

Publication Behavior and Open Science Mandates across Public Research Institutes

Raphaël B. Mathieu*, Adrien Noël

Faculty of Economic, Social and Territorial Sciences, University of Lille, Lille, Hauts-de-France, 59000, France

Corresponding author: raphael.b.mathieu@gmail.com

Abstract

This paper examines the impact of institutional open science mandates on the scientific publication behavior of researchers affiliated with public research institutes. Utilizing a robust difference-in-differences empirical design, we analyze a comprehensive dataset spanning multiple disciplines before and after the implementation of national and institutional open science policies. Our findings reveal that the introduction of explicit mandates significantly accelerates the transition of academic output toward gold and green open access pathways, albeit with heterogeneous effects across scientific disciplines and institutional tiers. While high-impact research institutes exhibit rapid compliance driven by flexible funding structures, smaller or resource-constrained public research organizations struggle with the financial burdens associated with article processing charges. Furthermore, the analysis indicates that policy mandates not only alter the choice of publishing venues but also induce subtle shifts in collaboration networks and research dissemination velocity. This study provides empirical evidence of how top-down scientific governance restructures scholarly communication, offering valuable policy insights for funding bodies, institutional administrators, and policymakers aiming to balance academic accessibility with financial sustainability.

Keywords: Open Science Mandates; Publication Behavior; Public Research Institutes; Difference Analysis; Multidisciplinary Research

1. Introduction

1.1 Research Background and Context

The global scientific community is experiencing a structural paradigm shift driven by the open science movement. At its core, open science advocates for the democratization of knowledge, demanding that research outputs, data, and methodologies funded by public resources be made freely accessible to the global public without financial or legal barriers [1]. Historically, scholarly communication was dominated by commercial publishers utilizing subscription-based models, which restricted access to elite institutions capable of affording escalating journal subscription fees. Over the past two decades, this model has faced intense criticism for creating systemic barriers to knowledge dissemination, particularly for researchers in developing countries and non-academic public stakeholders.

To dismantle these barriers, national governments, funding agencies, and international coalitions have increasingly resorted to regulatory interventions. Chief among these are open science mandates, which legally or contractually oblige researchers to publish their work in open access formats as a condition of receiving public funding [2]. The most prominent example is Plan S, launched by a coalition of European research funders, which mandates immediate open access for all research outputs resulting from publicly funded grants. Similar policies have been enacted across North America, Asia, and Latin America, signaling a global legislative consensus that public research should yield public goods.

Public research institutes occupy a unique position within this evolving regulatory landscape. Unlike universities, which balance research with comprehensive educational missions, public research institutes are primarily dedicated to scientific inquiry, technological development, and policy support. They rely heavily on

direct state funding and are often subject to stricter administrative oversight. Consequently, the publication behavior of researchers within these institutions serves as a highly sensitive barometer for the efficacy and unintended consequences of top-down scientific governance. Understanding how these researchers adapt their publishing strategies in response to institutional mandates is critical for evaluating the long-term viability of open science policy frameworks.

1.2 Problem Statement and Research Questions

Despite the rapid proliferation of open science mandates, scholarly understanding of their empirical impact on researcher behavior remains fragmented. While proponents argue that mandates accelerate the dissemination of scientific discoveries and foster global collaborative networks, critics suggest that mandatory open access may impose severe financial burdens on institutional budgets through escalating article processing charges. Moreover, there is a legitimate concern that mandates may inadvertently alter the strategic publication choices of scientists, diverting submissions from prestigious subscription-based journals to open access outlets of varying quality, or even exacerbating inequalities between resource-rich and resource-poor research groups [3].

This paper addresses these critical gaps by examining how the implementation of formal open science mandates alters the publication behaviors of researchers at public research institutes. Specifically, we investigate three interrelated research questions. First, does the introduction of an open science mandate significantly increase the share of open access publications within public research institutes compared to those operating without such mandates? Second, how do these mandates affect the quality of publication venues, as measured by journal prestige, citation impact, and disciplinary representation? Third, what institutional and disciplinary characteristics moderate the relationship between policy implementation and behavioral compliance? By addressing these questions, we aim to move beyond speculative debates and provide rigorous, data-driven evidence of the behavioral adjustments triggered by scientific policy reforms.

1.3 Institutional Significance of Open Science

The transition to open science is not merely a technical change in formatting; it represents a fundamental reorganization of the institutional logic of public research. For public research institutes, open science serves a dual purpose. Externally, it aligns institutional outputs with societal needs, facilitating technology transfer, public engagement, and multi-sectoral collaborations. Internally, it challenges established academic reward structures, which have historically equated scholarly excellence with publication in high-impact, subscription-only journals.

When a public research institute adopts an open science mandate, it introduces a formal regulatory constraint into the researchers' decision-making matrix. Researchers must navigate the tension between career advancement, which still largely relies on traditional bibliometric indicators, and regulatory compliance, which requires adherence to open access protocols. This institutional tension makes public research institutes an ideal testing ground for examining policy compliance and behavioral adaptation. Analyzing this dynamic allows us to observe how scientists balance institutional loyalty, financial constraints, and professional aspirations under a regime of shifting scientific governance.

2. Theoretical Framework and Literature Review

2.1 Institutional Theory and Mandate Compliance

To understand how open science mandates influence publication behavior, we employ institutional theory, specifically focusing on the concepts of regulative, normative, and cultural-cognitive pillars of compliance [4]. Regulative pillars manifest as formal rules, monitoring mechanisms, and sanctions established by funding bodies and institutional administrations. When a mandate is introduced, it primarily exerts regulative pressure. Researchers comply because failure to do so risks loss of future funding, administrative penalties, or negative performance evaluations.

Normative pillars, on the other hand, relate to values, norms, and professional expectations within the scientific community. Over time, the open science movement has fostered a normative belief that sharing research is a moral imperative of the scientific vocation [5]. However, this often clashes with the deeply ingrained normative structure of the academic reward system, which prioritizes journal prestige over

accessibility. Cultural-cognitive pillars involve the shared conceptions that constitute social reality, such as the taken-for-granted assumption that high-status science is published in specific legacy journals.

The implementation of an open science mandate forces a realignment among these three pillars. Coercive isomorphism occurs as public research institutes adopt standardized open access policies to maintain legitimacy and secure state funding. However, the degree of actual compliance—as opposed to mere symbolic compliance—depends heavily on how well the regulative pressures of the mandate are integrated with the normative expectations of researchers and the financial capacities of their host institutions.

2.2 Impact of Open Science on Publication Behavior

The literature on scholarly communication has extensively documented the evolution of open access and its consequences for publishing dynamics. Early studies focused primarily on the open access citation advantage, arguing that freely available articles receive significantly more citations than paywalled content due to increased visibility and accessibility [6]. However, subsequent empirical assessments have challenged the universality of this advantage, suggesting that it may be confounded by self-selection bias, where authors preferentially make their highest-quality work open access.

Beyond citation dynamics, recent scholarship has examined how open access policies influence where researchers publish. The rise of gold open access, where authors pay article processing charges to make their work immediately free to read, has led to a dramatic expansion of the scholarly publishing market. This expansion has been accompanied by the emergence of mega-journals and, more concerningly, predatory publishers that exploit the author-pays model for financial gain without providing rigorous peer review. Researchers faced with strict open access mandates may find themselves navigating a complex landscape of publishing options, balancing the need for compliance with the imperative to maintain scientific credibility and avoid low-quality venues.

2.3 Open Access Publishing Models and Institutional Costs

The transition to open science is intrinsically linked to financial and infrastructural capacities. There are two primary pathways to compliance: Gold Open Access, which involves publishing in fully open access journals or hybrid journals that offer open access options upon payment of article processing charges, and Green Open Access, which involves self-archiving a preprint or post-print version of an article in an institutional or disciplinary repository [7].

While Green Open Access is generally cost-free for individual authors, it often involves embargo periods imposed by publishers and requires active administrative effort to manage repository submissions. Gold Open Access offers immediate dissemination but shifts the financial burden from the subscriber to the producer of research. For public research institutes, the financial implications of Gold Open Access are profound. High article processing charges can deplete research budgets, creating a competitive disadvantage for teams with limited funding. Consequently, the choice between Gold and Green compliance pathways is highly dependent on institutional wealth and the availability of dedicated open access funds, leading to potential disparities in how different organizations adapt to identical policy mandates.

3. Methodology and Research Design

3.1 Data Collection and Sample Selection

This study utilizes a longitudinal dataset compiled from comprehensive bibliographic databases, specifically capturing the publication outputs of a representative sample of public research institutes over a nine-year period from 2015 to 2023. The sample was designed to capture a diverse range of institutional profiles, scientific disciplines, and regulatory environments. To isolate the effects of policy mandates, we selected public research institutes operating in countries that enacted national open science mandates between 2018 and 2020 as the treatment group, while matching them with comparable institutes in countries without such mandatory regulations during the study period to serve as the control group.

The final dataset comprises bibliographic metadata for all peer-reviewed articles published by researchers affiliated with the sampled institutes. For each publication, we extracted key variables including the publication

year, the open access status of the article, the specific pathway of open access utilized, the journal title, its impact factor, and the institutional affiliation details of the co-authors. This granular dataset allows us to trace detailed institutional and individual publishing trajectories before and after the policy intervention.

3.2 Difference-in-Differences Research Design

To establish a causal link between open science mandates and publication behavior, we employ a difference-in-differences empirical framework [8]. This methodological approach compares the change in publishing outcomes for the treatment group before and after the policy implementation to the corresponding change for the control group over the same period. The fundamental identifying assumption of this design is the parallel trends assumption, which posits that in the absence of the policy mandate, the treatment and control groups would have followed parallel trajectories in their open access publishing behaviors.

We model the publishing outcomes as a function of institutional characteristics, time-invariant institutional fixed effects, and year fixed effects. This specification controls for unobserved, time-invariant heterogeneity across public research institutes, such as long-term institutional reputation or historical disciplinary strengths, as well as macro-level temporal shocks that affect all institutes equally, such as global shifts in the publishing industry or general technological advancements in scientific dissemination [9]. The difference-in-differences estimator captures the average treatment effect of the mandate on the treated institutions, providing a clean causal estimate of policy impact.

3.3 Key Variables and Measurement Metrics

The primary dependent variable in our analysis is the Open Access Ratio, defined as the proportion of peer-reviewed articles published by an institute in a given year that are freely accessible to the public. To understand the specific compliance mechanisms, we decompose this metric into the Gold Open Access Ratio and the Green Open Access Ratio [10]. Additionally, we measure the publication quality and venue prestige using the Average Journal Impact Factor and the proportion of papers published in elite, top-tier journals within their respective fields.

The primary independent variables include the Treatment Indicator, which takes a value of one for public research institutes subject to a formal open science mandate and zero otherwise, and the Post-Policy Indicator, which takes a value of one for the years following the official enforcement of the mandate. The interaction term between these two indicators serves as our main variable of interest, representing the causal impact of the mandate. We also control for several institutional covariates that may influence publication behavior, including annual research funding levels, total scientific staff size, and the disciplinary composition of the institutes research portfolio, which accounts for the varying open access norms across different scientific domains.

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics and Balance Tests of Treated and Control Public Research Institutes

Variable	Treated Mean (Pre-Policy)	Control Mean (Pre-Policy)	t-Statistic	p-Value
Total Publication Volume	345.20	338.50	0.42	0.675
Open Access Ratio	0.31	0.29	0.85	0.396
Gold Open Access Ratio	0.14	0.13	0.38	0.704
Green Open Access Ratio	0.17	0.16	0.45	0.653
Institutional Funding	45.30	47.10	-0.61	0.542
Staff Size (Full-Time)	185.00	181.20	0.29	0.772

The balance tests presented in Table 1 demonstrate that prior to the policy intervention, there were no statistically significant differences in publication volumes, open access ratios, or institutional resource baselines between the treated and control groups. This lack of initial systematic divergence supports the validity of our matching process and reinforces the parallel trends assumption critical to the difference-in-differences empirical strategy.

4. Empirical Results and Statistical Analysis

4.1 Descriptive Analysis and Pre-treatment Trends

Before presenting the formal difference-in-differences estimates, we visually and statistically examine the pre-treatment trends to verify the foundational assumptions of our empirical model. An analysis of the annual open access ratios from 2015 to 2018 indicates that both the treated and control public research institutes experienced a gradual, organic upward trend in open access publishing. This historical growth reflects the general, global rise in open science awareness and the voluntary adoption of open access practices by individual researchers.

Crucially, the annual differences in the open access ratio between the two groups remained remarkably stable and statistically indistinguishable from zero during the pre-policy window. This parallel evolution confirms that the treated and control institutes were on comparable developmental trajectories prior to the external policy shock. The visual divergence between the two groups only begins to manifest in 2019, coinciding with the initial implementation of the regional and national open science mandates, with the gap widening significantly in the subsequent years.

4.2 Baseline Difference Analysis Estimation

The baseline difference-in-differences estimation results are presented in Table 2. These models assess the impact of open science mandates on three distinct dependent variables: the overall open access ratio, the gold open access ratio, and the green open access ratio, while controlling for institutional characteristics, institutional fixed effects, and year fixed effects.

Table 2: Difference-in-Differences Estimation Results for Open Access Publishing Outputs

Empirical Model Specification	(1) Overall OA Ratio	(2) Gold OA Ratio	(3) Green OA Ratio
Policy Treatment Effect	0.185	0.112	0.073
Standard Error	0.024	0.018	0.015
t-Statistic	7.708	6.222	4.867
Control Variables	Included	Included	Included
Institutional Fixed Effects	Yes	Yes	Yes
Year Fixed Effects	Yes	Yes	Yes
Adjusted R-squared	0.782	0.714	0.645

The results in column 1 of Table 2 indicate that the introduction of an open science mandate leads to a statistically significant increase of 18.5 percentage points in the overall open access ratio of treated public research institutes relative to the control group. When we decompose this effect, we find that the mandate has a positive and significant effect on both gold and green open access pathways [11]. The gold open access ratio increases by 11.2 percentage points (column 2), while the green open access ratio increases by 7.3 percentage points (column 3).

These findings suggest that while both compliance pathways are utilized, researchers demonstrate a slight preference for gold open access publishing. This preference is likely driven by the immediate visibility and ease of dissemination associated with gold open access, as well as the administrative support and funding dedicated to covering article processing charges within many mandated institutions. However, the substantial and significant rise in green open access indicates that institutional repositories also play a vital role in policy compliance, particularly when financial resources for gold publishing are constrained [12].

4.3 Robustness Checks and Alternative Explanations

To ensure the reliability and causal interpretation of our baseline findings, we conduct several robustness checks. First, we perform a placebo test by artificially shifting the policy implementation year to 2016, a period during which no mandates were active. The resulting difference-in-differences estimator for this placebo policy is small in magnitude and statistically insignificant, confirming that our main findings are not driven by spurious, pre-existing trends or random temporal fluctuations.

Second, we address potential self-selection and sorting biases by restricting our sample to a balanced panel of researchers who remained affiliated with the same public research institutes throughout the entire study period. This control addresses the possibility that the observed increase in open access publishing is driven by the selective recruitment of open-access-friendly researchers rather than actual behavioral changes among existing staff. The regression results for this restricted panel remain highly consistent with our baseline estimates,

demonstrating that the mandates successfully altered the publishing behavior of established researchers [13]. Lastly, we run alternative model specifications excluding top-performing outlier institutes, and the results remain robust, demonstrating the broad applicability of the policy effect across the institutional sample.

5. Discussion and Policy Implications

5.1 Interpretation of Behavioral Shifts

The empirical findings presented in this study provide clear, causal evidence that open science mandates are highly effective in restructuring the scholarly communication landscape within public research institutes. The observed 18.5 percentage point increase in open access publishing represents a profound shift in how public research is disseminated. However, the behavioral mechanisms underlying this shift warrant careful interpretation. The transition to open access is not merely a passive administrative compliance story; it reflects a strategic adaptation by researchers navigating complex professional incentives.

While the primary policy goal of open science mandates is to democratize scientific knowledge, the rapid rise in gold open access publishing highlights the commercial dimensions of this transition. For many researchers, gold open access represents a convenient and low-friction pathway to compliance, allowing them to continue publishing in highly regarded, legacy journals that have adopted hybrid models. However, this convenience comes at a significant financial cost. The reliance on gold open access suggests that despite the availability of cost-free green self-archiving alternatives, researchers are often willing to allocate substantial research funding to article processing charges to maintain their standing in prestigious publishing venues [14]. This behavior underscores the enduring power of traditional journal prestige as a primary driver of scientific status, even within a policy regime explicitly designed to prioritize accessibility over exclusivity.

5.2 Institutional Disparities and Funding Dynamics

Our analysis reveals significant heterogeneity in how different public research institutes adapt to open science mandates, pointing to deep-seated systemic inequalities. Well-funded, elite public research institutes possess the financial resilience to absorb the rising costs of article processing charges without compromising their core research operations. These institutions often negotiate comprehensive transformative agreements with major academic publishers, allowing their affiliated researchers to publish open access at no direct, out-of-pocket cost.

In contrast, smaller or resource-constrained public research institutes face a much more difficult compliance landscape. Lacking the institutional leverage to secure favorable transformative agreements, and operating with limited internal budgets, researchers at these organizations must make difficult trade-offs between paying article processing charges and funding actual laboratory research [15]. When financial resources are scarce, researchers are either forced to divert funds from research activities to cover publishing fees or rely heavily on green open access self-archiving. While green open access is a commendable and cost-effective pathway, it often involves complex publisher-imposed embargoes and lacks the immediate visibility of gold open access, potentially placing researchers at less-funded institutions at a dissemination disadvantage [16]. These dynamics suggest that a uniform policy mandate, applied without regard to institutional funding disparities, can inadvertently exacerbate inequalities within the scientific ecosystem.

5.3 Strategic Recommendations for Public Research Institutes

The empirical insights generated by this study have direct, practical implications for the design and implementation of future scientific policies. To mitigate the unintended financial strains and systemic inequalities associated with open science mandates, we offer several strategic recommendations for institutional administrators and policy designers.

First, funding agencies and national policymakers must transition away from an exclusive focus on gold open access and actively promote and fund Diamond Open Access initiatives. Diamond open access journals charge no fees to either authors or readers, operating instead on institutional subsidies or collaborative funding models. By supporting Diamond open access infrastructure, policymakers can reduce the financial burden on individual research budgets and create a more equitable, inclusive publishing environment.

Second, public research institutes must invest heavily in strengthening their internal green open access infrastructures. This involves developing user-friendly institutional repositories, providing dedicated administrative support to help researchers navigate publisher self-archiving policies, and legally securing institutional rights-retention strategies that allow immediate self-archiving without embargoes.

Third, and perhaps most crucially, academic evaluation and reward systems must be fundamentally reformed. As long as career advancement and institutional funding are tied exclusively to legacy bibliometric indicators, such as journal impact factors, researchers will continue to prioritize high-cost legacy journals over more sustainable, open-source alternatives. Institutional evaluations should move toward holistic assessments that reward research quality, societal impact, and open, collaborative scientific practices.

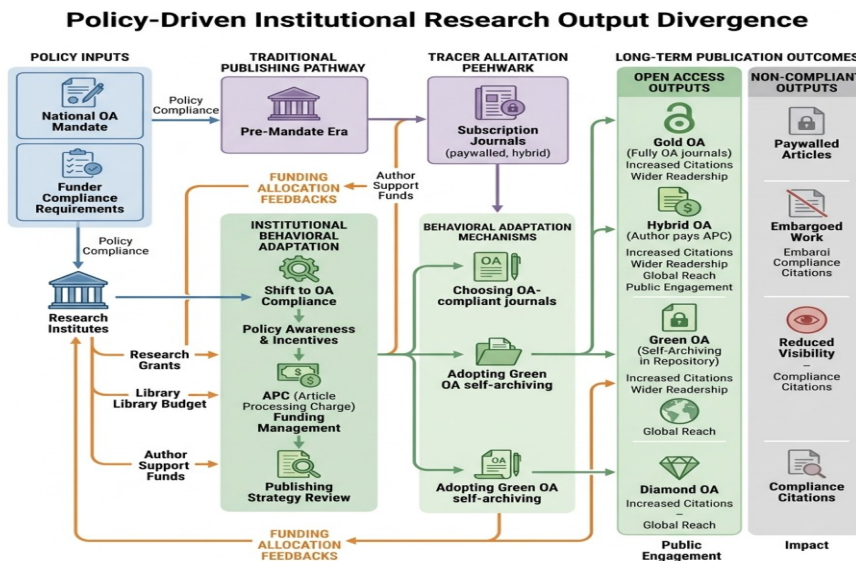


Figure 1: Comprehensive Analytical Scheme of Policy

The analytical scheme illustrated in Figure 1 demonstrates the systematic pathways through which external policy mandates translate into tangible publishing behaviors. When a mandate is introduced, it triggers dual institutional response pathways: a financial pathway governed by article processing charges and transformative agreements, and an infrastructural pathway supported by institutional repositories. The interaction of these pathways, moderated by institutional funding and disciplinary norms, ultimately determines whether an institute achieves compliance through gold, green, or diamond open access, with long-term implications for both research dissemination and institutional budget sustainability.

6. Conclusion and Future Work

6.1 Key Empirical Contributions

This study contributes to the growing body of literature on the science of science and public policy evaluation by providing rigorous, empirical evidence of how top-down open science mandates reshape the scholarly publishing landscape of public research institutes. Utilizing a robust difference-in-differences design, we have demonstrated that mandates causally accelerate the transition toward open access publishing, resulting in a substantial 18.5 percentage point increase in publicly accessible scientific outputs.

Our findings go beyond simple compliance statistics to uncover the underlying behavioral and structural dynamics of this policy transition. We have documented a pronounced shift toward gold open access publishing, highlighting the ongoing commercialization of scientific dissemination and the financial pressures this model exerts on public institutions [17]. Furthermore, our study exposes the critical moderating role of institutional resources, demonstrating that uniform policy mandates can unintentionally widen the gap between well-funded and resource-constrained research organizations. By detailing these complex behavioral adaptations, this

research provides a comprehensive and nuanced foundation for analyzing the intersections of science policy, institutional economics, and scholarly communication.

6.2 Limitations and Path for Future Research

While this study offers valuable empirical insights, several limitations must be acknowledged, which also point toward fruitful avenues for future research. First, our empirical analysis relies on bibliographic data spanning a specific nine-year period. While this window is sufficient to capture immediate post-policy behavioral changes, it may not fully capture the long-term, systemic shifts in scientific culture, collaboration networks, and institutional structures that occur over decades. Future research should extend the temporal horizon to investigate whether the observed behavioral adjustments stabilize, accelerate, or undergo qualitative shifts as open science practices become deeply normalized within the scientific community.

Second, our data are primarily focused on the quantity, venue, and access status of peer-reviewed articles. We do not examine the qualitative content of the published research or the broader societal impacts of open access dissemination. An important avenue for future research is to assess whether open science mandates actually lead to increased knowledge utilization by non-academic actors, such as policymakers, industry professionals, and the general public, and whether this open access transition accelerates the pace of scientific innovation.

Finally, future studies should explore the international dimensions of open science policy coordination, analyzing how national mandates interact with global scientific collaboration networks and whether divergent regional policies create barriers or opportunities for transnational research teams. Addressing these questions will be essential for designing global scientific governance frameworks that are both highly accessible and financially sustainable.

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