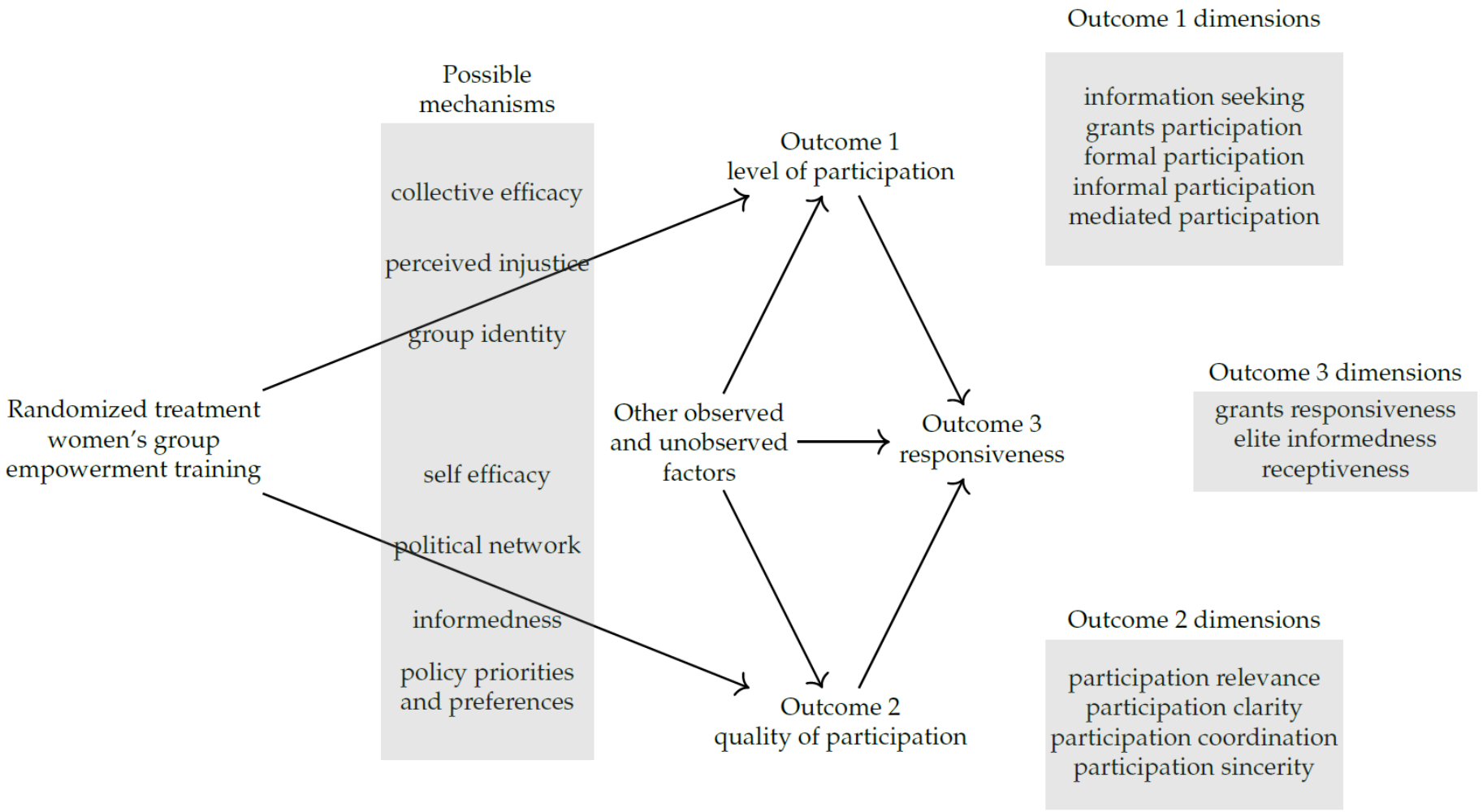
- Initial meeting prior to the roll-out of WAC and placebo interventions.
- Only women in attendance at the burn-in meetings who completed the baseline surveys were considered part of the experimental sample.
  - Excludes those who were invited to the burn-in meeting but chose not to attend or did not complete the baseline survey.
  - Excludes women who missed the burn-in but joined the treatment or placebo groups in subsequent meetings.
- Some country studies deliberately measured outcomes for a subset of all women's group participants. In those cases, a preregistered rule that was blind to treatment status was used to determine who was to be followed for measurement.

WAC Training Curriculum

Identification		Perceived Injustice		Collective Efficacy	
Sub-Component	**Example Activity**	**Sub-Component**	**Example Activity**	**Sub-Component**	**Example Activity**
1. Increase common Identity	Activity Mapping: Use gender-colored cards to put women's and men's time in a typical day into categories (farming, care, community meetings, paid	Make common grievances over gender inequality salient	Problem Hat: share problems anonymously for collective discussion and solution brainstorming.	1. Highlight benefit of coordinated action	Sharing Success Stories:
				2. Provide info. on local decision making & funding processes	Process Diagram: Identify steps in participation
				3. Identify points of influence	Community Power Map: Place stones where power exists
2. Identify common needs and goals	Criteria Ranking Matrix/Pairwise Ranking: Write prioritized issues on cards. Compare items in pairs and discuss which is the most important.			4. Train effective communication w/decision-makers	Women's Leadership Styles: Leaders' images
				5. Discuss locally feasible policy changes	Action Plan Matrix: Identify objectives.

Theoretical Expectations

Figure 1: DAG representation of the main theoretical claims



Theoretical Expectations

Number	Theoretical prediction
1a	ATE on level of participation >0
1b	ATE on quality of participation >0
1c	ATE on policy responsiveness >0
2a	ATE on perceived injustice >0
2b	ATE on group identity >0
2c	ATE on collective efficacy >0
2d	ATE on network size and composition >0
2e	ATE on policy preferences >0
2f	ATE on procedural knowledge >0
2g	ATE on self-efficacy >0
3a	ATE on participation | low restrictive gender norms >ATE on participation | high restrictive gender norms
3b	ATE on participation | high political freedoms >ATE on participation | low political freedoms

Research Design

Metaketa V

- Central goal of Metaketa research model is to evaluate interventions across differing study contexts rather than assuming that a study that works in one specific context should work in others.
- Coordinating RCTs across different political and cultural contexts helps the field to accumulate knowledge about the conditions under which interventions are most likely to work.
- 5-country study (Kyrgyzstan, Malawi, Nigeria, Pakistan, Vietnam)
- Single, bundled treatment motivated by theoretical and statistical power concerns
- Red-team/Blue-team replication from raw data
- Meta-Analysis of final results to produce an overall estimate along with individual country results
- Pre-registration of individual and meta research plans (https://egap.org/our-work/the-metaketa-initiative/round5-womens-action-committees-and-local-services/)

Kyrgyzstan
Social Norms and Women's Political Engagement

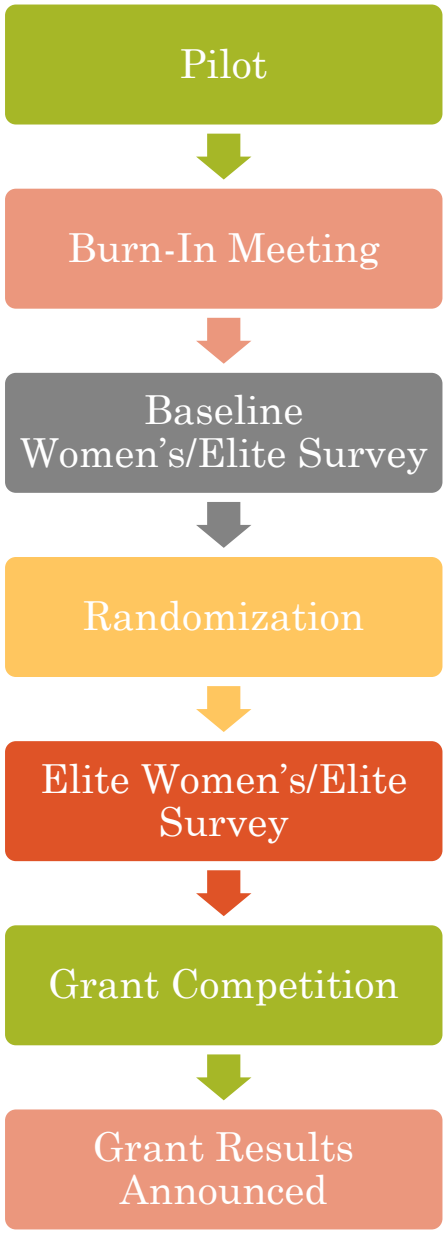
Malawi
Women's Action for Local Development in Malawi

Nigeria
Women's Action Committees and Local Services in Nigeria

Pakistan
Pathways to Women's Substantive Representation in Pakistan

Vietnam
Enhancing Female Participation in Communal Voluntary Contribution Project Choice Through…

Research Process

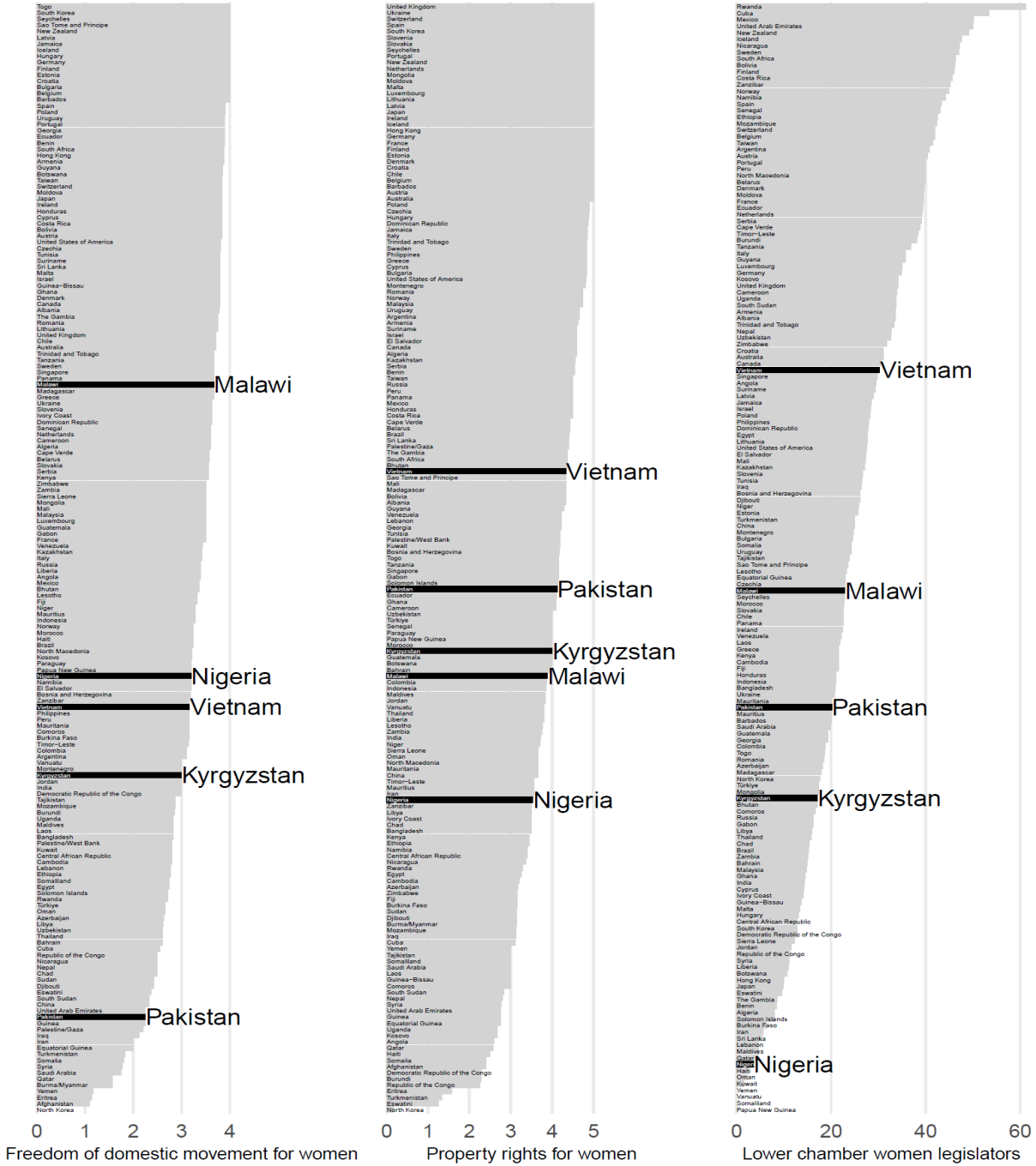


Country	Information Session	Final Data Collection
Vietnam	June 1, 2022	July 15, 2023
Pakistan	December 1, 2022	October 15, 2024
Nigeria	March 1, 2023	June 1, 2024
Malawi	February 1, 2023	March 1, 2024
Kyrgyzstan	February 12, 2023,	December 2, 2023

Sampling & Randomization

- **Countries** chosen by competitive proposal process
  - Based on the quality of their theoretical approach, research designs, and in-country partners.
  - Selected settings with highly unequal political participation between men and women, which include multiple regions, regime types, and cultural norms about women's empowerment.
- **Localities** chosen non-randomly by teams with partner organizations based on feasibility
  - In Malawi, Vietnam, and Kyrgyzstan, localities are villages, in Nigeria they are wards, and in Pakistan, localities are neighborhoods with varying levels of urban density
- **Assignment to treatment** (for the coordinated intervention) occurred at the level of the women's group and the randomization was blocked by various pre-treatment covariates.
- Kyrgyzstan, Pakistan, and Vietnam used matched quartet designs.
- Malawi and Nigeria blocked randomization by multiple pre-treatment covariates.
- **Experimental sample** includes those who attended burn-in meeting

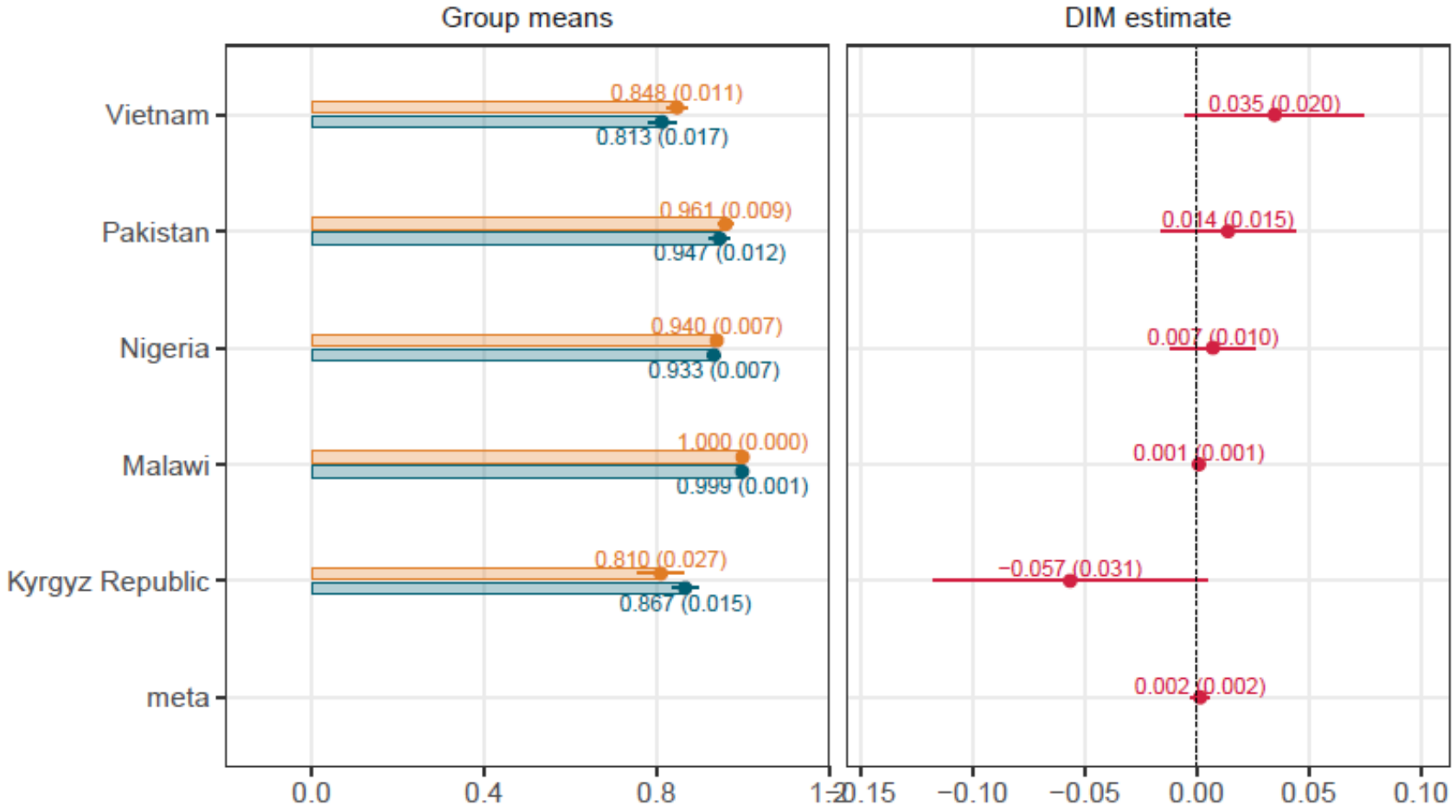
Comparison of Five Study Sites to Rest of World



Sample Sizes & Clusters by Country

Study	# Individuals (N)	N in Treatment (at Baseline)	N in Treatment (at Endline)	N in Control (at Baseline)	N in Control (at Endline)	# Clusters (K)	K in Treatment	K in Control
Kyrgyzstan	1972	1027	832	945	819	150	75	75
Malawi	2197	1082	1082	1115	1114	149	74	75
Nigeria	3879	1939	1823	1940	1810	300	150	150
Pakistan	3099	1577	1515	1522	1441	180	90	90
Vietnam	3227	1634	1385	1593	1295	179	89	90

No Evidence of Post-Treatment Non-Response Bias (Attrition)



Share of Respondents from Burn-In Answering Endline Survey

Data Sources

- Three Main Sources of Outcome Data
  1. **Women's Survey:**
     - Baseline survey of treatment and control groups (used for estimating balance), blocking, and covariate adjustment to reduce noise
     - Endline survey of major outcome measures
  2. **Elite Survey:** Survey of local politicians to study their knowledge and responsiveness.
  3. **Small Grants:** Behavioral measure
     - Administered separately by a different organization
     - Selection included local elites
     - Mirrors actual proposal and service delivery program existing in the country
     - All placebo and treatment units eligible to apply, advertised in all areas.

Measurement Strategy

Outcome Measure	Women's Survey	Endline Survey	Small Grants Program (Coded)
Participation Level	Index based on questions about whether women has attended or spoke at government meeting formal/informal meeting or asked about services		Participant sponsored or co-sponsored grant
Participation Quality	Index based on questions about whether participation was relevant, clear, coordinate among group, and sincere.		Clarity: well-written, well-documented, logical Relevance: to call for proposals Coordination: HHI of proposals
Responsiveness	Index based on whether elites knew what women wanted, acted on their behalf, and solved their problems, formally or informally.	Know more about what women or men want; know sectors that women are interested in.	Was the selected proposal sponsored or co-signed by a WAC woman?

Two Estimation Approaches

- Difference-in-Means Estimator
- Ordinary Least Squares Estimator using Lin (2013) covariate adjustment design

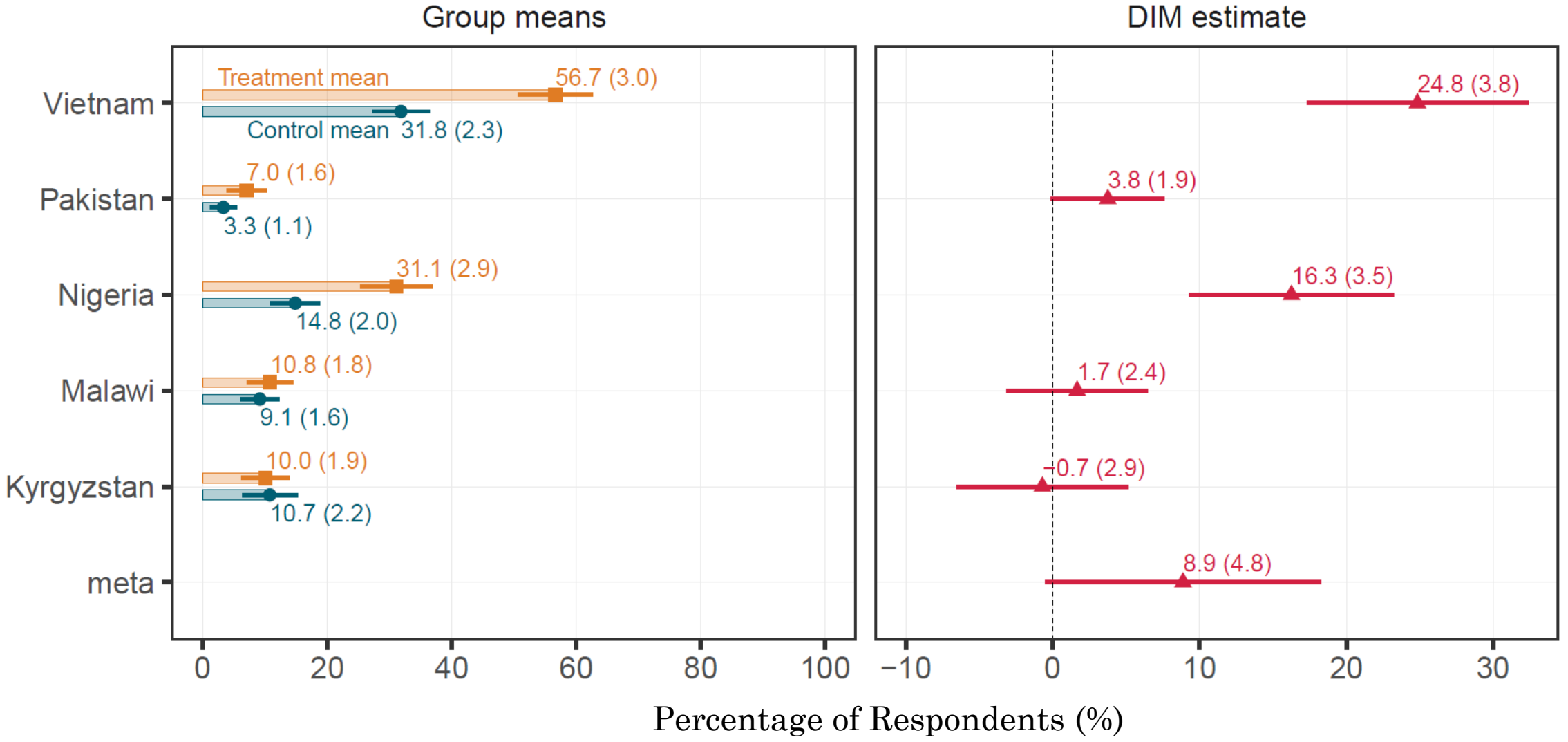
$$Y = \gamma_0 + \gamma_1 W + \gamma_2 X_1 + \gamma_3 W \cdot (X_1 - \bar{X}_1) + \gamma_4 X_2 + \gamma_5 W \cdot (X_2 - \bar{X}_2) + \eta$$

  - regression adjustments with de-meaned pre-treatment covariates interacted with treatment variable
  - use a different set of covariates in each study site because availability differs across contexts and outcomes need not be the same across sites
  - covariate estimation should achieve higher precision
- Standard errors clustered at women's group levels for analyses conducted at the individual level
- HC2 robust standard errors for analyses conducted at the women's group level.
- Meta-analysis pools together estimates of treatment effects on common DVs across studies using random-effects meta-analysis, separately for the adjusted and unadjusted estimates.
  - Meta effect is average effect across studies
  - Total variance $V^*_{Y_i}$ is the within-study variance V_{y_i} plus the between studies variance T^2

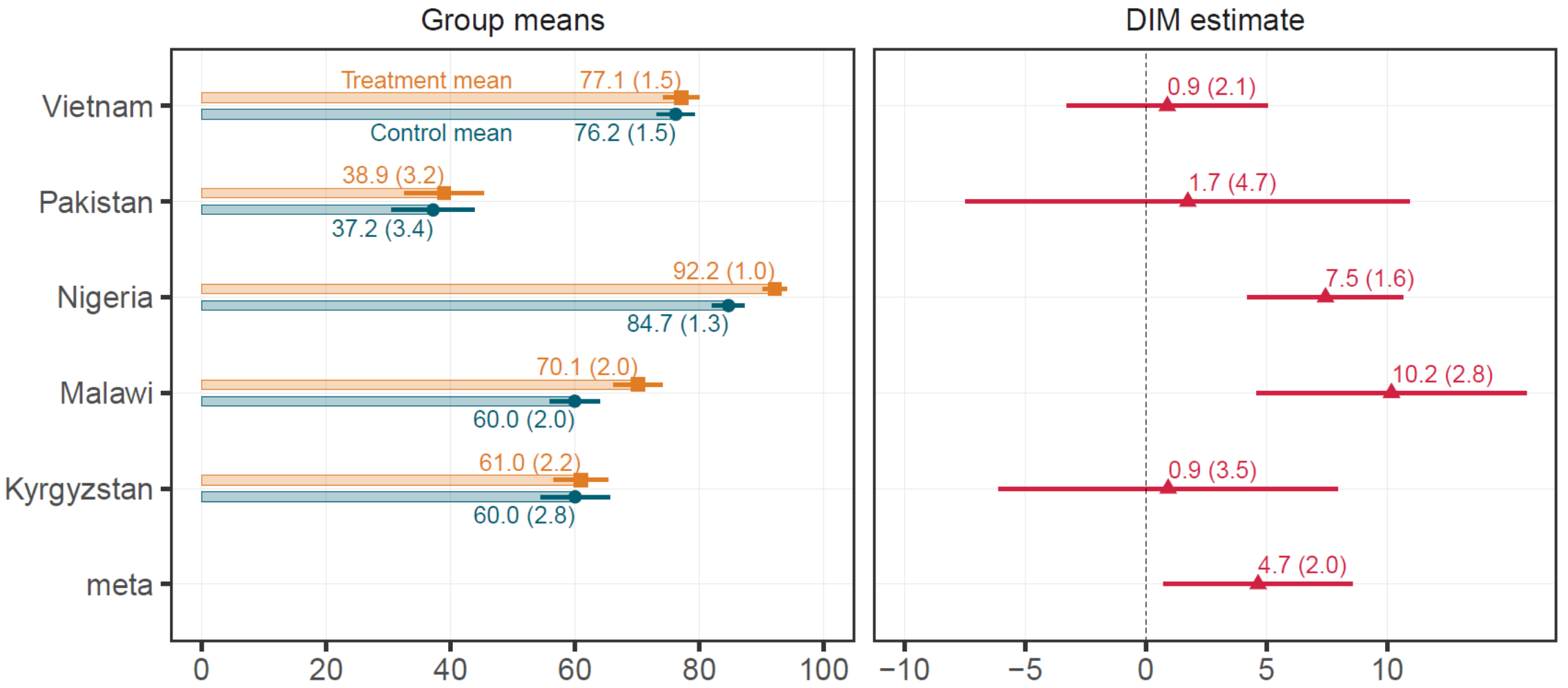
$$\boldsymbol{V^*_{Y_i} = V_{y_i} + T^2}$$

Results

Behavioral Participation Level: Co-Signing of Grants (%)

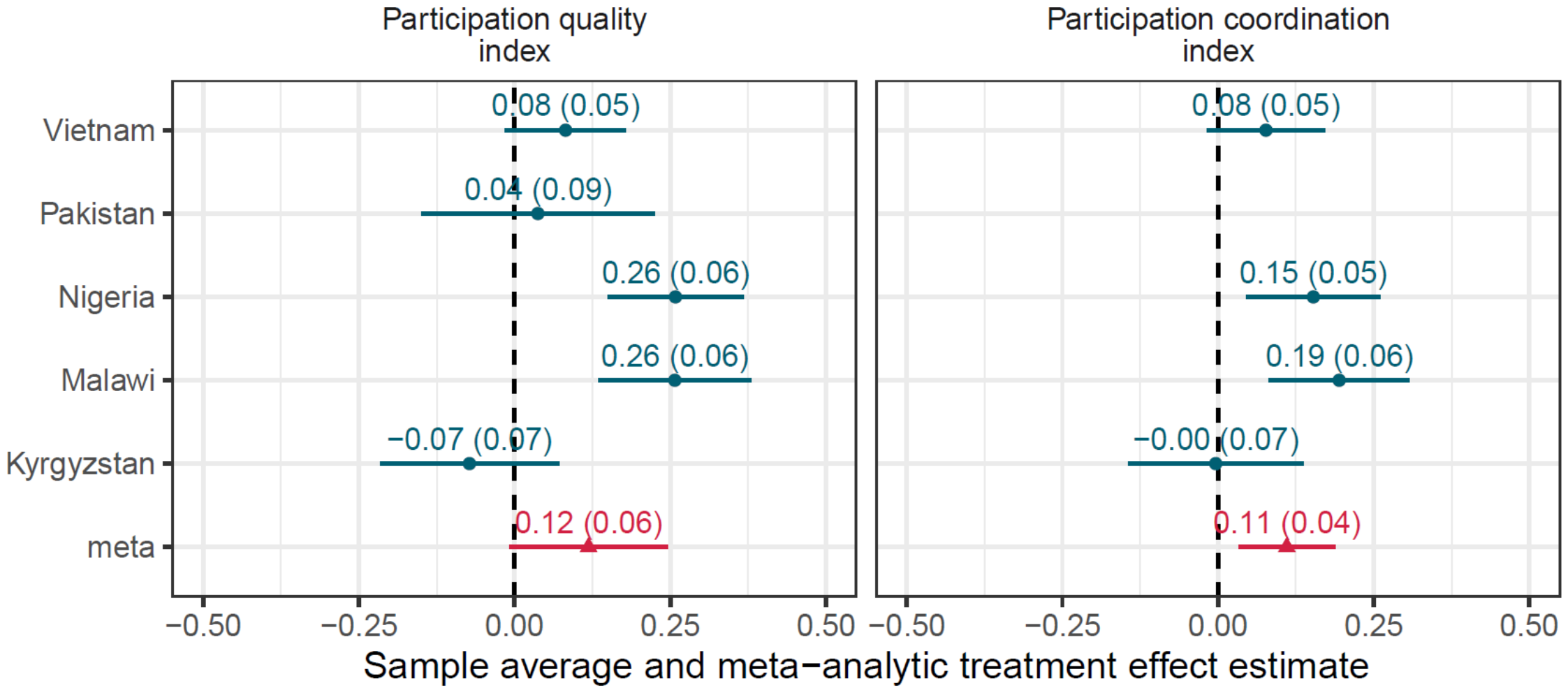


Participation Level (survey-based index)

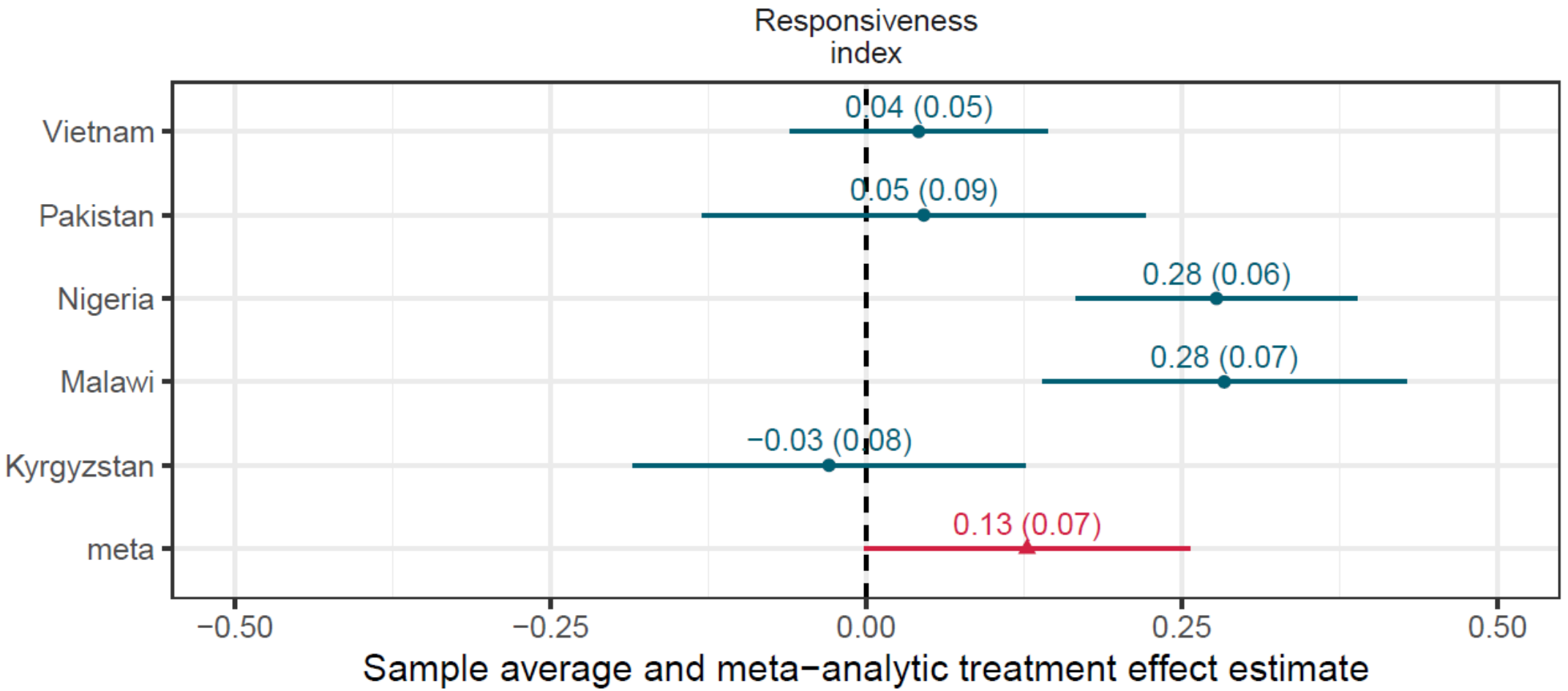


Sample average and meta-analytic treatment effect estimate

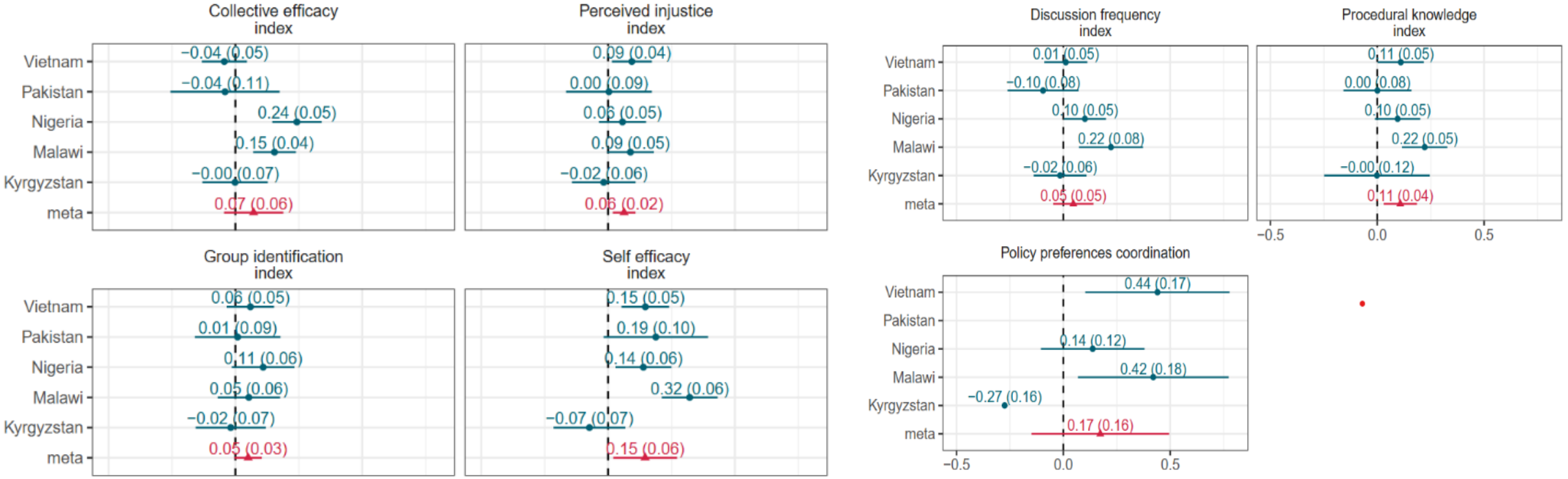
Participation Quality (survey-based index)



Responsiveness (survey-based index)



Potential Mechanisms



Sample average and meta-analytic treatment effect estimate

Conclusion and Next Steps

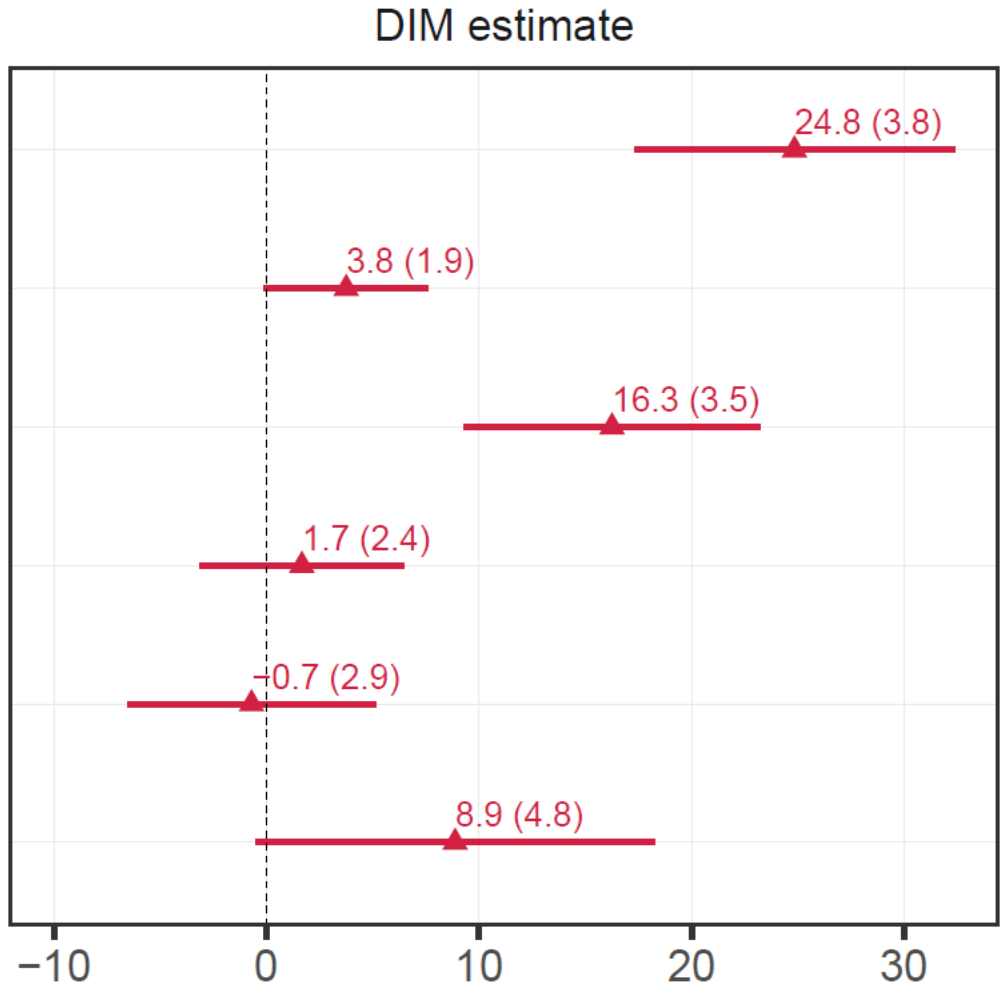
- Still coding some grant quality data (2,200 proposals in Nigeria alone)
- Initial evidence shows that Women's Action Committees *can* increase non-electoral participation and empowerment, but do not always
- Procedural knowledge and efficacy are the most likely mechanisms
- Clear heterogeneous effects observed, but not easy to explain
  - Nigeria demonstrates sizeable results on behavioral and survey measures
  - Malawi survey results are large, but no behavioral evidence
  - Vietnam large behavioral results, some survey evidence
  - Pakistan small survey results, some behavioral
  - Kyrgyzstan
- Candidate explanations for heterogeneity
  - Pre-existing levels of authoritarianism (within country test pre-registered)
  - Pre-existing levels of women's empowerment (within country test pre-registered)
  - Implementation (new v. old WACs, men in facilitation, time in field)

Additional Analyses

- Thought experiment on publication bias
- Elite survey analysis (no observed effects)
- Heterogeneous treatment effects by gender (no observed effects)
- Heterogenous treatment effects by political constraints (no observed effects)
- Forecasting analysis (less heterogeneity predicted by experts)
- Gant chart of intervention

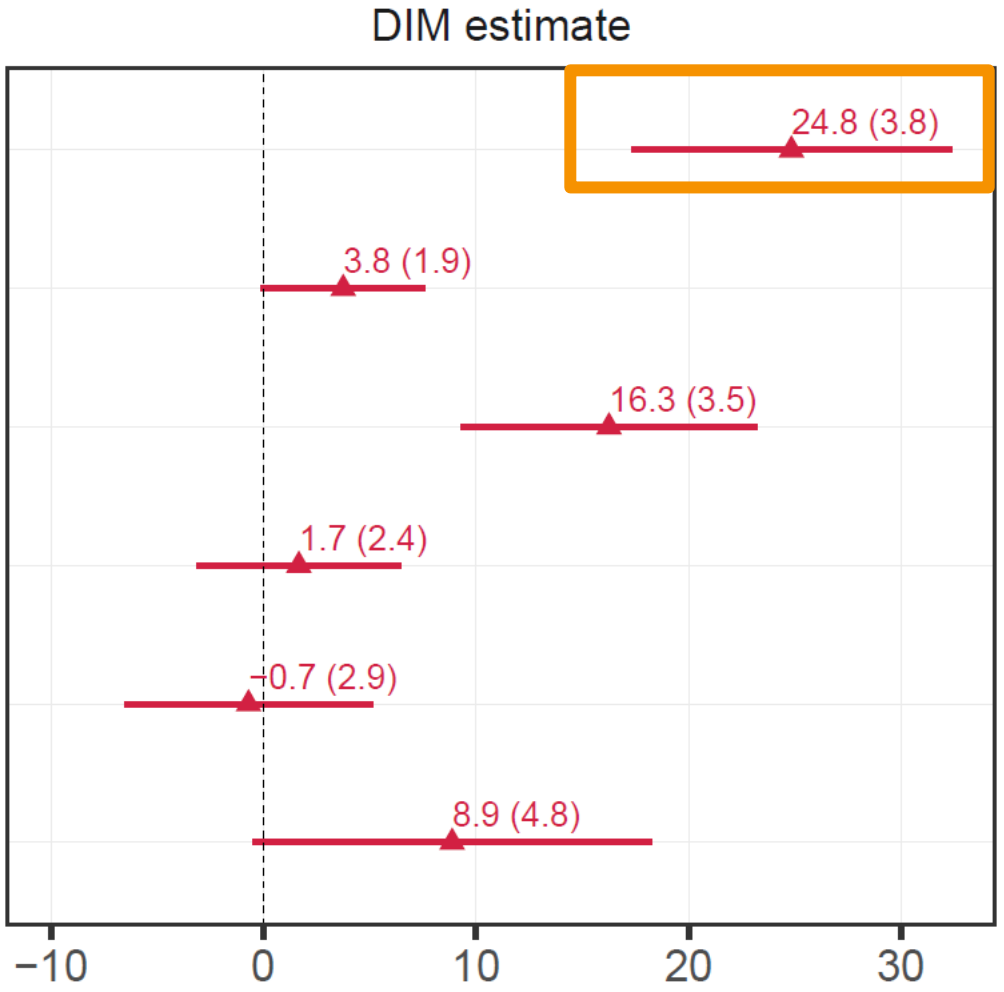
What did we learn?
What should we learn?

Thought Experiment onheterogenous results…



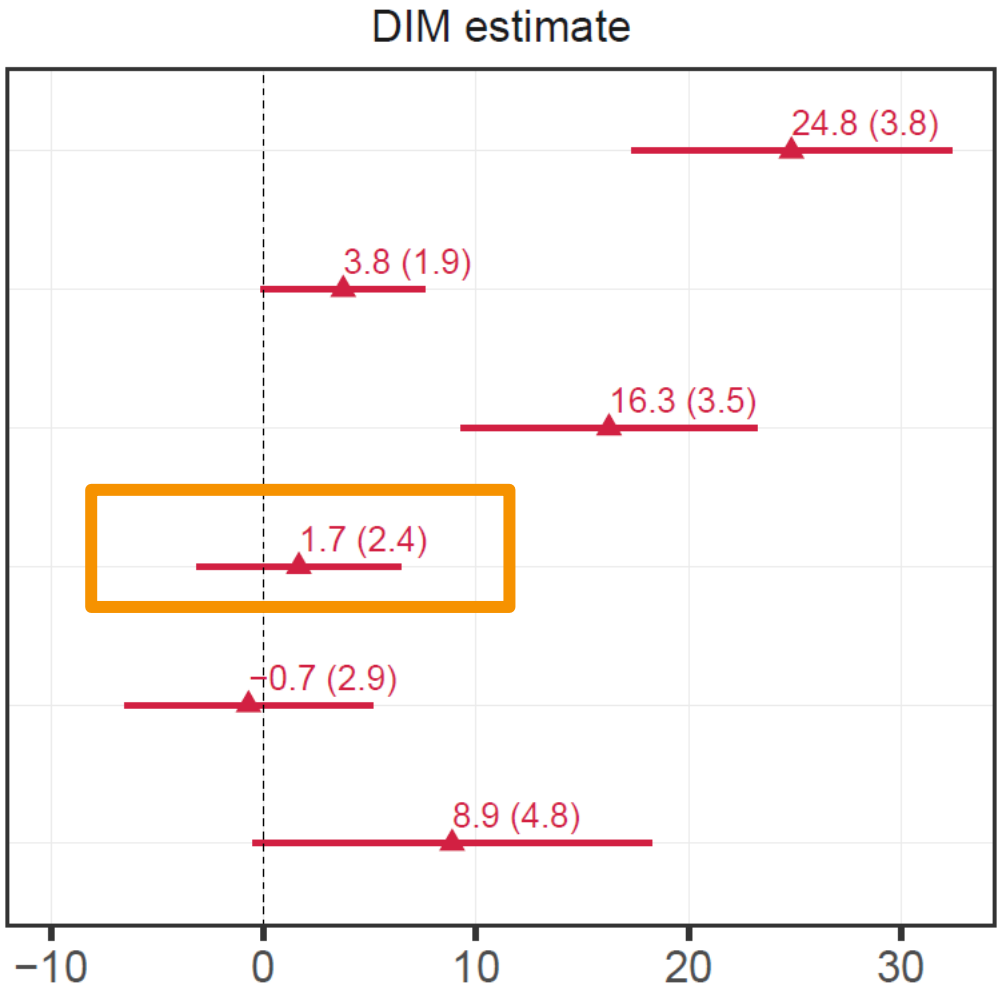
- Imagine the same results from these five field experiments produced sequentially in different orders (most significant first vs. null first)…

Thought Experiment (cont.)



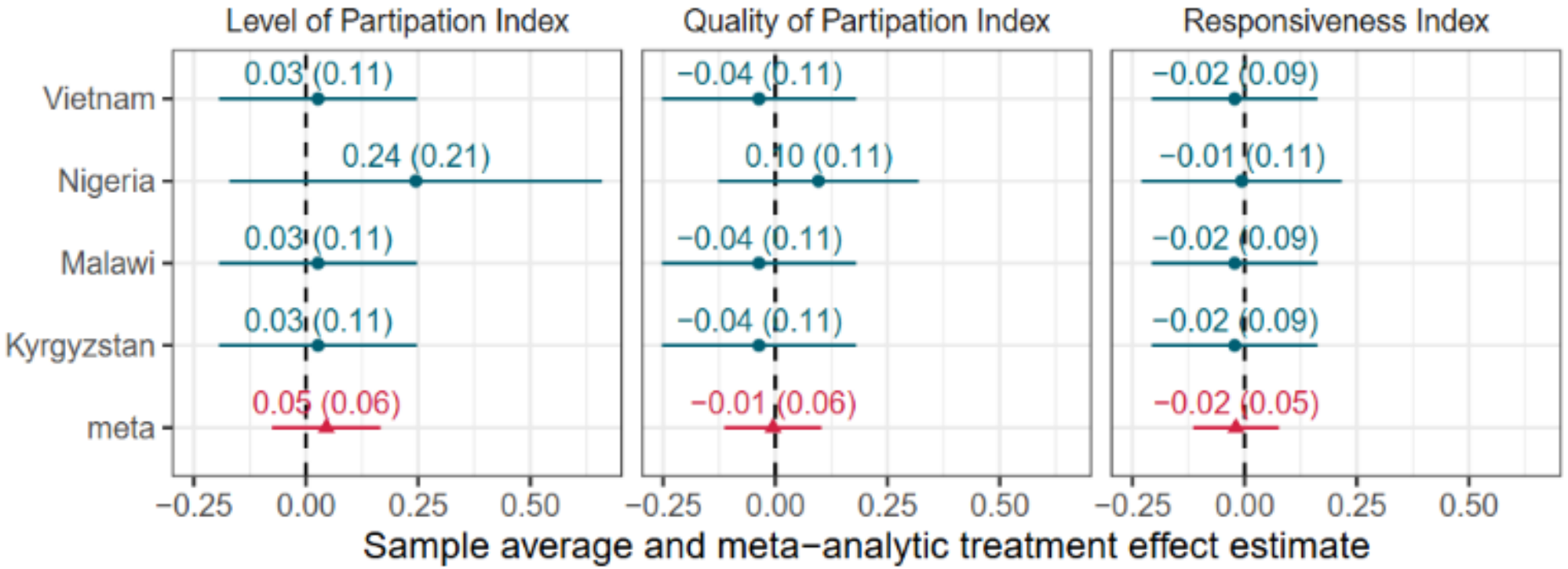
- Large positive significant effect
- High-profile publication
- Intervention “works”
- Scholar gets a great job
- Scholar defends territory, policing subsequent work in related areas that do not match the findings
- Study three gets published
- Everything else does not
- We think the intervention works and it is reproduced uncritically – major policy implications
- OR prominent scholar replicates study 1 with study 5 and works to discredit authors of study 1

Thought Experiment (cont.)

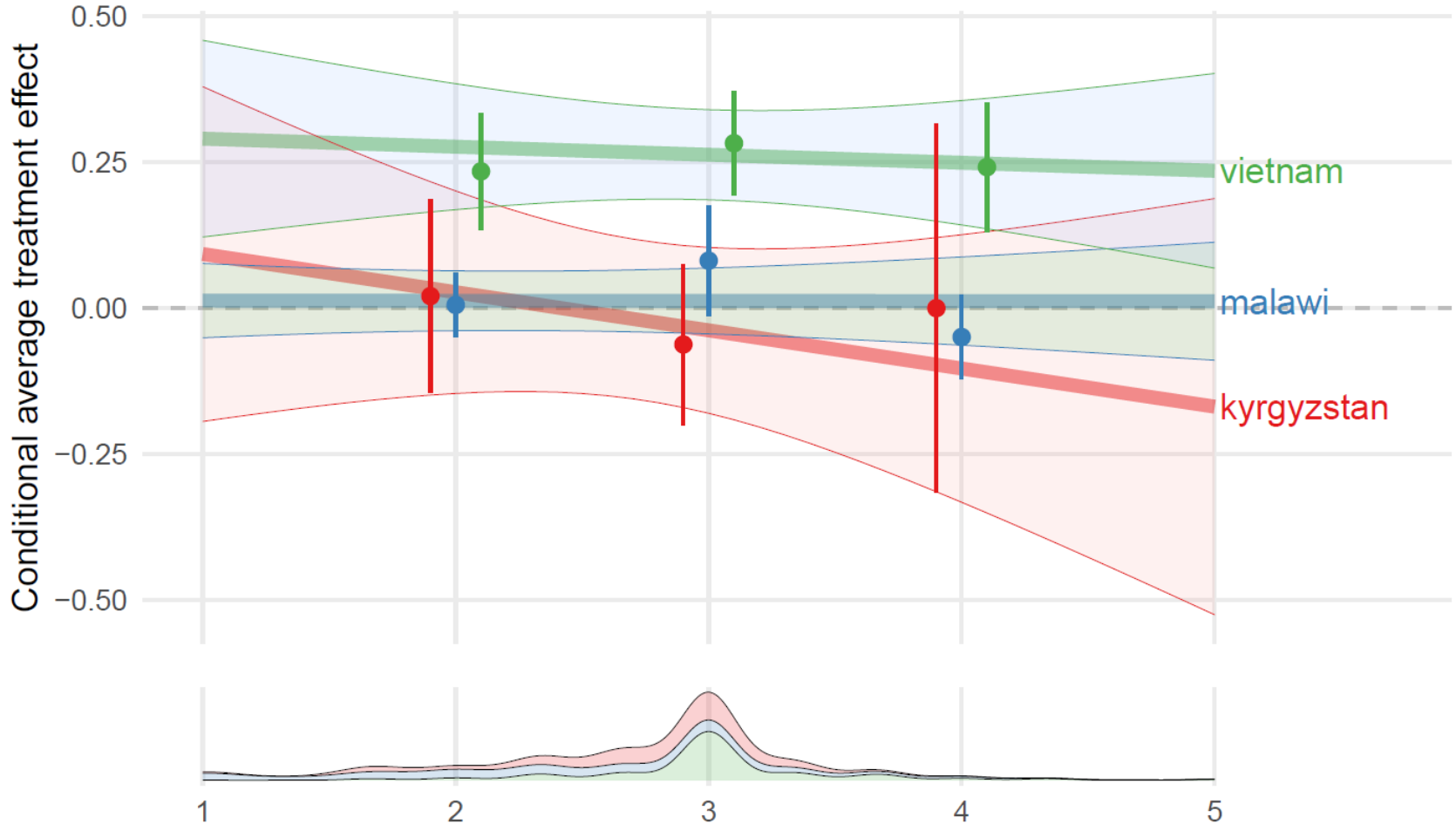


- Study 4 findings null—would it have been published?
- Would this null have affected future funding if it had been published? [maybe/probably]
- Same intervention, same "quality," different context as study 1, 2, 3
- How *should* we learn about heterogenous treatment effects?
- "True" effects might be heterogenous!

No Evidence that Elites Observed Changes in Participation or Increased Their Own Responsiveness

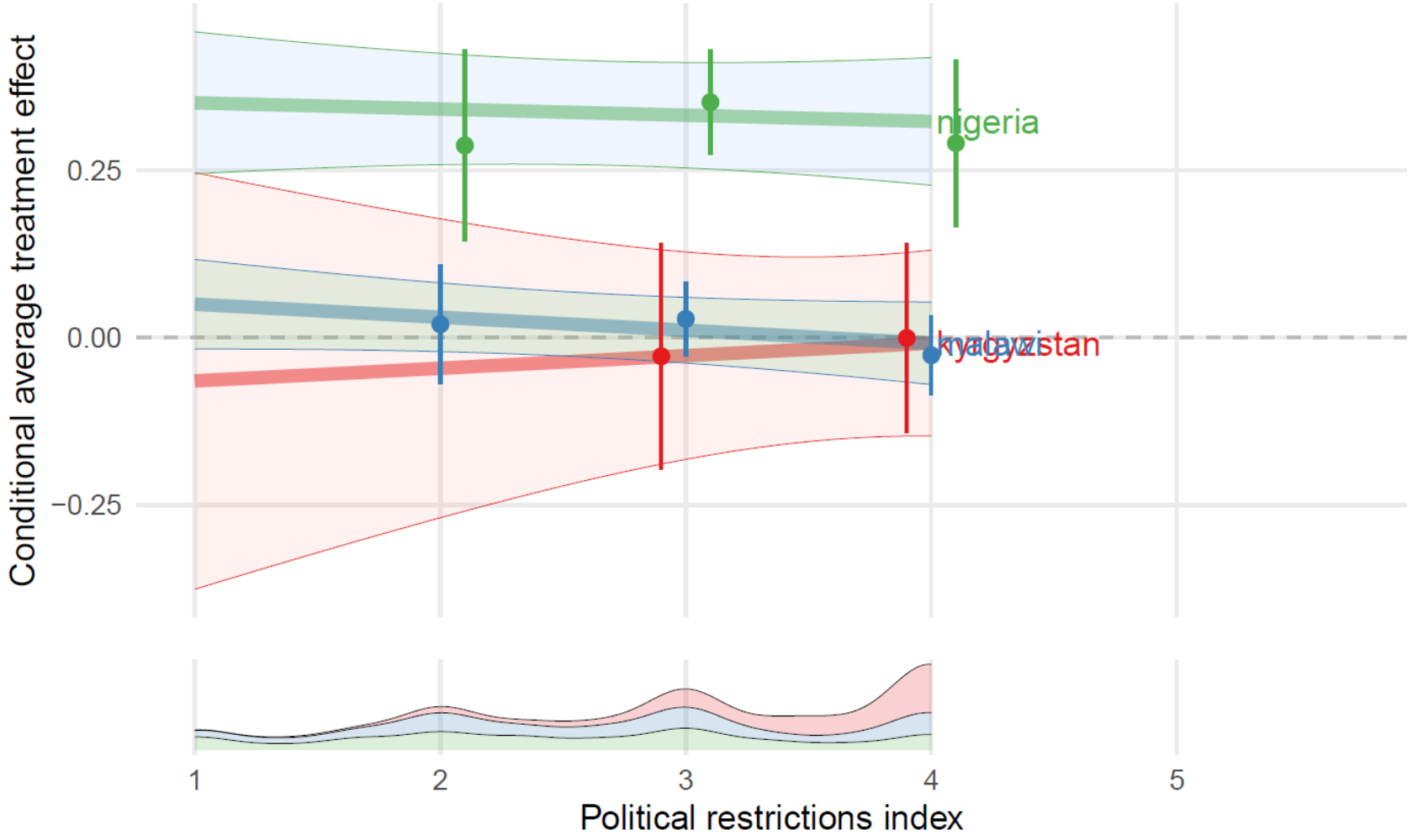


No Significant Heterogenous Effects by Gender

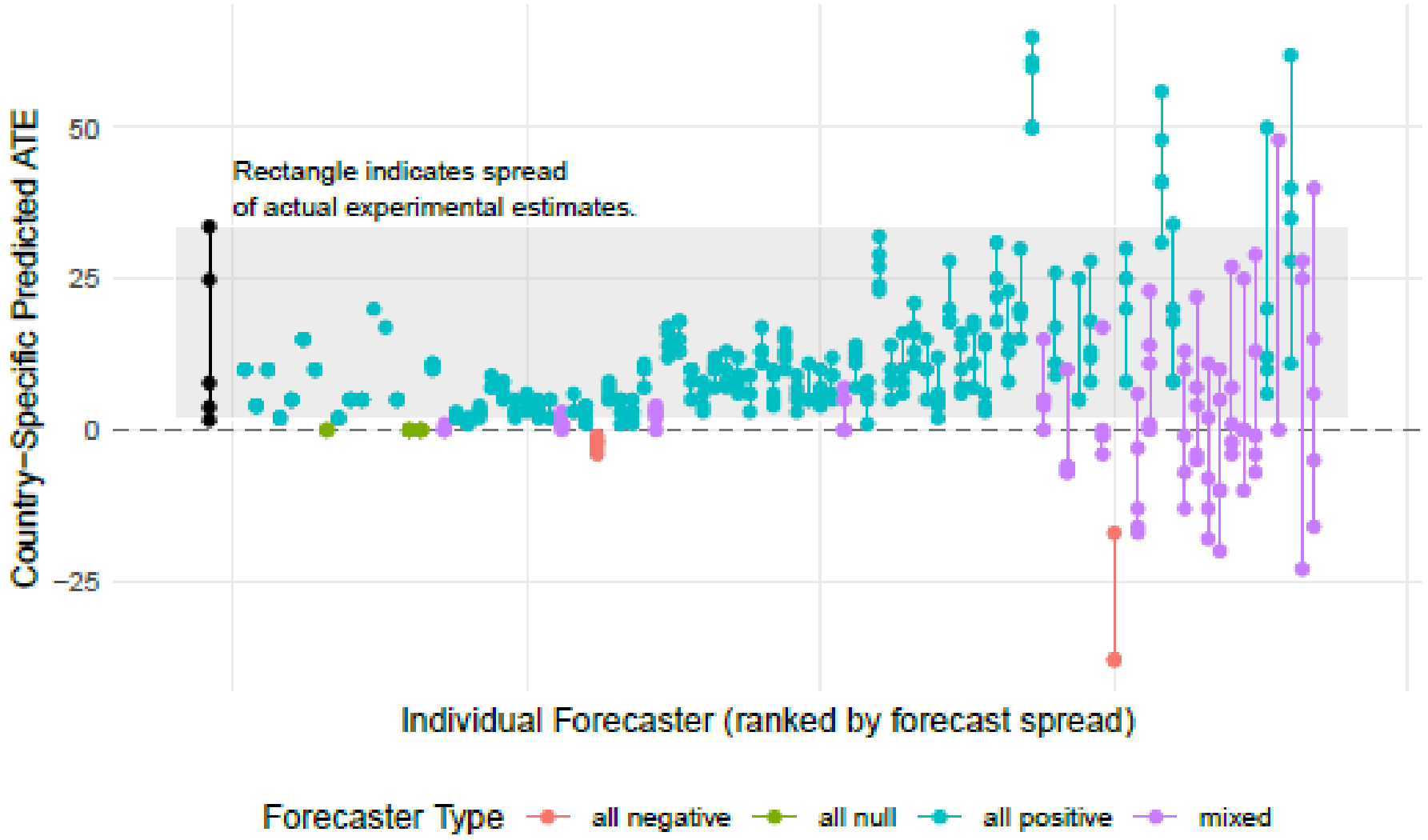


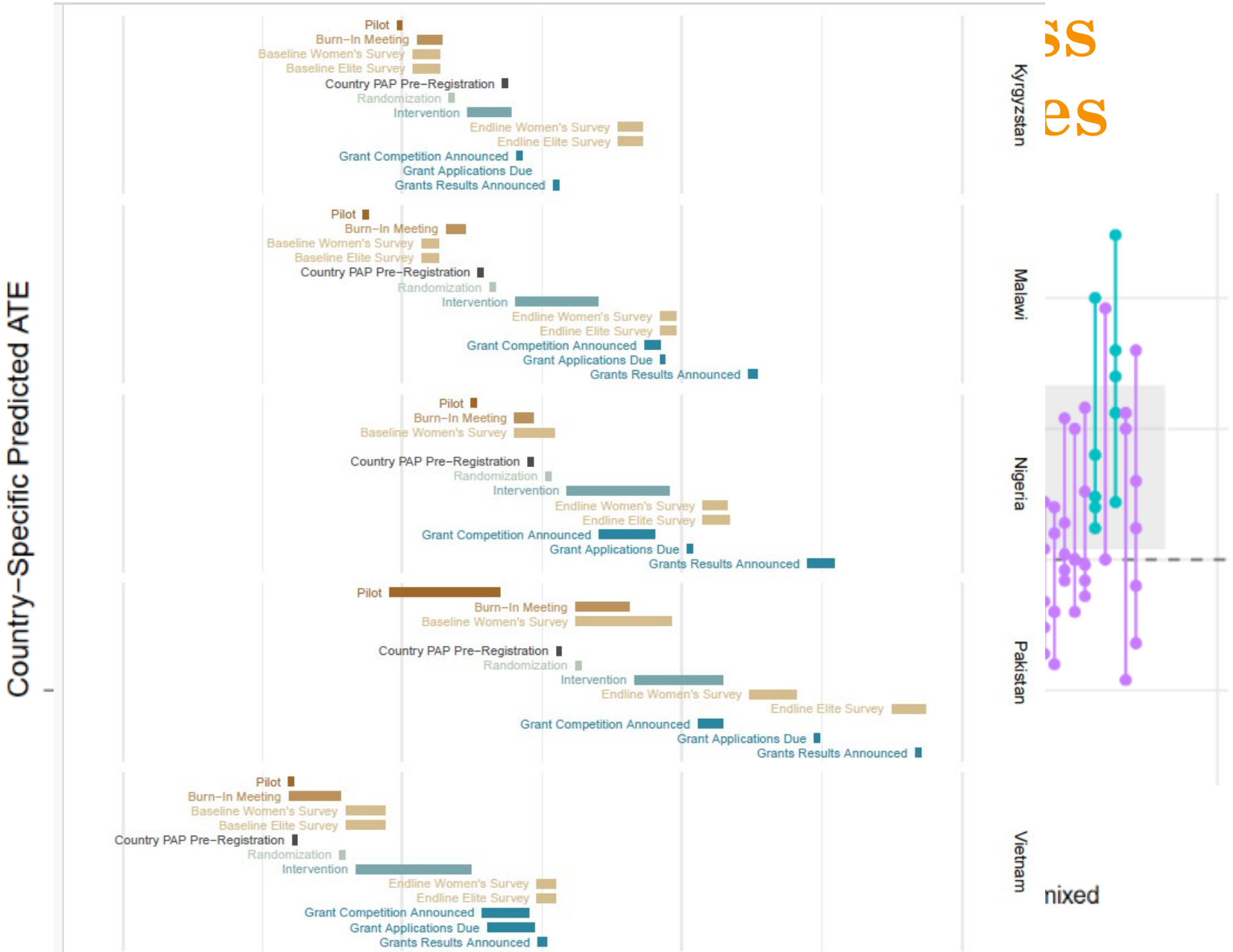
Sub-National Index of Pre-Treatment Women's Empowerment

No Significant Heterogenous Effects by Political Restrictions



Forecasting Analysis of Gender Experts




Country−Specific Predicted ATE
Kyrgyzstan
Malawi
Nigeria
Pakistan
Vietnam
Pilot
Burn−In Meeting
Baseline Women's Survey
Baseline Elite Survey
Country PAP Pre−Registration
Randomization
Intervention
Endline Women's Survey
Endline Elite Survey
Grant Competition Announced
Grant Applications Due
Grants Results Announced
2022
2023
2024
2025