Preferred Partners? Co-financing with the African Development Bank and the Legitimation of Foreign Assistance

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June 19, 2026

Abstract

Foreign donors often co-finance development projects with local actors. But how is co-financing between a foreign donor and major regional actor perceived by the public in aid recipient countries? In this paper, we examine how co-financing arrangements between foreign donors and the African Development Bank (AfDB) affect the perception of donors and the projects they finance in South Africa and Nigeria. We find that while citizens are less optimistic about the quality of co-financed projects compared to solo-financed projects, they are more willing to trust foreign donors, attribute local knowledge to them, and defer to them in development policy disputes when they co-finance with the AfDB than when they finance projects on their own. These soft power benefits are amplified among citizens who especially attached to pan-Africanist sentiments. Our results highlight co-financing as an understudied soft power mechanism that legitimises the development authority of foreign donors in recipient countries.

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[§] The authors gratefully acknowledge funding support from the Swiss National Science Foundation and the Paul and the Marcia Wythes Center on Contemporary China at Princeton University. The content is solely the responsibility of the authors and does not necessarily represent the views of the Center.

1 Introduction

Foreign donors increasingly cooperate with regional actors. The European Union (EU) has worked in tandem with the African Development Bank (AfDB) by co-financing development projects, with the current portfolio nearing $1 billion by 2022 (AfDB, 2022). Chinese co-financing with the AfDB since 2014 nearly doubles those contributions (AfDB, 2023). Other foreign donors, like Japan and France, have similarly turned to Africa's largest international financial institution as a key co-financing partner for development projects across the region (Anyiam-Osigwe and Vreeland, 2024).

How do citizens in recipient countries perceive decisions by foreign donors to co-finance development projects with regional actors? Existing research has largely focused on individual attitudes and behaviours toward development assistance from foreign bilateral donors (Blair et al., 2022), bilateral donors compared to multilateral donors (Findley et al., 2017), and multi-actor projects funded by bilateral donors and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) (Leutert et al., 2023). With few exceptions, there has, however, been little research on citizen perceptions towards co-financing between multilateral and bilateral donors, or foreign and local or regional donors (Strange et al., 2024).

The lack of attention is surprising for several reasons. As international organisations that mobilise donor resources to pursue development projects, regional multilateral development banks (MDBs), like the AfDB but also the Inter-American Development Bank and the Asian Development Bank, do not operate in isolation. Instead, they frequently cooperate with individual donors, pooling financial resources to co-finance development projects (Clark, 2021). Such co-financing is not only meant to crowd in donor resources, but it is also meant to promote donor coordination and maximise development impact. And while management and staff sensitivity to the political alignments of leading shareholders can inform co-financing arrangements (Clark, 2025), both staffers and donor government officials are equally attentive to the perceptions of citizens as the ultimate beneficiaries of these co-financed projects.

In fact, changing norms around accountability have led major donors to establish mechanisms that allow citizens, who interact with development projects, to voice their views on these projects (Park, 2015, 2022, 2023; Steinert et al., 2025). Such mechanisms have facilitated a much closer connection between donors and private citizens. At the same time, both the success and sustainability of development projects are dependent on sufficient buy-in and trust from beneficiaries.[1] If recipients feel that donors do not have their interests at heart, they could lower support for donor-backed policies or withdraw from aid projects that rely on local participation and careful targeting. Understanding how citizens perceive decisions to co-finance with certain development partners moreover allows both multilateral and bilateral donors to identify partners that help to

[1] See Heinzel and Liese (2021).

maximise their impact (see, for example, Felzer, 2019).

For individual foreign donors, in particular, gaining trust within communities and receiving approval from the public in recipient countries are central to the effectiveness of overseas development programs. Research has shown, for example, that the choice of aid delivery, is driven by such concerns over aid effectiveness (see Dietrich, 2013). This can also apply to decisions to solo-finance or co-finance with regional MDBs. Getting buy-in from citizens, potentially through co-financing, would also generate soft power influence for foreign donors, which can be subsequently leveraged either in bilateral dealings with the recipient government or in competition with geopolitical rivals in the region (Blair et al., 2022; Clark et al., 2025b).

While previous survey evidence suggests that government elites overwhelmingly view the AfDB as a "preferred partner" compared to other bilateral and multilateral donors, less is known about whether co-financing with such a regional actor enhances or hinders these public-facing goals of impact and influence (see Woods and Martin, 2012, 1). Yet, this is important for our understanding of the consequences of international cooperation and relevant for development policymaking.

In this paper, we use survey experiments fielded in South Africa and Nigeria to examine how co-financing involving foreign donors and the AfDB affects public perceptions of donors and the projects they fund. We focus on the AfDB as a regional actor, leveraging its "local" character as a pan-African institution. We theorise that, beyond pooling resources or improving project implementation, international cooperation in the form of foreign-regional co-financing has a legitimating function that improves public perceptions of donors.

Citizens should, on average, welcome foreign donors' partnership with an African development finance institution. As a regional organisation, the AfDB's cooperation with foreign donors should be perceived as enhancing African agency. Foreign donors signal that they are not acting unilaterally or bypassing African institutions. We theorise that this improves citizens' willingness to trust foreign donors, attribute local knowledge to them, and defer to them over development policy disputes over a project.

At the same time, citizens may also view the co-financed project itself more favourably (see Lu et al., 2024). When a project is co-financed, it means that multiple donors are willing to share both the final burden of the project as well as overall project risk. Foreign donors can leverage the local expertise of regional actors and these donors are more likely to pool resources for projects that have been internally assessed as worthwhile—although it remains possible that multiple financiers on a single development project can hinder project quality by increasing implementation delays (Winters, 2019; Clark, 2025).

We also theorise that public perceptions of foreign donors' decisions to co-finance with regional IOs will be moderated by citizens' attachments to their regional self-expressions. Several studies in the European context have shown that citizen's level of attachment to their European identity affects their views on EU policy and the EU itself (Luedtke, 2005; Schoen, 2008). Given our geographic focus, we consider respondents' attachments to pan-Africanism, the foundational ideology of a collective African identity that unifies African people and the diaspora, galvanising them to push for Africa's development (Mazrui, 1995; Lake, 1995; Chipato, 2023). The pan-African identity finds institutional expression in regional IOs, like the African Union (AU) and the AfDB (Adogamhe, 2008; Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2013; Tieku, 2013) and we expect citizens with stronger attachments to pan-Africanism to look more favourably on the decision by foreign donors to co-finance with the AfDB.

Our results highlight the soft power benefits of co-financing and the moderating influence of citizens' sentiments towards pan-Africanism. Compared to solo-financed projects, we find that citizens in recipient countries are more likely to have a favourable view of donors when projects are co-financed. Specifically, they are more likely to not only trust the donor to make the right decision in the context of development assistance and identify the donor as understanding their country's problems, but they are also more likely to prefer that donors take the lead in cases where there are disagreements with the local government over the direction of the country's development policy.

While co-financing with regional actors increases foreign donor favourability among recipient publics, these legitimacy gains do not extend uniformly to perceptions of the project itself. Respondents express greater trust in donors that co-finance with the AfDB, more confidence in their diagnostic ability regarding their country's problems, and are more willing to defer to them on development policy, but they are not more enthusiastic about the project and report slightly lower confidence in project quality compared to solo-financed projects.

This suggests that citizens distinguish between the legitimacy of donor authority and expectations about implementation performance, a finding that directly accords with Dellmuth and Tallberg (2015) and Dellmuth et al. (2019). Co-financing may make foreign donors appear more appropriate and locally embedded, without necessarily convincing citizens that multi-actor projects will be easier to deliver or of higher quality. This interpretation is also consistent with work suggesting that co-financed projects may face coordination costs and weaker performance in MDB project ratings data (Winters, 2019), although other studies find more positive associations between co-financing and project outcomes (Lu et al., 2024).

Our results regarding the influence of pan-Africanism suggest that the relationship between co-financing and perceptions of trust in donors and project quality are moderated by citizens' attachment to pan-African sentiments. While citizens with higher level of pan-African sentiments view donors more favourably even in the context of solo-financed projects, they are more likely to express trust in donors to make the right decisions and have more confidence that the project would be of good quality under co-financing arrangements.

Our findings contribute to several important strands of international relations scholarship. First, we advance the growing literature on co-financing as a form of international cooperation in the development finance regime (Clark, 2021, 2025). We specifically present co-financing as an understudied soft power tool that legitimates the development authority of foreign donors in recipient countries. At the same time, our paper complements other work that has examined the impact of co-financing using project-level characteristics (see Winters, 2019; Lu et al., 2024). We follow Strange et al. (2024) by considering an alternative measure: the perceptions of citizens as the ultimate beneficiaries of co-financed development projects.

Second, we add to the growing literature on representation in multilateral development finance, including donor efforts to reduce structural inequality through representation (Cho et al., 2025). Rather than examining the effect of diverse representation at the individual or leader-level (Weaver et al., 2022; Clark et al., 2025a), we turn to representation among development partners to demonstrate the effect of partnering with regional IOs that have not always been central in the aid and development finance context.

Finally, our paper contributes to the literature on public opinion on foreign aid and development finance. We not only emphasise the distinction between foreign and regional aid, but also highlight the moderating influence of pan-African identities on African citizens' perceptions of donors. Perhaps more than any other form of international cooperation, pan-Africanism is particularly relevant for international *development* cooperation given the colonial legacies of foreign aid (Ramachandran, 2025). African agency or ownership is more pertinent in this area, with citizens often relying less on transactional or cost-benefit analysis and more on normative considerations regarding their identities, degree of trust in foreign and regional donors, and the future of the continent.

Beyond these scholarly contributions, our study also has important implications for international development cooperation more generally. Viewed alongside the AfDB's own client assessment that suggested government elites view the African Bank most favourably as a "preferred partner" (Woods and Martin, 2012), our results show that the mass public similarly holds a favourable view of the African Bank—an important consideration for prospective development partners seeking soft power and influence across the continent.

The rest of the paper is structured as follows. In the next section, we discuss our theoretical expectations. In Sections 3 and 4, we present our research design and findings. Section 5 concludes with a discussion of the implications of our findings.

2 Motivations behind co-financing

Why would foreign donors co-finance with regional development banks? Development funders hardly operate in isolation. In any given recipient country, they are engaged in similar projects. Consider the energy sector in Nigeria. In addition to the AfDB, Nigeria's power value chain is supported with funds from the World Bank, the EU, and numerous bilateral donors, including Germany, the United Kingdom, France, and Japan. The large number of development partners necessitates an equally high level of coordination, often to ensure complementarity rather than fragmentation. Instead of risking such fragmentation and because they are often interested in similar projects, foreign donors choose to co-finance, pooling resources to pursue the same projects "in tandem" (Clark, 2025, 32).

Apart from improving donor coordination, co-financing is pursued for a host of other reasons. Less well-resourced donors can crowd in or leverage additional donor resources through co-financing (Cui et al., 2020) while less experienced donors learn best practices, which produce better project performance outcomes. As Chin and Gallagher (2019, 249, 264) highlight, this has been especially true for China and China-led MDBs that co-financed extensively with the World Bank during the early years following their creation. Co-financing among MDBs as well as non-governmental organisations may not only allow development partners improve the transparency and governance of development projects but it can also result in better alignment between the project and the interests of recipient countries (Shin et al., 2017).

Co-financing with local or regional partners also has distinct advantages for a foreign donor. It can increase their visibility in countries of operation and can also help to engender a greater sense of ownership over development projects among citizens, reducing concerns over foreign intervention and fostering more favourable views about the donor across the general public.[2] Drawing on a conjoint experiment in India, McLean et al. (2024) find that public support for aid-funded environmental projects improves when the local government provides some co-financing, compared to projects without any government contribution. Because regional or local development partners are also more likely to have extensive local presence or knowledge, foreign donors can leverage their expertise and bridge knowledge gaps to ensure that projects are directly addressing the development need of the recipient public (Lu et al., 2024, 4).

But co-financing with regional actors may not only be pursued to improve project effectiveness. It can also provide an opportunity for foreign donors to temper the neo-colonial critiques that often accompany the delivery of development assistance. Foreign aid is sometimes viewed as a tool for major powers, especially former colonial powers, to extend their influence in the post-colonial era (Chiba and Heinrich, 2019; Onyekachi, 2020; Mlambo et al., 2025). Even China, a relative newcomer to African development, has faced criticisms for perpetuating a new form of

[2] See Van Wieringen (2024, 15) on efforts to ensure the EU's Global Gateway reaches its optimal impact.

neo-imperialism and neo-colonialism through its foreign assistance rather than a more positive form of South–South cooperation (Lumumba-Kasongo, 2011; Antwi-Boateng, 2017). Jointly financing projects with a regional institution can help to "mute" criticism about aid dependency and neo-colonial sentiments, offering a "buffer" between the foreign donor and the recipient country that can generate more positive perceptions about the donor and its development-centred interventions within the recipient country (see Mingst, 1987, 290).

These public perceptions matter for multiple reasons. First, the public can determine the success of development projects. Where positive, they can facilitate the smooth delivery and implementation of projects, promoting goodwill among citizens towards the donor and generating soft power influence within the country for that donor (Kim et al., 2025). When perceptions of donors or projects are less favourable, however, citizens can resist development projects, engaging in anti-project demonstrations (Che, 2021) or opposing resettlement to provide the land needed for large-scale infrastructure projects (Clark et al., 2025c). Especially for development funders, like the EU, which have increasingly commercialised their investments, such negative perceptions may prove costly for business and economic interests.

Second, public perceptions also affect the donor's reputation. For example, one of the major concerns of the EU regarding its Global Gateway Initiative, an overseas infrastructure development programme, was the possibility that projects would be "seen as extractivist and neocolonial, thus harming the EU's reputation" (Van Wieringen, 2024, 14). Such reputational effects on a donor's international status and prestige are especially important for emerging and middle powers and their aspirations towards leadership over global governance issues—including development (see Berlinschi, 2010; Aras et al., 2024).

Finally, beyond development projects more generally, citizens perceptions towards co-financed projects in particular, can help donors in long-term development planning. Having too many bilateral partners, who each have their procedures and reporting requirements, can introduce inefficiencies (Clark, 2025). The ideal co-financing partner should amplify the positive consequences of favourable perceptions among aid recipients. Public perceptions of co-financing projects can thus send important signals about whether a donor's choice of a co-financing partner enhances or hinders their development agenda in the recipient country. By choosing to co-finance with African institutions, donors show that they are working with African institutions instead of bypassing them. They project respect for local or African expertise, institutions, and a joint vetting of foreign aid projects. We thus expect citizens to trust donors more under such arrangements.

> H1(a): Citizens have a higher level of trust in donors under co-financing arrangements with regional institutions compared to donors under solo-financing arrangements.

When a foreign donor-sponsored project receives co-financing from an African-led international development organisation, citizens should also perceive the co-financiers as having a better understanding of the problems of the country. As a co-financier, regional institutions bring in local knowledge, local expertise, and local networks, which foreign donors can leverage. Indeed, scholars have linked the AfDB to this idea of "localised multilateralism" (Moussavi, 2024). With its location in Abidjan, Côte d'Ivoire and its predominantly African staff, the AfDB has enjoyed greater legitimacy in the eyes of African governments, in part, because it has maintained its "African character" and is perceived to serve African interests (Mingst, 1990, 57; Kraemer-Mbula, 2021).

This "localised multilateralism" has led scholars to suggest that the AfDB is more aligned with the region's "varied cultural, political, and economic landscapes" and is better placed to address development challenges compared to other foreign donors (Moussavi, 2024). In a client survey for the AfDB, Woods and Martin (2012, 41) confirmed these sentiments even among government officials, who believe that the AfDB better understands their countries' needs and priorities, "is closer to Africa," and "understands the African way and African solutions."

While government elites and citizens are distinct political actors, the latter should similarly perceive the AfDB to be more knowledgeable about their countries' needs and more responsive to their interests because of its "African character." In turn, their perceptions about the AfDB's co-financing partners should be based on the greater diagnostic ability—or problem-solving capacity—of a donor that has a regional partner and thus has a better understanding of the problems the country faces.

> H1(b): Citizens have more confidence in the diagnostic ability of donors under co-financing arrangements with regional institutions compared to donors under solo-financing arrangements.

We also expect these co-financed projects to therefore have a legitimating effect on foreign influence in domestic development, making citizens more likely to be accept more external control over own government. Citizens would view donor involvement in development policy as more appropriate and legitimate, compared to donors that do not have a regional footing. This should increase their willingness to defer to donor preferences when they conflict with those of domestic governments. Compared to solo-financing arrangements, co-financing with a regional actors should thus not only elicit more trust in donors to make the right decisions for them in the development context or more confidence in the donor's understanding of their country's problems, but it should also encourage the otherwise costly choice of giving greater deference to donors, even over local governments, on development policy issues,

> H1(c): Citizens are willing to defer more to donors under co-financing arrangements with regional institutions over their own governments compared to donors under solo-financing arrangements.

Regarding perceptions about the development project itself, we might expect citizens to perceive a project as being more response to local needs if it is co-financed with the AfDB compared to being solo-financed by a foreign donor. Existing research in fact suggests that citizens look favourably on co-financed projects especially when they sense of a high degree of complementarity about co-financiers (Strange et al., 2024). In the case of regional-foreign co-financing, the best practices and local knowledge of a regional MDB may complement the extra financial resources that foreign donors bring. Given this, co-financing can make citizens more enthusiastic about a development project and have higher expectations about project delivery and performance.

> H2(a): Citizens look more favourably on projects that are co-financed than solo-financed projects.

At the same time, the legitimating effect that co-financing should have on perceptions of donors may not completely transfer to the average citizen's perceptions of project performance. It is possible that citizens may transpose negative perceptions or disillusionment and dissatisfaction with their own national public service delivery to their perceptions of projects that African institutions are involved in. Indeed, within sub-Saharan Africa, perceptions of the delivery of public services, like education, infrastructure, and energy—the kind of which MDBs also provide—have seen minimal improvements, with difficulties in accessing high-quality services and corruption both contributing to persisting negative attitudes among citizens (Bratton et al., 2019, 2, 7, 13).

If legitimacy gains do not extend uniformly to perceptions of the project itself and if perceptions about projects co-financed with the AfDB are affected by the perceived efficiency of African governments or the public sector, then we might expect less favourable perceptions about these projects, even if citizens might otherwise have more positive views about the project funders. Citizens may thus have higher expectations for the performance of projects funded by international, non-African donors.

> H2(b): Citizens look less favourably on projects that are co-financed than solo-financed projects.

These more negative expectations about citizens' preferences for co-financed projects, including their perceptions about project quality or the likelihood of a project being affected by corruption, map onto existing evidence suggesting that co-financed development projects lead to poorer project outcomes (Winters, 2019). When multiple donors are involved in the design and implementation of a development project, other scholars have argued that it can sometimes introduce inefficiencies, including free-riding, blame-shifting, implementation delays, and lower levels of accountability within a project (Winters, 2019; Clark, 2025).

Still, we expect some heterogeneity among African citizens. Some citizens view regional actors more favourably than others. For example, Schnabel et al.'s (2022) focus group discussions and interviews suggest that citizens' views about regional IOs in Africa are locally contested and sometimes depend on the direct experiences with the organisations. Focusing specifically on Burkinabé and Gambian citizens, Witt (2023) suggests that people's experience with or exposure to the AU, including the organisation's norms, policies, and programs, in their everyday lives shapes their support and perceived legitimacy of pan-African institutions. Asongu et al. (2024) suggests that individual characteristics, like location, education, and living conditions, affect people's propensity to support the AU. Focusing on the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), Witt et al. (2024) also find that everyday citizens' perceptions of the ECOWAS are generally more positive, but do not suggest that ECOWAS' security interventions enhanced local ownership.

Not much is known about public opinion on African-led development-oriented IOs, like the AfDB, despite the institution being the largest of its kind in Africa. Arguably the most widely-used public opinion survey for Africa, Afrobarometer often only asks respondents questions on the AU and regional economic communities, like ECOWAS and the Southern African Development Community (SADC).[3] In their experimental survey fielded to Ugandan citizens, Milner et al. (2016, 232) note that the AfDB is the least well-known donor among a list that included the World Bank, China, and the United States, but Findley et al. (2017) find that citizens with higher levels of donor familiarity are more likely to support multilateral donors, like the AfDB, compared to China and other bilateral donors.

We focus on another dimension of heterogeneity among African citizens: level of pan-Africanism. We theorise that people's perceptions about donors under co-financing arrangements should be conditioned by their level of attachment to pan-Africanism or their regional pan-African identity. Most public opinion research conducted in African countries often ask respondents about relative attachments to their national and ethnic identities (Green, 2020; Brigevich and Oritsejafor, 2024). Yet, as Mazrui (1982) argues, one of the central tenets of pan-Africanism, which emerged out of the colonial struggle, is solidarity among all Africans and in turn, the promotion of a supranational identity shared by all Africans and pan-African IOs. Such IOs, like the AU, are viewed as institutional expressions of pan-Africanism, attempting to provide African elites and everyday citizens with a key referent for both enhanced African agency and a united Africa (Adogamhe, 2008; Tieku, 2019; Oloruntoba, 2023). As we detail below, our approach to capturing pan-African sentiments primarily focuses on how citizens view their African identity and regional institutions, like the AU, SADC, and ECOWAS.

In many ways, the AfDB embodies this same pan-African expression. AfDB documents describe

[3] Like the AU, views are mixed. Afrobarometer surveys conducted in 2019/2020, for example, showed that 56% of Nigerians had a favourable view of ECOWAS, while only 33% of South Africans viewed SADC favourably.

the bank as “the premier pan-African development institution” and both its policies and operations promote deeper continental integration, including support for cross-border connective infrastructure projects and the region-wide African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA). Just as national and ethnic identities matter for political outcomes, this regional pan-African identity and the institutional manifestations of pan-Africanism should also matter for public perceptions about international political and economic processes and outcomes, including co-financing with the AfDB.

Development cooperation is deeply entangled with questions of agency, legitimacy, and inequality, which is precisely the area where pan-Africanism is most powerful as a normative and political framework. Regardless of their exposure or knowledge about the AfDB, we expect citizens with stronger pan-African sentiments to respond more favourably to the decision by foreign donors to co-finance with the pan-African AfDB.

> H3: Citizens look more favourably on donors and projects under co-financing arrangements with regional institutions compared to foreign solo-financed projects, especially when they have stronger attachments to pan-Africanism.

For African citizens with higher levels of pan-African sentiments, co-financing should signal a foreign donor’s respect for African expertise and institutions. This arrangement does not bypass African actors. Instead, it may not only be perceived as a partnership among equals, but also an act of solidarity or a decision by a foreign donor to enhance African agency in development or shed neocolonial practices that sidelined African actors.

3 Research design

To test our hypotheses, we fielded an original survey experiment in two sub-Saharan African countries in the first quarter of 2025. Following Findley et al. (2017), we relied on a between-subjects design in which each respondent was randomly assigned one treatment condition. We compare the differences in respondents’ level of approval of donors and the development project that is randomly assigned as either solely funded by a foreign donor or co-financed with the AfDB. The donors we included were the EU and China. We briefly explain our focus on the two sub-Saharan African countries, our sample, measurements, and the survey protocol.

3.1 Case selection

We investigate our hypotheses in Nigeria and South Africa. We focus on these two countries for several reasons. First, they are recipients of development projects funded by China and the EU (as foreign donors), both separately and in co-financing arrangements with the AfDB.[4] This

[4] See, for example, the Nigeria Electrification Project and South Africa’s Eskom Transmission Improvement Project co-financed by the AfDB and China.

allows us to study the impact of co-financing in countries that have actually—and repeatedly—experienced co-financing.

As countries with broadly similar macroeconomic profiles, Nigeria and South Africa represent Africa's largest economies. As such, they allow us to study the effects of co-financing in contexts where there is less aid dependency yet more strategic importance to foreign donors. Typically, foreign aid has been used to garner influence among such strategically or politically important countries. Where this might not be such an effective tool by itself, we are able to investigate whether foreign donors' decision to partner with a regional IO provides an added benefit that is separate from just providing development assistance to recipient countries.

Both Nigeria and South Africa are also countries whose contemporary leaders were both at the forefront of pan-Africanism. As Tieku (2004) explains, reform packages spearheaded by Nigeria's President Olusegun Obasanjo and South Africa's President Thabo Mbeki led to the process that created the AU and a new pan-African ideal. And while South Africa's focus was on redefining African identity to facilitate foreign direct investment into the region for development, Nigeria's leadership embraced a continental approach to development but was also internationalist (Tieku, 2004, 253, 257). While emphasising African agency, the latter remained open about the need for foreign aid and investment (Sanubi and Oke, 2017).

Baseline attitudes captured by Afrobarometer towards African IOs, like the AU, ECOWAS, and SADC, in these countries are also fairly similar. While majority of citizens perceive these African IOs to be helpful, a slightly higher percentage of South Africans express some pessimism about their perceived helpfulness (Olapade et al., 2016).

Because we are interested in investigating our hypotheses more broadly and expect our arguments to apply across different African contexts, our main analysis below is based on a sample that pools respondents from South Africa and Nigeria. In Tables C3 and C4 of Appendix C, we report results for separately for South Africa and Nigeria, respectively. The results are the same.

3.2 Sample

Our respondents were recruited by local survey firms familiar with the country context in both Nigeria and South Africa.[5] Because the survey was administered online, respondents needed a smartphone or a computer with mobile data or internet access. This necessarily means that the sample is slightly more educated, wealthy, and urban than the population as a whole. However, we used quotas on gender and region to generate a sample that is more representative on these dimensions. Only respondents who are either South African or Nigerian citizens and 18 years or older were allowed to complete the survey. We removed responses that took less than ten min-

[5] We worked with PureSpectrum in South Africa and Lagos Green Transport Limited in Nigeria.

utes to complete, filtering out low-quality responses.

Our survey began by collecting information about respondents' opinion about development issues in their country, local and international organisations, and society and politics. We then presented respondents with a series of questions related to their African identity and views about pan-African initiatives before presenting our experimental vignette.

3.3 Measuring pan-Africanism

To capture respondents' attachments to pan-Africanism, we use seven questions (see Appendix B.3). Regarding respondents' sense of their African identity, we ask about the extent to which they feel a connection with other Africans, their self-identification regarding their national and African identity, and how positive or negative they feel about their African identity. Other scholars have used similar questions to measure supranational identification among African citizens (Gordon, 2023). Separately, we assess respondents' attitudes towards "African solutions" to development problems. The latter is a key phrase that has increasingly dominated development discourse in and about Africa (Ani, 2019). It denotes the idea that African actors, specifically, should take a central role in addressing issues that affect the continent because "Africans know their problems and how to solve it" (Ani, 2019, 141).[6]

We also ask respondents questions that relate to institutional pan-Africanism, focusing on perceptions of continental or pan-African organisations or initiatives. We ask about their trust in the AU, the African Continental Free Trade Area, and a regional economic community, namely SADC (for South Africa) and ECOWAS (for Nigeria). As noted above, regional institutions are an important part of the expression of pan-Africanism, with African countries using these institutions to collectively address shared challenges. Previous Afrobarometer public opinion surveys show that majority of Africans find the AU and RECs to be at least "a little bit" helpful (Olapade et al., 2016). The Afrobarometer reports that in Nigeria, over 60% of the sample population thought the AU and ECOWAS were at least a little helpful; in South Africa, about 50% felt the same about the AU and SADC (Olapade et al., 2016, 16, 18). All respondents were presented with these questions before the vignette about a hypothetical development project funded by donors.

To generate a measure of pan-Africanism from this battery of questions, we first rescale all measures to range 0-1 and then take an average of respondents' scores across the seven questions. As reported in Table A1 of summary statistics in the Appendix, the average level of pan-Africanism in the sample is high, with a mean of 0.64 and standard deviation of 0.16. Since our questions capture different dimensions of pan-Africanism, we also generate one sub-index that averages responses to the three questions on support for pan-African organizations and a sep-

[6] We also included a question about support for an African passport to travel across the region, but found that this question was somewhat polarizing for South African respondents, making it less comparable to the other questions. We therefore omit it from out index.

arate sub-index that averages responses to the four questions on African identity. We use these to probe which aspect of pan-Africanism drives respondents' reactions to co-financing. As a robustness check, we instead use principal component analysis (PCA) to generate indices of pan-Africanism, reporting results with these alternative measures in Appendix D.

3.4 Survey protocol

Respondents were evenly split to be randomly assigned to one of six treatment conditions based on the identity of the funder.[7] The development funders we randomly assigned were a control condition with no specific donor named, the AfDB, EU, China, and both the EU and China as co-financiers with the AfDB .

Some scholars define co-financing in reference to the project initiator. For example, in the context of Chinese co-financing, Lu et al. (2024) describe co-financing as "investments made by entities other than the primary Chinese funder in any China-initiated project or Chinese investments in projects initiated by other entities." We, however, do not inform our respondents whether the AfDB or the EU, or China is the project initiator, focusing instead on the joint nature of the partnership between either foreign donor and the regional AfDB. We began our set-up by telling respondents about the development assistance that their country generally receives:

> As you may know, each year, [South Africa/Nigeria] receives substantial financial assistance from other countries and international organizations. This development assistance is used to finance projects that improve energy access, infrastructure, education, and health, as well as to increase the standard of living more generally.

We then presented our respondents with the following vignette:

> We would now like you to consider a potential energy project that would be financed through such development assistance. The project would expand electricity supply and strengthen the electricity grid across [South Africa/Nigeria] by adding further energy-creating stations, building new mini-grids, and improving national transmission networks. This would reduce power disruptions across the country and benefit millions of [South Africans/Nigerians].
>
> The project is [**jointly**] financed by [**one of the the country's major donors/the AfDB/China/China and the AfDB/EU/EU and the AfDB**].

We focus on an energy project not only because it would improve the wellbeing of recipients in our sample countries, which both have challenges with electricity supply (Moeti, 2013; Dada,

[7] As part of a larger project, there was a seventh treatment condition that provided information about the institutional structure of the AfDB. Since it is not relevant to this study, we omit it here.

2014); but also because the foreign donors in our experiments have in fact co-financed such development projects with the AfDB. We focus on a *hypothetical* energy project to isolate the impact of donor identity on our outcomes of interest by holding the attributes of the development project constant while only varying the identity of the donor. Because the project is hypothetical, we can also be vague about its location within the recipient country. With a real project, we risk the possibility that respondents' reaction will be more influenced by their proximity to the project.

After presenting respondents with this vignette, we ask a series of questions about their perception of the donor(s) and the hypothetical project. Our main questions with respect to attitudes toward the donor are: (1) How much do you trust the [donor] to make the right decisions for people in [South African/Nigerian] society? (2) To what extent do you think that the [donor] officials understand the problems that [South Africa/Nigeria] faces? and (3) If the donor and [South Africa's/Nigeria's] government disagree on development policy, which do you think should have the final say?

When analysing respondents' attitudes toward the electricity project, we focus on three questions:[8] (1) How enthusiastic are you about this electricity project? (2) How confident are you that the project will be of good quality? (3) How much do you think the project will be affected by corruption?

These six outcome measures are measured on different scales. To allow for comparison across these outcomes we normalize the variables using the mean and standard deviation of responses in the control group. Table A1 in the Appendix reports summary statistics for the outcome measures.

3.5 Estimation

We are interested in whether co-financing with the AfDB leads to different assessments of donors and/or the development project they fund. To assess this, we compare the responses of individuals assigned to two co-financing treatments to those of individuals assigned to the two non-AfDB solo-financed treatments (i.e. China and the EU). In our main tests, we choose to pool China and the EU together as solo-financing donors and compare these to the two co-financing conditions in which each donor partners with the AfDB.

Of course, China and the EU are quite different donors and likely to elicit different responses among respondents. Accordingly, we first report the effect of each individual donor relative to the control. However, our main interest is in how co-financing with the AfDB is received relative to baseline attitudes toward these donors. Therefore, after we report each of the treatment effects

[8] We asked several other questions about respondents attitudes toward the electricity project, including the anticipated impact on employment, recipient country firms, and debt management, see Appendix B.2. Results are consistent, so we report findings with the more general questions in-text.

relative to the control, we proceed to the main results in which the two co-financed treatments and two solo-financed treatments are combined. To address concerns that our headline findings are driven by distinct dynamics for either the EU or China, we report, in Tables C1 and C2 in the Appendix, the separate co-financing results for the EU and China, respectively. The results are the same across the two donors, except in the case of one outcome measure.

In the main analysis, we combine the Nigerian and South African samples. As explained earlier, the similarities in the two countries' macroeconomies and relationships with donors make them useful settings in which to study the effect of co-financing. However, there are important differences across the two countries, especially with respect to the electricity sector, the focus of our hypothetical development project. While Nigeria and South Africa have similar levels of urban electricity access, at 85% of the urban population in Nigeria in 2023 and 90.9% of the urban population in South Africa that same year, there are significant differences in rural electricity access. In 2023, 94% of South Africa's rural population had electricity access, while World Bank data indicates that only 32.9% of the rural population in Nigeria had access to electricity in that same year.[9] These differences in electricity access are reflected in our data. While only 13.75% of respondents in the South Africa sample say that they went without electricity "most of the time" in the last 12 months, 34.08% say the same in the Nigeria sample. Accordingly, 93.04% of respondents in Nigeria say that electricity is a "very important" issue, while only 85.6% of respondents say the same in South Africa.

Random assignment of treatment should ensure that differences in electricity access do not matter for how respondents react to a hypothetical project in the electricity sector. Nevertheless, differences across the two country samples could potentially bias the results. Table A2 in the Appendix shows the balance across treatment categories for key demographic attributes, experience of hardship, and attitudes toward development issues. There is a statistically significant difference in how often respondents report going without electricity across the two treatment categories. To account for this, we control for respondents' electricity access and the importance of electricity as an issue in all models. We also report results separately for Nigeria and South Africa in Tables C4 and C3 in the Appendix, showing that the results are consistent across both samples.

We estimate average treatment effects using OLS with robust standard errors. Our models include respondents' self-reported electricity deprivation and the importance they attach to electricity as an issue, as noted above, as well as their gender and age.

[9] Source: World Bank, SDG 7.1.1 Electrification Dataset, EG.ELC.ACCS.UR.ZS and EG.ELC.ACCS.RU.ZS.

4 Results

We present our results in three steps. First, we report how the AfDB compares to other donors in the reactions it elicits from respondents. Second, we show how co-financing affects respondents' approval of the donor and the project. This reveals that while co-financing generates a boost in goodwill and trust toward the donor, it does not lead to higher expectations of the development project. Third, we probe the reasons for this discrepancy by reporting heterogeneous treatment effects by respondents' level of pan-Africanism. In line with our expectations, respondents with higher levels of pan-Africanism are more approving of donors when projects are co-financed. Overall, our findings indicate that co-financing most reliably improves donors' reputation, but not the expectations of the actual projects they carry out.

4.1 How are the AfDB and other donors perceived?

We begin by reporting in Table 1 how the AfDB, EU, China, and co-financing are perceived. Relative to control, respondents have a negative perception of the EU and China as donors, compared to a more positive assessment of the AfDB, as models 1-3 in Table 1 show. Compared to the control of an unspecified donor, attributing the project to the EU or China leads to lower trust in the donor, a lower assessment of donor understanding the problems of the country, and less willingness to defer to the donor in the case of disagreements. By contrast, when a project is attributed to the AfDB, this leads to roughly 0.1 standard deviation increase in trust in the donor to make the right decision for citizens.

Relative to the control, the co-financing conditions do not have a statistically significant effect on respondents' assessment of donors. However, to understand the effect of co-financing, the pertinent comparison is between solo- and co-financed projects, which we discuss below. These results serve to show that respondents' baseline trust in China and the EU is fairly low, compared to a higher trust in the AfDB.

When it comes to attitudes toward the development project, as reported in models 4-6, the picture is more mixed. Compared to the control of an unspecified major donor, the AfDB and co-financing conditions lead to higher enthusiasm about the project, with no such effect for attributing the project to China or the EU. However, if China or the EU is named as the donor, this leads to greater confidence in the quality of the project and lower concerns about corruption.

These results indicate that both China and the EU, two important and very different donors in sub-Saharan Africa, suffer somewhat from a lack of recipient trust, though respondents have some confidence in the development projects themselves. Can co-financing compensate for these shortfalls in trust? We next turn to these results.

Table 1: Solo- and co-financed treatments relative to control

	(1) Trust donors to make right decisions for citizens?	(2) Donor understands problems of the country?	(3) Should donor have more influence when resolving disagreements?	(4) Enthusiasm about electricity project	(5) Confidence in quality of project	(6) Will project be affected by corruption?
EU	-0.0426	-0.148**	-0.101*	0.0427	0.116**	-0.137**
	(0.0406)	(0.0410)	(0.0423)	(0.0411)	(0.0407)	(0.0407)
China	-0.113**	-0.101*	-0.258**	0.0711	0.106**	-0.132**
	(0.0421)	(0.0413)	(0.0419)	(0.0410)	(0.0405)	(0.0406)
AfDB	0.0984*	-0.00524	0.0245	0.0964*	0.0209	-0.0781
	(0.0403)	(0.0402)	(0.0417)	(0.0398)	(0.0398)	(0.0406)
EU-AfDB co-financing	0.0354	0.00485	0.0304	0.112**	0.0403	-0.0744
	(0.0403)	(0.0407)	(0.0425)	(0.0399)	(0.0398)	(0.0406)
China-AfDB co-financing	0.0207	-0.00786	-0.0383	0.0906*	0.0248	-0.134**
	(0.0415)	(0.0409)	(0.0436)	(0.0408)	(0.0401)	(0.0408)
Observations	6533	6529	6529	6459	6530	6531

Standard errors in parentheses

Controls not reported: Gender, age, electricity issue importance, gone without electricity.

* $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$

4.2 Does co-financing matter?

Table 2 reports results on the effect of co-financing on perceptions of donors. Across the board, we find that co-financing lead to higher trust and more positive assessments of donors. When we ask respondents how much they trust the donors to "jointly make the right decisions for people" in their society, they are more likely to trust donors under co-financing arrangements compared to solo-financed arrangements, as results in model 1 of Table 2 suggest.

Moreover, respondents believe that the AfDB and foreign donor together have a better understanding of the problems of their country, as shown in model 3 of Table 2. This greater trust and perception of better understanding leads respondents to grant greater authority to the donor. When we ask about how disagreements over development policy between the donors and the government should be resolved, we find that the co-financed treatments also causes respondents to be more likely to say that the donors should have the final say in disagreements, as shown in model 3 of Table 2. This result suggests a greater deference towards donors in co-financing arrangements involving a regional development funder.

Since the outcome variables have been normalized, the coefficients on the co-financing treatment are directly comparable; across these three outcome measures, co-financing has the greatest impact on deference toward donors in resolving disagreements. This reflects the aversion that respondents had to delegating authority to donors in the solo-financed treatments (see Table 1) and highlights how co-financing can help donors increase buy-in from the public in recipient countries.

Table 2: Co-financing effect on perceptions of donors

	(1) Trust donors to make right decisions for citizens?	(2) Donor understands problems of the country?	(3) Should donor have more influence when resolving disagreements?
Co-financed	0.105^{**}	0.121^{**}	0.176^{**}
	(0.0321)	(0.0318)	(0.0337)
Observations	4026	4025	4024

Standard errors in parentheses

Controls not reported: Gender, age, electricity issue importance, gone without electricity.

* $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$

Whereas co-financing has a significant effect on the perceptions of donors, we show in Table 3 that co-financing with the AfDB does not improve perceptions of the proposed development project. If anything, it slightly dampens assessments of the project. Compared to projects that are attributed to China or the EU alone, those co-financed with the AfDB elicit no greater enthusiasm from respondents, as model 1 in Table 3 shows. In fact, respondents have slightly less confidence in the quality of the project when it is co-financed with the AfDB than solo-financed, as reported in model 2 of Table 3. Moreover, co-financing does not mitigate concerns about corrup-

Table 3: Co-financing effect on perceptions of development project

	(1) Enthusiasm about electricity project	(2) Confidence in quality of project	(3) Will project be affected by corruption?
Co-financed	0.0444	-0.0791*	0.0306
	(0.0314)	(0.0311)	(0.0316)
Observations	3985	4024	4026

Standard errors in parentheses

Controls not reported: Gender, age, electricity issue importance, gone without electricity.

* $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$

tion relative to solo-financed projects, as shown in model 3. Thus, although respondents believe that the AfDB has a better understanding of their country's needs and they thus place greater trust and show greater deference to donors when a project is co-financed, this does not translate into greater enthusiasm about the development project itself. There even appears to be a slight co-financing penalty for the quality of the project.

The contrast between these two sets of outcomes suggests that respondents appraise co-financing through different lenses. Partnering with the AfDB makes donors more trustworthy and gives them greater credibility, perhaps by showing investment in regional actors. However, when it comes to implementation of actual development projects, the AfDB does not offer a similar boost. These findings are consistent across both the EU and China, as Tables C1 and C2 in the Appendix show. In both cases, co-financing leads to better perceptions of the donor (though the trust outcome misses significance in the case of the EU), but does not lead to improved assessments of the project. To better understand why co-financing impacts perceptions of donors, we next investigate how respondents' pan-African identity impacts their responses to co-financing with the AfDB.

4.3 Do regional identities matter?

We expect that respodents react to co-financing with the AfDB based on their own attachment to pan-Africanism. Table 4 shows that respondents with higher pan-Africanist sentiment do respond more positively to co-financed project, though not across the board. As shown in model 1 of Table 4, those with higher pan-Africanist sentiments are more likely to trust donors to make the right decision when a project is jointly financed by the AfDB and China or the EU. Similarly, pan-Africanism appears to attenuate some of the scepticism about the quality of co-financed projects, as column 5 of Table 4 reports. Whereas co-financing leads to more negative expectations of project quality among the sample as a whole, those reporting higher levels of pan-Africanism have greater confidence in the quality of the project, especially when co-financed. Though pan-Africanist sentiment does not lead to more enthusiasm about co-financed projects across the board, it accentuates the impact of co-financing on donor trust and compensates for the scepti-

Table 4: Pan-Africanism leads to slightly higher approval of co-financing with the AfDB

	(1) Trust donors to make right decisions for citizens?	(2) Donor understands problems of the country?	(3) Should donor have more influence when resolving disagreements?	(4) Enthusiasm about electricity project	(5) Confidence in quality of project	(6) Will project be affected by corruption?
Co-financed	-0.276*	-0.0409	-0.0675	-0.0238	-0.356**	0.144
	(0.131)	(0.137)	(0.143)	(0.133)	(0.125)	(0.125)
Pan-Africanism	1.569**	1.312**	-0.357*	1.913**	1.881**	-1.450**
	(0.151)	(0.150)	(0.154)	(0.144)	(0.143)	(0.138)
Co-financed × Pan-Africanism	0.564**	0.231	0.379	0.0804	0.397*	-0.153
	(0.201)	(0.208)	(0.215)	(0.196)	(0.192)	(0.192)
Observations	4023	4022	4020	3981	4020	4022

Standard errors in parentheses

Controls not reported: Gender, age, electricity issue importance, gone without electricity.

* $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$

cism some respondents may have about the quality of AfDB projects.

The partial impact of pan-Africanist identities on respondents reactions to donors and development projects suggests that co-financing with the AfDB taps into regional identities. Those respondents for whom those regional identities are more salient are also more responsive to co-financing. We show in the Appendix in Table D1 at the conditioning effect of pan-Africanism is primarily driven by the questions about support for regional organizations, i.e. the institutional dimension of pan-Africanism. By contrast, questions about respondents' African identity are less important for conditioning responses to co-financing, though Table D2 shows that those with higher identity-based pan-Africanism do have greater trust in donors when the AfDB is co-financing the project.

5 Conclusion

This paper has argued that co-financing with regional development institutions can operate as a soft power mechanism by legitimating foreign donor authority in recipient countries. Focusing on the AfDB, Africa's largest development finance institution, we show that co-financing makes citizens more willing to trust foreign donors, attribute contextual knowledge to them, and defer to them in development policy disputes. We also show that people's level of pan-Africanism particularly matter for perceptions of trust in donors.

At the same time, these legitimacy gains do not translate into uniformly more positive project evaluations. Citizens do not become more enthusiastic about co-financed projects and express slightly lower confidence in project quality. This distinction suggests that co-financing legitimates foreign donors without necessarily improving perceptions of the projects they finance.

Our results have important implications for international development cooperation. Development actors are increasingly turning towards co-financing to coordinate their response to the current polycrisis—a growing list of simultaneous problems faced by Global South countries from energy and health challenges to poverty and inequality (World Bank, 2024). While co-financing has been encouraged because of the potential impacts it has on donor coordination and development impact, much less attention has focused on how the ultimate beneficiaries of co-financed development projects actually view these arrangements. We offer insights that highlight the potential benefits to foreign donors of partnering with a major regional actor in Africa.

While we focus on foreign donors, future research may look towards the added benefit—or cost—of co-financing to recipient governments who are accountable to everyday citizens. Through co-financing, governments are not only able to demonstrate to their citizens that they are bringing much-needed funding to the country from multiple sources, but they can also signal relationship-building with foreign and regional actors that citizens view favourably. Just like the benefits accrued to foreign donors that we highlight in this paper, these potential political rewards to co-financing suggest that international development cooperation has important consequences for political actors.

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A Summary Statistics

Table A1: Summary statistics

Variable	Obs	Mean	Std. Dev.	Min	Max
Trust donors to make right decisions for citizens?	6668	.003	1.013	-1.652	1.913
Donor understands problems of the country?	6665	-.037	1.008	-1.829	1.659
Should donor have more influence when resolving disagreements?	6663	-.054	1.053	-1.936	1.551
Enthusiasm about electricity project	6584	.064	.991	-2.037	1.33
Confidence in quality of project	6666	.055	.992	-1.746	1.889
Will project be affected by corruption?	6667	-.089	1.013	-1.901	1.21
Pan-Africanism	6665	.643	.164	.071	1
Pan-Africanism (Institutions)	6653	.609	.278	0	1
Pan-Africanism (Identity)	6664	.668	.142	.125	1
Female	6654	.5	.5	0	1
Age (categorical)	6679	2.533	1.381	1	6
Issue importance: Electricity	6586	4.854	.488	1	5
Last 12 months: Gone without electricity	6647	2.848	1.18	1	5

B Survey Questions

B.1 Donor attitudes

1. To what extent do you think that donor officials understand the problems that South African faces?

2. How much do you trust the donors to make the right decisions for people in [South African/Nigerian] society?

3. If the donors and [South Africa's/Nigeria's] government disagree on development policy, which do you think should have the final say?

B.2 Project attitudes

1. How enthusiastic are you about this electricity project? (1-10)

2. How confident are you that the energy project will be of good quality?

3. How much do you think that the energy project will be affected by corruption?

4. Do you think that the financing of this project will be expensive for [South Africa/Nigeria]?

5. What impact do you believe this project will have on employment in [South Africa/Nigeria]?

6. To what degree do you think that the development of electricity infrastructure in this project will involve firms from [South Africa/Nigeria]?

7. How much do you think that this electricity project supports [South African/Nigerian] needs and interests?

B.3 Pan-Africanism

1. We would like you to think about your identity as an African citizen in relation to the rest of the world. To what extent do you feel a connection with other people from the rest of Africa? (Very strong connection/Strong connection/Weak connection/No connection)

2. How do you perceive being seen as 'African'? (Positive/Negative/Positive and Negative/Indifferent)

3. Currently, do you see yourself more as South African or African? Please indicate accordingly (only South African/I feel more South African than African/ I feel equally South African and African/I feel more African than South Africa/I feel only African)

4. How much do you agree with this statement: To tackle development problems in Africa, we need to create and implement African solutions (Strongly oppose/Somewhat oppose/Somewhat support/Strongly support/Completely support)

5. How much do you trust the African Union to act in the interest of all Africans? (Trust a lot/Somewhat trust, Only a little trust/No trust at all)

6. How much do you trust the African Continental Free Trade Area to act in the interest of all Africans? (Trust a lot/Somewhat trust, Only a little trust/No trust at all)

7. How much do you trust the Southern African Development Community / Economic Community of West African States to act in the interest of all Africans? (Trust a lot/Somewhat trust, Only a little trust/No trust at all)

C Additional results

Table A2: Balance across solo-financed vs. co-financed conditions

	(1) Solo donor treatment	(2) Co-financed treatment	(3) Difference (1)-(2)
Female	0.51	0.50	0.01
	(0.50)	(0.50)	(0.02)
Is respondent urban?	0.84	0.84	-0.00
	(0.37)	(0.37)	(0.01)
White	0.11	0.12	-0.01
	(0.32)	(0.32)	(0.01)
Age (categorical)	2.49	2.53	-0.03
	(1.38)	(1.34)	(0.04)
employment	2.94	2.90	0.04
	(2.01)	(2.02)	(0.06)
Last 12 months: Difficulty paying housing	2.63	2.63	-0.00
	(1.26)	(1.26)	(0.04)
Last 12 months: Gone without electricity	2.84	2.91	-0.08*
	(1.17)	(1.20)	(0.04)
Last 12 months: Unable to afford transportation	2.47	2.50	-0.02
	(1.23)	(1.25)	(0.04)
Last 12 months: Unable to afford education	2.49	2.52	-0.03
	(1.31)	(1.31)	(0.04)
Last 12 months: Gone without medicine	2.37	2.35	0.01
	(1.24)	(1.25)	(0.04)
Respondent level of education	6.28	6.30	-0.01
	(1.35)	(1.35)	(0.04)
Heard about US aid withdrawal	0.70	0.71	-0.01
	(0.46)	(0.45)	(0.01)
Issue importance: Education	4.84	4.86	-0.02
	(0.53)	(0.44)	(0.02)
Issue importance: Poverty	4.85	4.86	-0.01
	(0.58)	(0.56)	(0.02)
Issue importance: Unemployment	4.88	4.88	0.00
	(0.55)	(0.53)	(0.02)
Issue importance: Electricity	4.86	4.85	0.01
	(0.48)	(0.50)	(0.02)
Issue importance: Cost of living	4.86	4.85	0.01
	(0.52)	(0.52)	(0.02)
Issue importance: Crime and security	4.85	4.88	-0.03
	(0.56)	(0.50)	(0.02)
Issue importance: Water supply	4.80	4.79	0.01
	(0.57)	(0.57)	(0.02)
Issue importance: Mngmt of the economy	4.83	4.87	-0.04**
	(0.53)	(0.43)	(0.02)
Issue importance: Corruption	4.72	4.71	0.02
	(0.84)	(0.88)	(0.03)
Confidence: Natl government	2.18	2.17	0.01
	(1.11)	(1.11)	(0.03)
Confidence: Military	2.44	2.44	0.01
	(1.10)	(1.09)	(0.03)
Confidence: Courts	2.36	2.35	0.01
	(1.03)	(1.04)	(0.03)
Confidence: Police	1.96	1.97	-0.01
	(1.04)	(1.04)	(0.03)
Confidence: Local government	2.07	2.10	-0.03
	(1.02)	(1.04)	(0.03)
Confidence: NGOs	2.61	2.64	-0.03
	(1.01)	(1.01)	(0.03)
Confidence: Village/traditional leader	2.24	2.28	-0.03
	(1.06)	(1.04)	(0.03)
Confidence: Political parties	1.97	2.00	-0.03
	(1.04)	(1.03)	(0.03)
Confidence: Banks and financial institutions	2.71	2.67	0.04
	(0.99)	(0.99)	(0.03)
N	2,070	2,056	4,126

Table C1: EU solo-financed vs. EU-AfDB co-financed

	(1) Trust donors to make right decisions for citizens?	(2) Donor understands problems of the country?	(3) Should donor have more influence when resolving disagreements?	(4) Enthusiasm about electricity project	(5) Confidence in quality of project	(6) Will project be affected by corruption?
Co-financed	0.0716	0.156**	0.128**	0.0694	-0.0781	0.0611
	(0.0442)	(0.0449)	(0.0474)	(0.0440)	(0.0440)	(0.0447)
Observations	2054	2052	2053	2030	2052	2053

Standard errors in parentheses
Controls not reported: Gender, age, electricity issue importance, gone without electricity.
* $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$

Table C2: China solo-financed vs. China-AfDB co-financed

	(1) Trust donors to make right decisions for citizens?	(2) Donor understands problems of the country?	(3) Should donor have more influence when resolving disagreements?	(4) Enthusiasm about electricity project	(5) Confidence in quality of project	(6) Will project be affected by corruption?
Co-financed	0.134^{**}	0.0947^{*}	0.215^{**}	0.0173	-0.0788	-0.00356
	(0.0467)	(0.0457)	(0.0484)	(0.0449)	(0.0445)	(0.0449)
Observations	1972	1973	1971	1955	1972	1973

Standard errors in parentheses
Controls not reported: Gender, age, electricity issue importance, gone without electricity.
* $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$

Table C3: South Africa sample

	(1) Trust donors to make right decisions for citizens?	(2) Donor understands problems of the country?	(3) Should donor have more influence when resolving disagreements?	(4) Enthusiasm about electricity project	(5) Confidence in quality of project	(6) Will project be affected by corruption?
Co-financed	0.0988^{*}	0.126^{**}	0.165^{**}	0.00848	-0.118^{**}	0.0347
	(0.0469)	(0.0459)	(0.0481)	(0.0451)	(0.0452)	(0.0433)
Observations	2012	2012	2010	2009	2012	2012

Standard errors in parentheses

Controls not reported: Gender, age, electricity issue importance, gone without electricity.

* $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$

Table C4: Nigeria sample

	(1) Trust donors to make right decisions for citizens?	(2) Donor understands problems of the country?	(3) Should donor have more influence when resolving disagreements?	(4) Enthusiasm about electricity project	(5) Confidence in quality of project	(6) Will project be affected by corruption?
Co-financed	0.112^{**}	0.115^{**}	0.188^{**}	0.0795	-0.0438	0.0279
	(0.0430)	(0.0431)	(0.0469)	(0.0436)	(0.0424)	(0.0443)
Observations	2014	2013	2014	1976	2012	2014

Standard errors in parentheses
Controls not reported: Gender, age, electricity issue importance, gone without electricity.
* $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$

D Alternative measures of pan-Africanism

In the main analysis, we measure pan-Africanism with an unweighted average of seven questions asking about respondents' attachment to their African identity and support of African regional organizations. In this section we report results using alternative measures of pan-Africanism. First, we separate the questions into those capturing institutional pan-Africanism, i.e. support for regional organizations, and identity pan-Africanism. Table D1 shows that the main result in Table 4 is driven by the institutional dimension of pan-Africanism. By contrast, respondents who score higher on the questions of identity-based pan-Africanism are not as likely to respond positively to the co-financing treatment, see Table D2.

Second, we use an alternative approach for reducing the dimensionality of our questions about pan-Africanism, relying on principal component analysis (PCA). Prior to running PCA, the seven variables are standardized to have a mean of 0 and standard deviation of 1. Of the seven components generated, we retain the first two, following the general rule of thumb of retaining components with eigenvalues over one (see Table D3). The third component has an eigenvalue of 0.88, close to the threshold, but we are guided by theory in choosing only to retain the first two components.

The first two components clearly correspond to the two salient dimensions of pan-Africanism: support for African institutions and a sense of pan-African identity, respectively. As reported in Table D4, the first component is strongly correlated with the three measures capturing trust in the AU, African Continental Free Trade Area, and the respective regional economic organisations in West Africa and Southern Africa. The second component is correlated with a respondent's African identity and support for the notion of "African solutions for African problems." This component thus captures more of the identity aspect of pan-Africanism. These are two dimensions of pan-Africanism that are theoretically relevant and distinct. By contrast, it is less clear which dimension is captured by the third component, leading us to prefer retaining only the first two components. As a robustness check, we therefore use these two variables as measures of institutional pan-Africanism and identity-based pan-Africanism, testing whether respondents who score more highly on either of the two measures respond more positively to co-financing with the AfDB.

The results in Tables D5 and D6 confirm the headline findings reported in-text in Table 4 and disaggregated in Tables D1 and D2. Pan-African identity does drive the response to co-financing, with co-financing triggering greater trust in donors and confidence in project quality among those with higher levels of pan-Africanism. This result is due to the institutional dimension of pan-Africanism.

Table D1: Conditioning effect of pan-Africanism (institutional measures of pan-Africanism)

	(1) Trust donors to make right decisions for citizens?	(2) Donor understands problems of the country?	(3) Should donor have more influence when resolving disagreements?	(4) Enthusiasm about electricity project	(5) Confidence in quality of project	(6) Will project be affected by corruption?
Co-financed	-0.0771	0.0577	0.0169	-0.0421	-0.262**	0.0849
	(0.0798)	(0.0822)	(0.0857)	(0.0804)	(0.0754)	(0.0731)
Pan-Africanism (Institutions)	0.899**	0.663**	-0.153	1.027**	0.936**	-0.989**
	(0.0903)	(0.0895)	(0.0898)	(0.0848)	(0.0856)	(0.0808)
Co-financed $\times$ Pan-Africanism (Institutions)	0.272*	0.0870	0.261*	0.119	0.269*	-0.0639
	(0.123)	(0.125)	(0.127)	(0.116)	(0.115)	(0.112)
Observations	4017	4016	4014	3976	4014	4016

Standard errors in parentheses
Controls not reported: Gender, age, electricity issue importance, gone without electricity.
* $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$

Table D2: Conditioning effect of pan-Africanism (identity measures of pan-Africanism)

	(1) Trust donors to make right decisions for citizens?	(2) Donor understands problems of the country?	(3) Should donor have more influence when resolving disagreements?	(4) Enthusiasm about electricity project	(5) Confidence in quality of project	(6) Will project be affected by corruption?
Co-financed	-0.285	-0.0918	0.0665	0.134	-0.204	0.226
	(0.155)	(0.159)	(0.168)	(0.162)	(0.153)	(0.156)
Pan-Africanism (Identity)	0.998**	1.108**	-0.412*	1.456**	1.629**	-0.443**
	(0.169)	(0.170)	(0.177)	(0.168)	(0.167)	(0.165)
Co-financed × Pan-Africanism (Identity)	0.571*	0.306	0.166	-0.148	0.169	-0.284
	(0.232)	(0.234)	(0.249)	(0.236)	(0.227)	(0.231)
Observations	4022	4021	4019	3980	4019	4021

Standard errors in parentheses

Controls not reported: Gender, age, electricity issue importance, gone without electricity.

* $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$

Table D3: Eigenvalues of principal components

	Eigenvalue	Difference	Proportion	Cumulative
Comp1	2.814742	1.569174	0.4021	0.4021
Comp2	1.245568	.3690106	0.1779	0.5800
Comp3	.8765575	.1332681	0.1252	0.7053
Comp4	.7432894	.0899892	0.1062	0.8115
Comp5	.6533002	.2906071	0.0933	0.9048
Comp6	.3626931	.0588433	0.0518	0.9566
Comp7	.3038497	.	0.0434	1.0000

Table D4: Principal components (Eigenvectors)

	Comp1	Comp2	Comp3	Comp4	Comp5	Comp6	Comp7	Unexplained
Feel a connection with people from rest of Africa? (standardized)	.3646313	.00905	-.5059174	.1906944	.7555032	.059466	-.0180028	0
Perceive being seen as 'African'? (standardized)	.3137663	-.3637259	-.2176046	.7075756	-.4700972	-.0149771	.004855	0
Identify with national identity vs. African (standardized)	-.1569615	.6086206	.4129452	.6325286	.1851749	.0001697	-.0061785	0
To tackle development, need African solutions? (standardized)	.0297913	-.65442	.6357194	.1069801	.3935489	-.0132485	.0143827	0
Trust to act in interest of Africans? AU (standardized)	.5017761	.16639	.1714292	-.1279976	-.0438411	-.4733719	.6698961	0
Trust to act in interest of Africans? AfCFA (standardized)	.5035641	.1459364	.2003594	-.1336523	-.0673847	-.3439916	-.7377317	0
Trust to act in interest of Africans? RO (standardized)	.4875595	.1412589	.2291311	-.1311066	-.1122068	.8084879	.0799905	0

Table D5: Conditioning effect of pan-Africanism (PCA measure of institutional pan-Africanism)

	(1) Trust donors to make right decisions for citizens?	(2) Donor understands problems of the country?	(3) Should donor have more influence when resolving disagreements?	(4) Enthusiasm about electricity project	(5) Confidence in quality of project	(6) Will project be affected by corruption?
Co-financed	0.0936**	0.108**	0.182**	0.0309	-0.100**	0.0395
	(0.0307)	(0.0309)	(0.0335)	(0.0301)	(0.0295)	(0.0302)
Co-financed × Institutional pan-Africanism	0.0487*	0.0207	0.0323	0.0214	0.0545**	-0.00571
	(0.0200)	(0.0202)	(0.0209)	(0.0191)	(0.0189)	(0.0186)
Institutional pan-Africanism	0.161**	0.129**	-0.0301*	0.183**	0.171**	-0.173**
	(0.0147)	(0.0146)	(0.0150)	(0.0142)	(0.0141)	(0.0131)
Identity pan-Africanism	-0.0809**	-0.127**	0.152**	-0.0426**	-0.113**	-0.0911**
	(0.0148)	(0.0150)	(0.0155)	(0.0142)	(0.0146)	(0.0142)
Observations	3972	3971	3970	3936	3969	3971

Standard errors in parentheses

Controls not reported: Gender, age, electricity issue importance, gone without electricity.

* $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$

Table D6: Conditioning effect of pan-Africanism (PCA measure of identity pan-Africanism)

	(1) Trust donors to make right decisions for citizens?	(2) Donor understands problems of the country?	(3) Should donor have more influence when resolving disagreements?	(4) Enthusiasm about electricity project	(5) Confidence in quality of project	(6) Will project be affected by corruption?
Co-financed	0.0955**	0.109**	0.183**	0.0315	-0.0984**	0.0393
	(0.0308)	(0.0309)	(0.0335)	(0.0300)	(0.0295)	(0.0303)
Co-financed × Identity pan-Africanism	-0.0411	-0.0305	0.0468	0.0136	-0.0252	0.00573
	(0.0295)	(0.0299)	(0.0310)	(0.0283)	(0.0291)	(0.0285)
Institutional pan-Africanism	0.185**	0.139**	-0.0145	0.194**	0.198**	-0.176**
	(0.0103)	(0.0103)	(0.0108)	(0.00993)	(0.00979)	(0.00981)
Identity pan-Africanism	-0.0610**	-0.113**	0.130**	-0.0488*	-0.101**	-0.0939**
	(0.0211)	(0.0212)	(0.0219)	(0.0205)	(0.0209)	(0.0195)
Observations	3972	3971	3970	3936	3969	3971

Standard errors in parentheses

Controls not reported: Gender, age, electricity issue importance, gone without electricity.

* $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$