# Prevention or Relief?

Public Attitudes Toward Disaster Policies



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# BACKGROUND

- Past research has shown that citizens reward incumbents for relief spending in response to disasters, but not for prevention spending (Gailmard & Patty, 2019; Healy & Malhotra, 2009).
- Prevention spending is more effective than relief spending.
- It is not clear whether this reflects the public's true policy preferences.

# **PREDICTIONS**

- 1. People prefer relief policies over prevention policies.
- 2. People will give more attention to deservingness cues in a relief frame than in the prevention frame.

# **METHODS**

- Data: Amazon Mturk (N = 397)
- Subjects randomly assigned to read a prevention-frame vignette or the relief-frame vignette.
- Half of the participants in each condition assigned to different deservingness framings: "trying" versus "not trying."
- Participants indicate how likely they are to support the hypothetical policy (+2 being "Very likely," -2 being "Very unlikely").

There is no evidence that voters support relief spending over prevention spending.

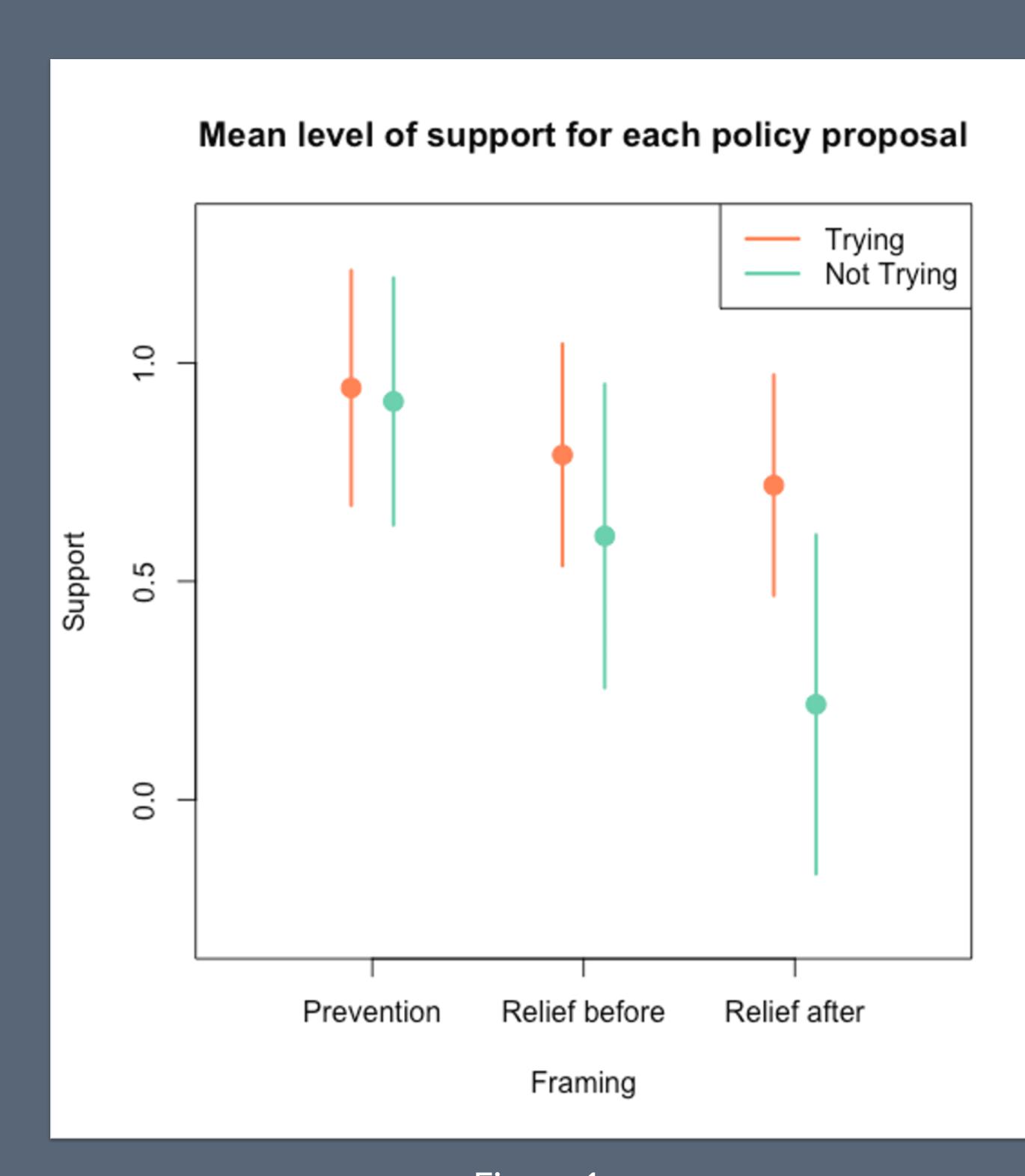


Figure 1

# Figure 2 SURVEY FLOW

Residents are annually threatened during flood seasons. Experts are forecasting that this town will experience increasingly devastating floods. They warn that eventually, the whole town will have to relocate...

# Prevention & relief (before)

This year, the river will rise by more than 6 inches of rain in 72 hours. It will cause at least \$100 million in damages.

# Relief (after)

This year, the river rose by more than 6 inches of rain in 72 hours. It caused \$100 million in damages.

# Not trying

The residents are eager to recover, but they vow to defy any evacuation orders. "This is our home. We are not going anywhere..." said a resident.

# Trying

The residents are eager to recover, and they are willing to comply with any evacuation orders. "We will do anything, even if it means leaving our homes..." said a resident.

### Prevention

As a response, the governor has proposed a disaster prevention tax policy to raise \$80 million. This money will go into building an extra drainage canal the region to prevent damage from flooding.

# Relief (before) & relief (after)

As a response, the governor has proposed a disaster relief tax policy to raise \$80 million. This money will go into restoring the flooded community.

If this plan is implemented, each taxpayer should expect to pay approximately \$100, though some taxpayers would pay more and some would pay less, depending on their income.

How likely are you to vote for this policy?

-2 -1 0 1

Very unlikely Slightly unlikely Neither Slightly likely Very likely

# **RESULTS SUMMARY**

- The level of support for the relief policy is **lower** than the prevention policy. Prediction (1) is not supported. See Figure 1.
- However, this effect seems to be driven solely by those in the "Not Trying" treatment group.
- The effect of deservingness cues is stronger in the relief (after) frame, but not in the prevention frame. Prediction (2) is supported.

# **IMPLICATIONS**

 If voters are given the information and the outcomes very explicitly, voters can be convinced to support prevention.

# **FUTURE RESEARCH**

• Economic game in which real money is at stake. Real people with real "victims."

# **KEY REFERENCES**

- Gailmard, S., & Patty, J. W. (2019). Preventing prevention. American Journal of Political Science, 63(2), 342-352.
- Healy, A., & Malhotra, N. (2009).
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