

Presidents and Vaccines

Head of state inoculation as a tool against vaccine hesitancy

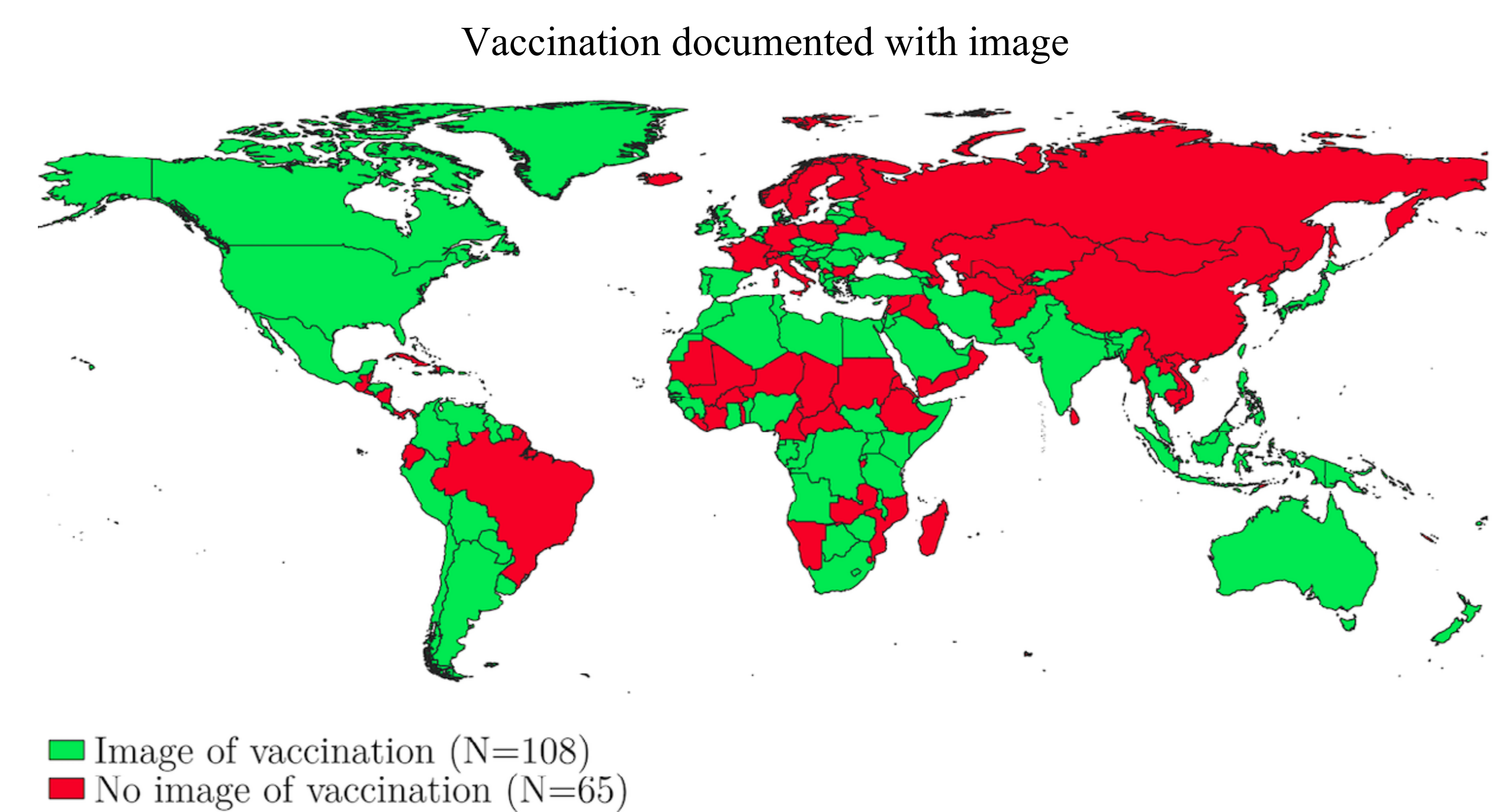


Lara Collart, Elie Lunanga, Nik Stoop, Marijke Verpoorten

Abstract

Vaccine hesitancy is one of the main threats to global health. Since the COVID-19 pandemic, vaccine confidence further declined. How can vaccine acceptance be boosted? One way may be public vaccination of role models, such as heads of state. We document whether heads of state received a COVID-19 vaccination, and whether they did so publicly. Through a survey- and policy experiment we then analyse for a sample of 600 Congolese citizens if the vaccination of President Tshisekedi affected their stated COVID-19 vaccine acceptance. We find that 62% of heads of state shared an image of their vaccination. In the survey experiment, the president's hypothetical vaccination boosts vaccine acceptance from 36% to 57% for Congolese who report trusting the president. For Congolese who do not trust the president, it decreases vaccine acceptance from 16% to 11%. When the president got vaccinated during the survey period, only 18% of respondents were aware of this. For them, vaccine acceptance increased from 16% to 36%. Most heads of state thus made their vaccination status public. Our findings indicate that this action can increase vaccine acceptance, provided that the leader is trusted, and the news reaches the citizenry. These conditions are not straightforward, particularly in low-income countries and remote areas

Figure 1: Heads of state & COVID-19 vaccination



Notes: This map indicates whether an image of the vaccination of the country's head of state was made available to the public. Own compilation.

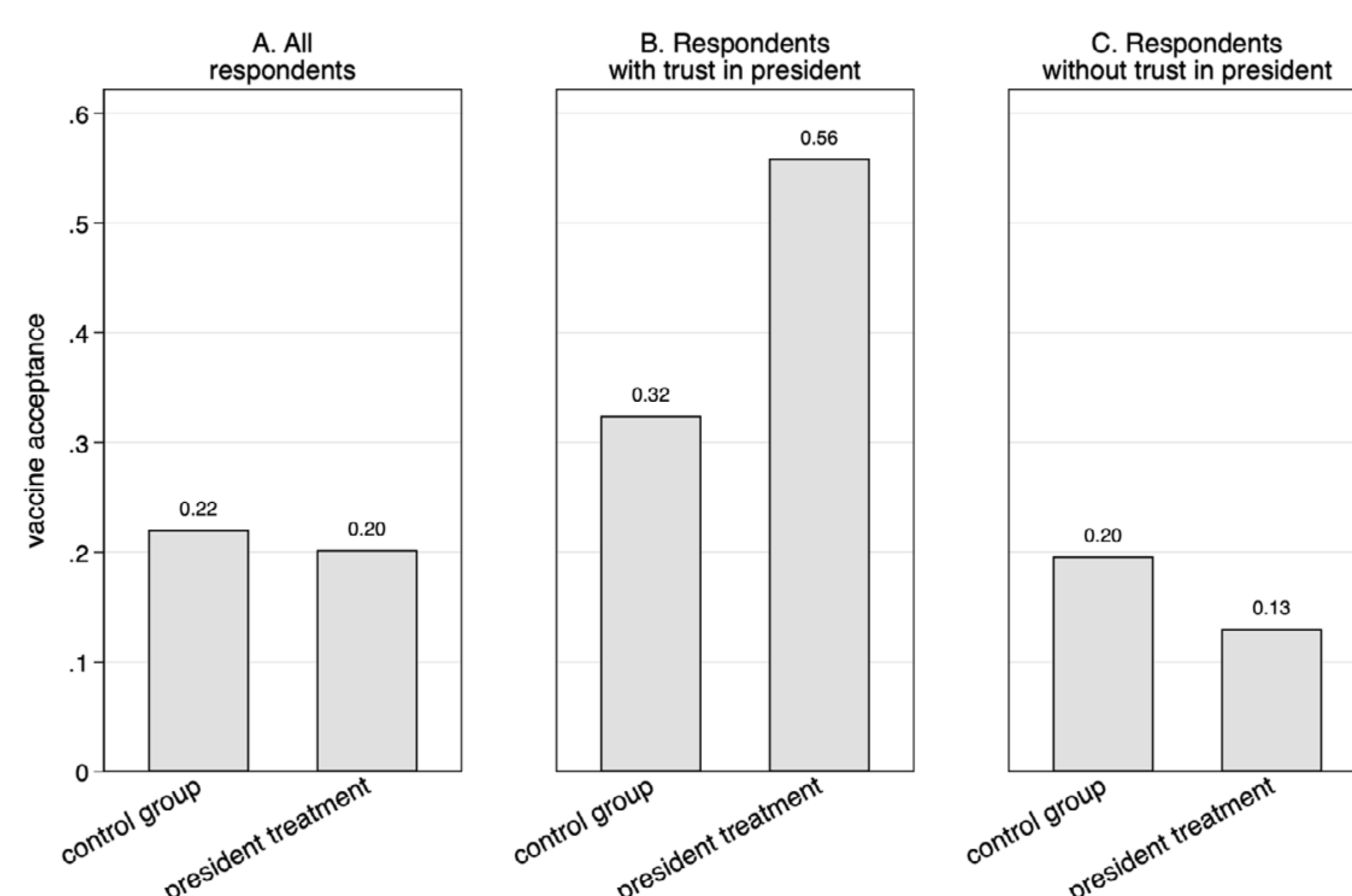
Keywords

1. Vaccine acceptance
2. Covid-19
3. DR Congo

Funding

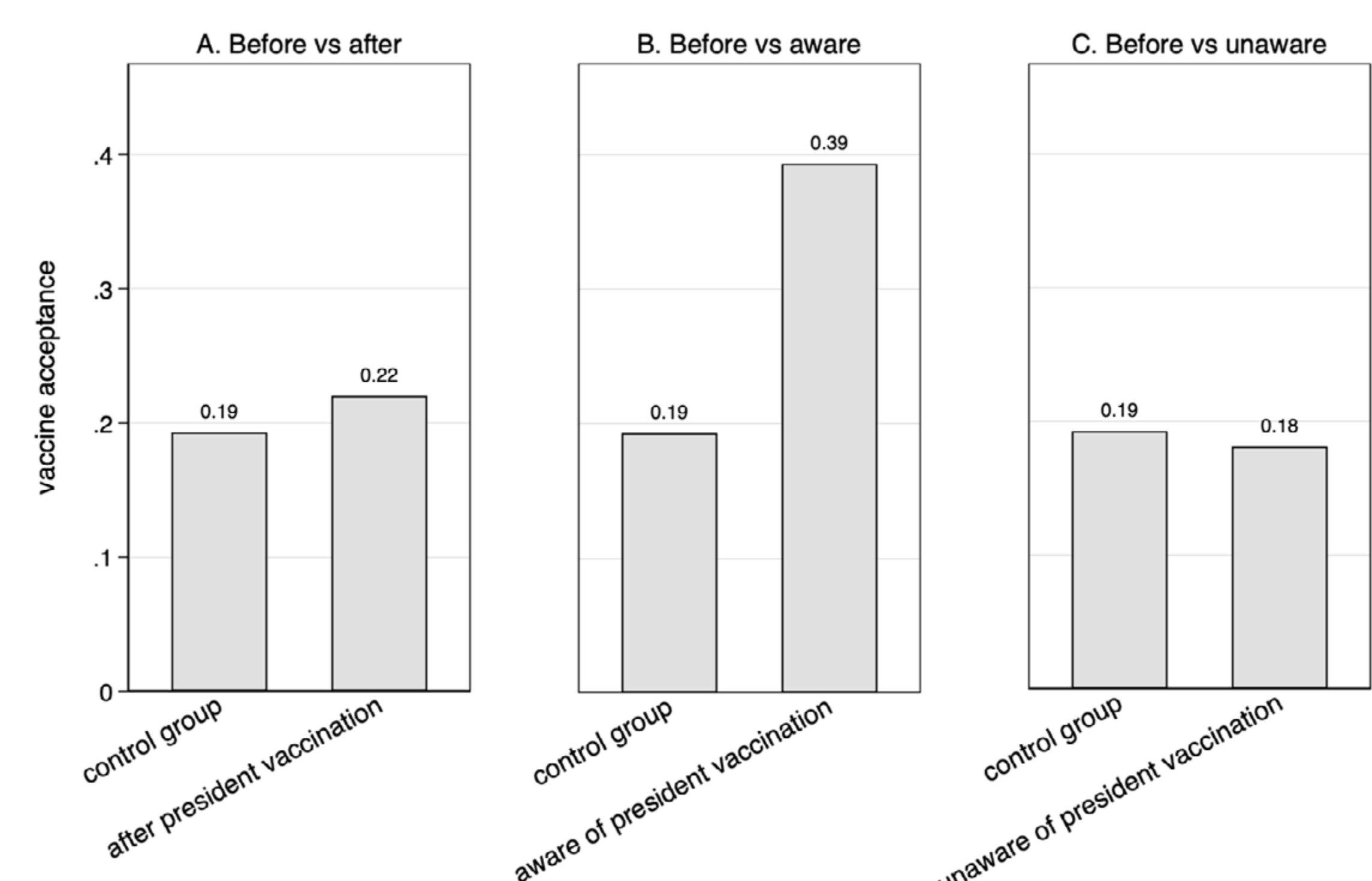
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Figure 2. Survey experiment



Notes: Panel A compares mean vaccine acceptance across respondents in the president treatment (N=203) and the control group (N=195). The difference in means is 0.02 (p-value:0.65). Panel B only considers respondents who trust the president with respect to COVID-19 (N=71). It again compares mean vaccine acceptance across respondents in the president treatment (N=37) and the control group (N=34). The difference in means is 0.23 (p-value:0.047). Panel C only considers respondents who do not trust the president with respect to COVID-19 (N=327). It again compares mean vaccine acceptance across respondents in the president treatment (N=158) and the control group (N=169). The difference in means is 0.07 (p-value:0.11). Average trust in the president is balanced across the control (0.19) and treatment (0.17) groups, with a difference in means of 0.02 (p-value:0.56). Differences in means and significance levels are obtained from t-tests.

Figure 3. Policy experiment



Notes: Panel A compares mean vaccine acceptance across respondents interviewed before (N=114) and after (N=486) the president got vaccinated. The difference in means is 0.03 (p-value:0.52). Panel B compares mean vaccine acceptance across respondents interviewed before the president got vaccinated (N=114) and those who are aware of the president's vaccination after he got vaccinated (N=89). The difference in means is 0.20 (p-value:0.002). Panel C compares mean vaccine acceptance across respondents interviewed before the president got vaccinated (N=114) and those who are unaware of the president's vaccination after he got vaccinated (N=397). The difference in means is 0.01 (p-value:0.78). Differences in means and significance levels are obtained from t-tests.