

## Background

### Context: College applications

- SAT/ACT is optional for >80% universities
- 57% students didn't submit test scores in 2022
- Debate on the influences of test-optional<sup>1</sup>

### Previous literature:

- People are *on average* insufficiently skeptical about information withheld by others
- Influence of individual differences (e.g., strategic reasoning) remains unclear
- Limited investigation on the information sender-receiver interaction<sup>2</sup>

## Methods

### Study 1 (information sender)

- 100 Prolific participants
- Decide to submit or withhold ACT scores
  - For 20 students
- Randomly generated scores for students
  - GPA and ACT, modestly correlated ( $r=0.50$ )

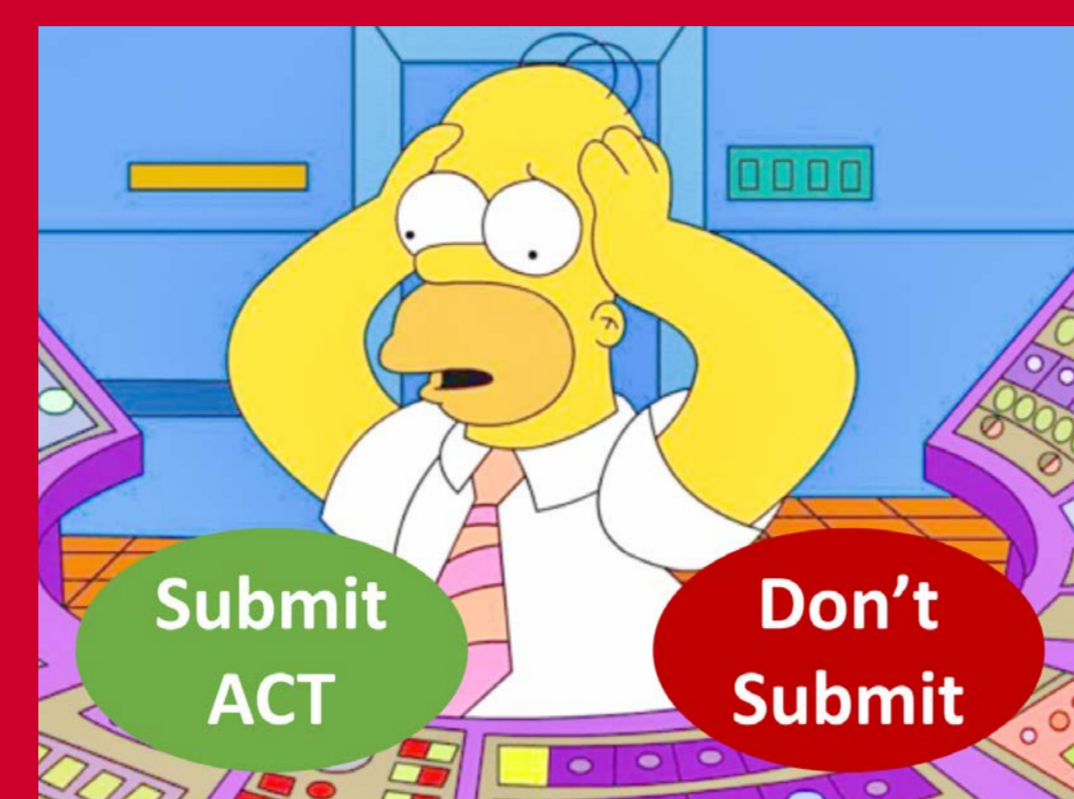
### Study 2 (information receiver)

- 301 Prolific Participants evaluate applicants
  - Drawn from Study 1 choices
- Rank two pools of 10 applicants each
  - Some profiles don't include ACT scores
- Guess the missing ACT scores
- Missing reasons (between-participants)
  - Strategically withheld (from Study 1)
  - Randomly dropped
  - No reason provided

S1 & S2: measure K-level strategic reasoning

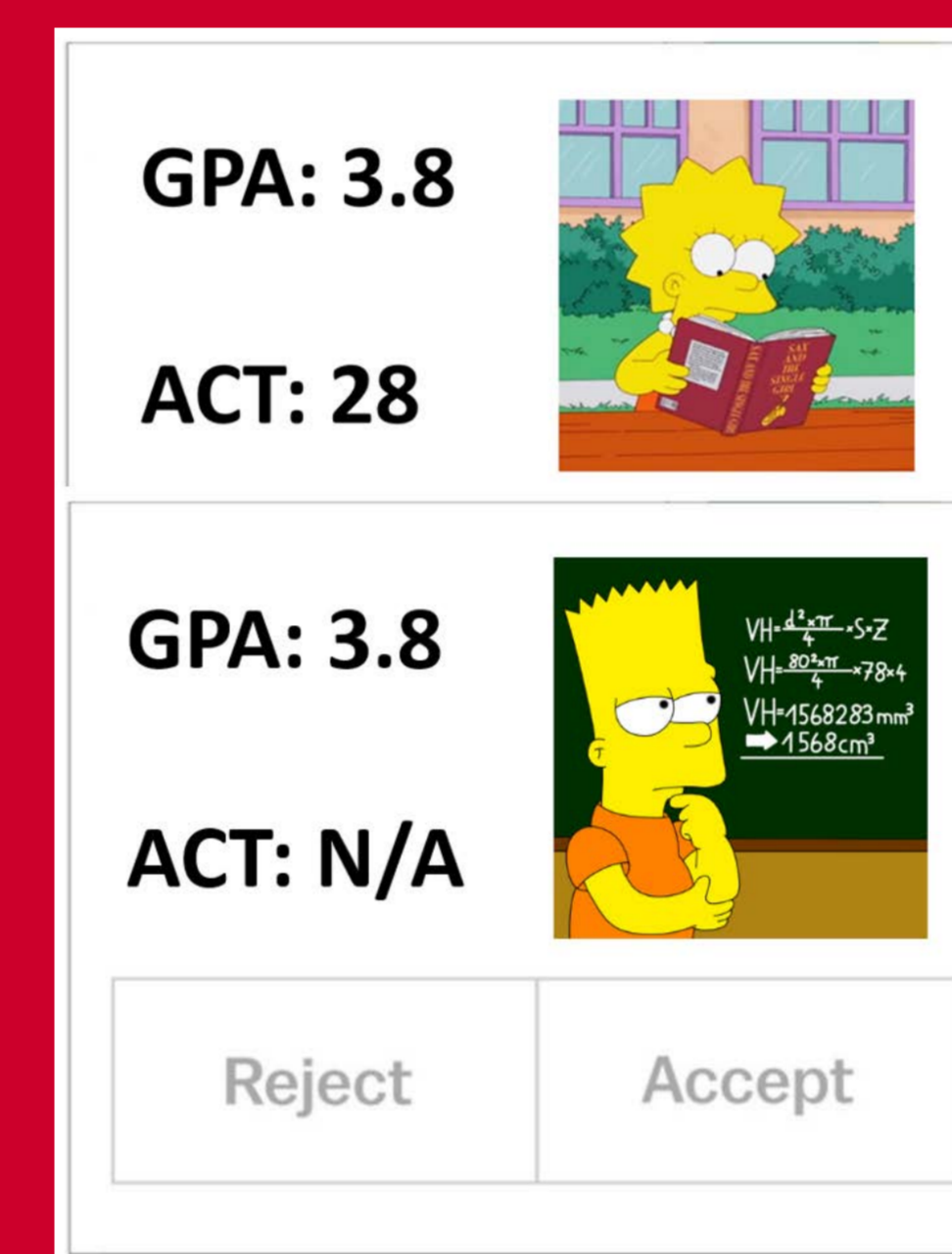
# STRATEGIC THINKING IN DISCLOSING AND UNRAVELING OF HIDDEN INFORMATION

## Key Findings

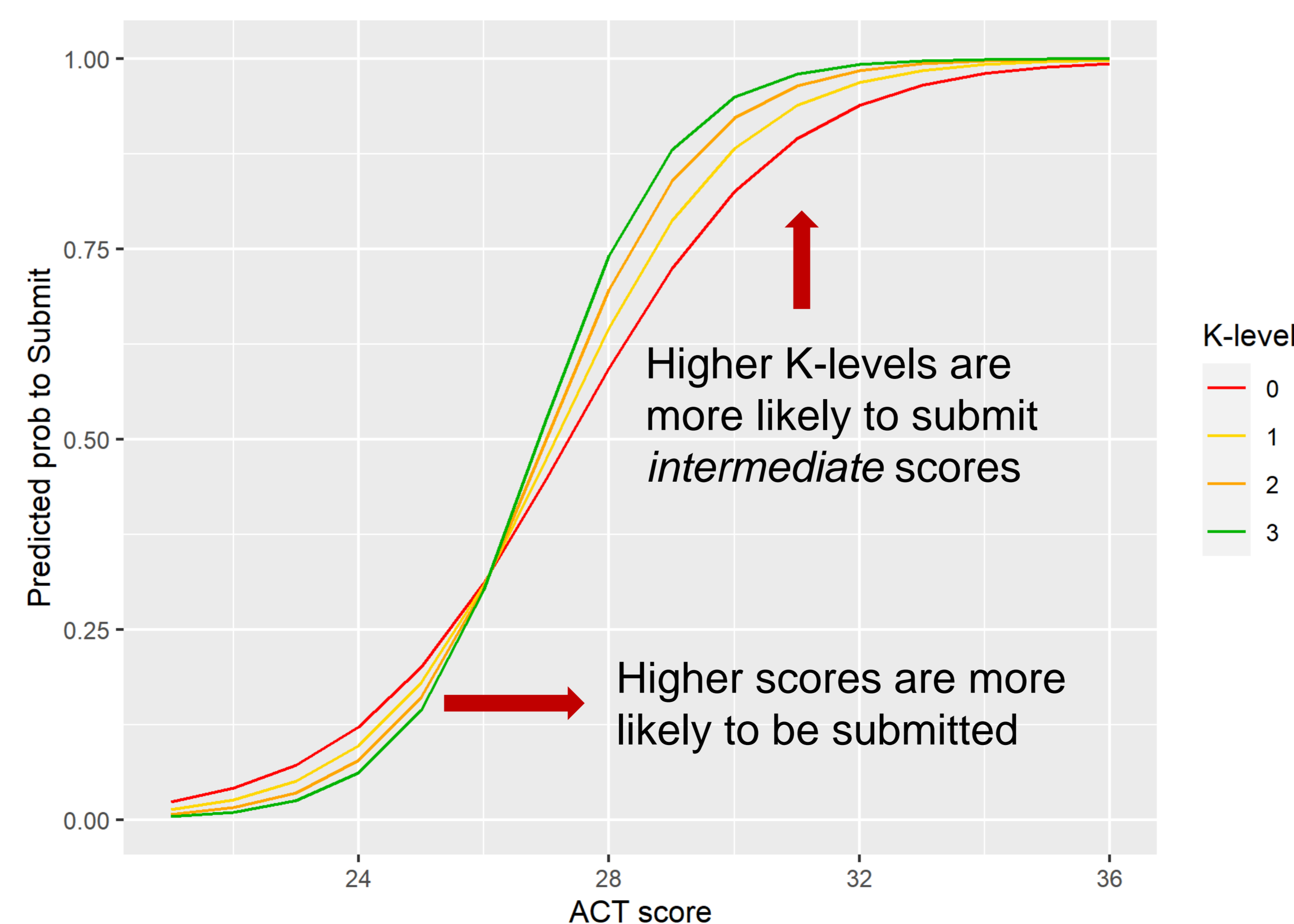


- Tendency to submit intermediate ACT scores rises with higher K-levels

- Applicants without ACT scores receive worse evaluations
- But higher K-levels are more forgiving of those "advised to withhold" their scores



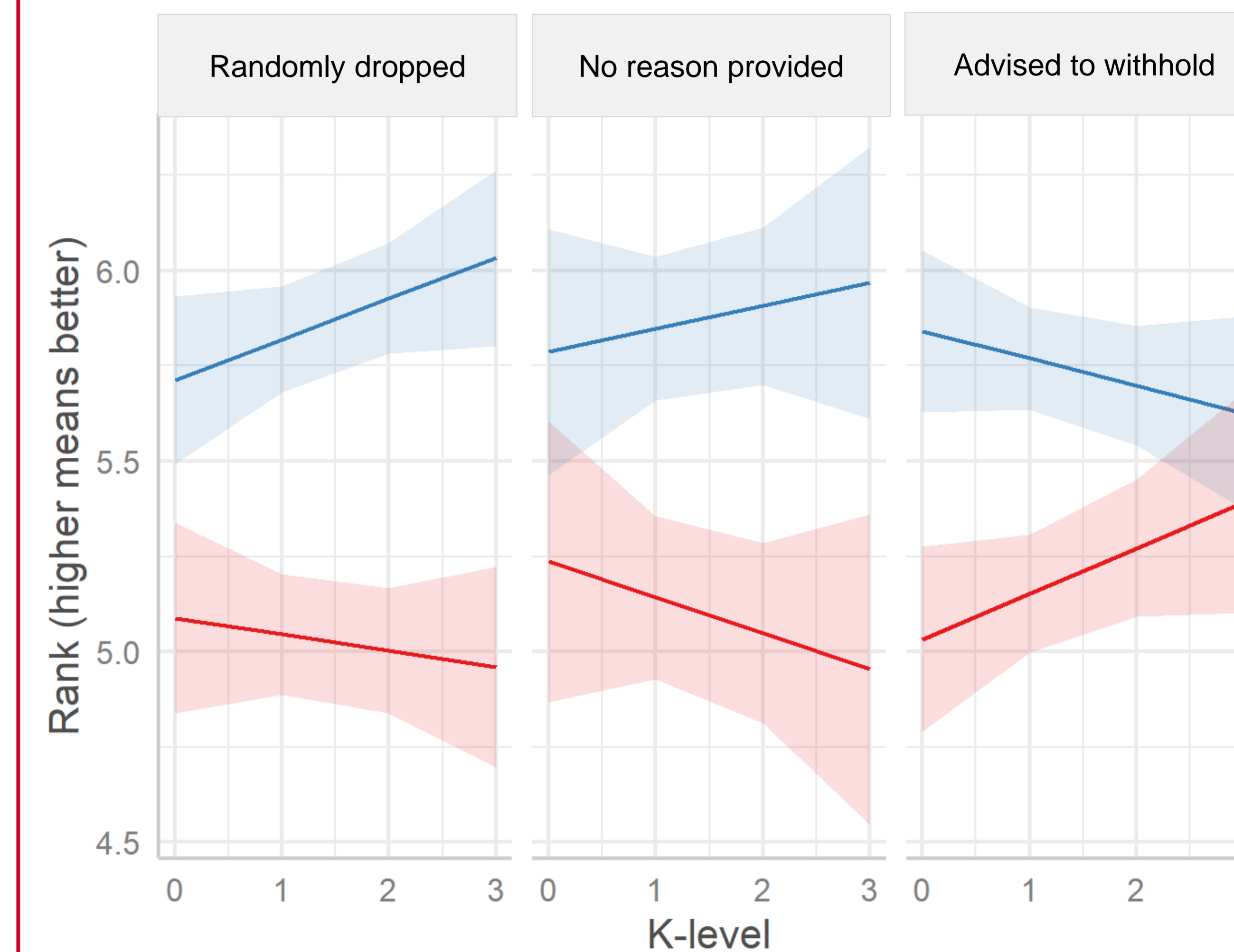
## Study 1: information senders



## Study 2: information receivers

Applicant's ACT available?  Yes  No

Rank of applicants by ACT omission reasons



- Applicants without ACT scores fare worse,
  - Controlling for actual ACT
  - Beta = 0.63, SE = 0.14,  $p < 0.001$
- Being informed that applicant was advised to withhold ACT attenuates this effect
  - Beta = -0.28, SE = 0.11,  $p = 0.013$
  - Especially among higher k-levels (Beta = -0.34, SE = 0.11,  $p < 0.001$ )

## Conclusions and Limitations

- Higher strategic thinkers report more, maybe expecting others to unravel
- Evaluators are skeptical of omitted scores
- But response to reasons were unexpected
  - Instructions about "advising to withhold" may suggest a different process

### Key References

1. Bennett, C. T. (2022). Untested Admissions: Examining Changes in Application Behaviors and Student Demographics Under Test-Optional Policies. *American Educational Research Journal*, 59(1), 180–216.
2. Jin, G. Z., Luca, M., & Martin, D. (2021). Is no news (perceived as) bad news? An experimental investigation of information disclosure. *American Economic Journal: Microeconomics*, 13(2), 141-173.