

Policing Politicians: Citizen Empowerment and Political Accountability in Africa¹

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August 2007

Abstract

Does greater transparency improve governmental performance and increase political accountability? In this paper, we describe a unique field experiment designed to estimate the impact of increased access to information about what happens in the Ugandan Parliament on three outcome variables of interest (i) how members of parliament (MPs) perform (ii) voter attitudes and behavior and (iii) electoral outcomes. Our strategy involves generating, together with the support of the Ugandan Parliament and the Africa Leadership Institute, an annual scorecard reporting on the performance of MPs. In a random sub-sample of constituencies, the scorecard will be disseminated through extensive constituency-level workshops in which MPs are given the opportunity to defend their records and field questions from voters and opposition candidates. The selection of sites for dissemination will be public information; in particular, they will be known to MPs four years in advance of the next parliamentary elections in 2011. Mechanisms that work through the impact of the information on individual voter attitudes and through effects on politician and party political behavior are distinguished by combining a survey experiment with the randomizes dissemination strategy. In an early assessment of the plausibility of the strategy, we briefed a random set of Ugandan MPs on the scorecard design in March 2007. These briefings produced a 50% increase in the rate of participation in parliamentary debates among these MPs.

¹ This paper was prepared for presentation at the annual meeting of the American Political Science Association, Chicago, 2007. We thank our partners in the field at AFLI and Nathan Falck who played a central role in developing the Scorecard and implementing the early intervention described in this paper during the past year.

Identifying the conditions under which politicians are responsive to citizens' needs and preferences is a central concern of political scientists. As Besley and Burgess (2002) argue, "it is particularly poignant in low-income countries where, in the absence of market opportunities, vulnerable populations rely in large measure on state action for their survival." Thus, unsurprisingly, observers greeted Africa's wave of democratization in the 1990s with guarded optimism, anticipating that regular elections might provide strong incentives for better governmental performance.

There is some evidence that Africa's democratic experiments are producing governments that better protect the rights and interests of their constituents. 44 of 48 countries in Sub-Saharan Africa held at least one contested election between 1989 and 2003, and 20 mounted three consecutive elections. While some of the early elections were admittedly imperfect, Lindberg (2006) argues that countries exhibit a trend toward elections of higher quality over time. He suggests that the "mere holding of de jure participatory and competitive elections tends to be self-reinforcing and improves with greater experience," and that elections generate subsequent improvements in the protection of rights and liberties (2006, 17). Posner and Young (2007) demonstrate further that "formal rules of the game" constrain African politicians in ways that they previously have not; while three-quarters of African politicians who left office in the 1960s and 1970s did so through coups, violent overthrows, or assassinations, the share replaced through irregular means dropped to just 19 percent after 2000. The modal means by which heads of state in Africa now leave office is voluntary resignation, generally as a consequence of constitutional term limits. With respect to the provision of public goods that benefit the disadvantaged, Stasavage (2005) shows that multiparty elections increased education spending by 1.1% of GDP, while Kudamatsu (2006) provides evidence that Africa's democratization has yielded improvements in infant mortality of nearly 2 percentage points.

But there are also reasons to be concerned that the rise of electoral democracy in Africa might not fulfill its promise of greater political accountability and better performance. A wave of recent scholarship highlights the emergence of "hybrid" or "semi-authoritarian" regimes which combine "the rhetorical acceptance of liberal democracy, the existence of some formal democratic institutions... with essentially illiberal or even authoritarian traits." (Ottaway 2003, 3; Lucan and Way 2002, forthcoming) These governments allow little real competition for power, thereby diminishing government accountability. They are also

abundant in Africa, where multiparty elections often fail to produce working parliaments or other institutions capable of holding the executive in check. By some accounts, of the 15 African countries that exhibited “competitive authoritarian” characteristics in the mid-1990s, 12 have not progressed subsequently toward greater democracy (Lucan and Way, forthcoming). These realities are consistent with the skeptics who warned that elections would be an insufficient corrective to patterns of neopatrimonial politics overseen by an all-powerful chief executive (Bratton 1998; Chabal and Daloz 1999). Moreover, there is growing evidence that political liberalization may not be sufficient to generate greater investments in public goods. Wantchekon (2003) shows that candidates employ patronage appeals to great effect in democratic Benin, whereas platforms constructed around investments in public goods yield few electoral benefits. Kasara (2006) demonstrates that, expensive sub-national administrative districts proliferated in Kenya as an electoral strategy by the ruling party to win the votes of minority ethnic groups. Both studies suggest, as Callaghy (1993) and Van de Walle (2001, 2003) cautioned, that electoral politics may not generate improvements in economic and social policies, but only reinforce patterns of patronage. Finally, recent surveys of public opinion in Africa suggest that popular support for democracy has drifted downward over time as citizens gain more experience with it (Bratton 2004). Optimism about the benefits of democracy marked the aftermath of founding elections, especially where the previous regime was repressive, yet popular exuberance often dissipated as “political life reverted to familiar patterns.” (148) Alternations in power can resurrect support for and faith in democratic processes, but alternations take place all too rarely: incumbent presidents in Africa still win reelection more than 85% of the time (Posner and Young 2007).

One reason why the advent of electoral democracy in Africa may be insufficient to improve governance and accountability is that voters typically do not observe the actions of politicians and may be uninformed about their behavior or their preferences (Besley and Burgess 2002). This information asymmetry leaves room for politicians to act opportunistically, to shirk their duties, and to ignore the needs or preferences of the citizenry, even in an electoral democracy. Thus, some have proposed that a key mechanism for enhancing the performance and accountability of politicians is greater transparency (Sen 1999). With better information, voters can select higher quality politicians and hold poorly performing ones accountable at the polls (Besley 2005). At the same time, though, greater

transparency may induce poorly performing politicians to disguise their opportunistic behavior or shirking, decreasing the likelihood of detection, thereby offsetting its positive impact.

Does greater transparency improve governmental performance and increase political accountability? To address this question, we study the impact of a unique accountability mechanism – Uganda’s Parliamentary Scorecard – on the behavior of members of parliament (MPs), the attitudes of voters, and ultimately, on electoral outcomes. Produced annually by a local NGO beginning in 2007 (in partnership with Columbia and Stanford universities), the scorecard will report on initiatives undertaken and positions advocated by MPs in plenary and committee sessions, activities in their home constituencies, and provide relative rankings of each MP compared to other MPs in their own party and in Parliament as a whole. We can avoid the identification issues that plague previous studies of the relationship between transparency and accountability through the use of experimental designs.

This paper describes our empirical strategy and provides some early results on the responsiveness of Ugandan MPs to the availability of increased information about their behavior. The overall strategy relies on randomization in the dissemination of political information across political constituencies. Although the scorecard will be produced for all MPs, we will generate exogenous variation in the degree to which politicians and voters are exposed to the scorecard by running extensive dissemination workshops with voters in a sample of randomly selected geographic constituencies. The selection of these sites will take place 4 years in advance of the 2011 elections. From the perspective of politicians, these workshops represent a substantial increase in the efficacy of the accountability mechanism: under present conditions rural voters will get almost no information about the performance of their MP from the release of the scorecard in Kampala, Uganda’s capital. Insofar as information effects work through improved voter access to information, MPs in remote areas can expect this new information to be of little relevance for them. However, knowing in advance that information will be disseminated directly to their constituencies should increase the marginal benefits accruing to improved performance. This empirical strategy will permit us to compare the parliamentary performance of MPs, voter satisfaction, and reelection rates across constituencies in which the scorecard was disseminated to voters and those where it was not.

Beyond describing the general empirical strategy, this paper also reports the results of an early test of the efficacy of the accountability mechanism. Between March and May 2007, a random sub-sample of 101 MPs (out of a total of 296 elected MPs) was invited to receive detailed briefings about the scorecard in advance of its release to the public in the fall. In total, 34 MPs received the briefings (including 3 who were not invited to receive them). We look for evidence that those MPs who were made aware of the scorecard changed their subsequent behavior in Parliament in an effort to improve their performance. Specifically, we compare the rate of participation in parliamentary debates in the month prior to the intervention (February) to participation in the month after (mid-June to mid-July, after parliament was reconvened for a new session). Participation rates in February for the treated group were statistically identical to (and substantively lower than) those of the control group (38% compared to 40%) and, importantly, participation rates were identical for those that were selected and accepted treatment and those that were selected and did not. Strikingly, however, we find that in July, the rate of participation for treated MPs is 50% higher than for control MPs (53% compared to 36%). We take this direct evidence of the impact of knowledge of the scorecard on parliamentary behavior as encouraging preliminary evidence of the power of transparency in the Ugandan context.

The remainder of this paper is organized as follows. We begin by reviewing the literature on transparency and accountability and exploring a set of causal channels through which information might impact the performance of politicians. We then describe the Parliamentary Scorecard project, including our strategies for measuring MPs performance and our empirical approach to estimating the impact of the dissemination intervention. We conclude with a discussion of the results of our early evaluation.

Transparency, Accountability, and Government Performance

The empirical record is clear: on their own, elections are often insufficient as a means to prevent opportunistic behavior and generate among politicians a greater responsiveness to citizens' needs and preferences. In models of political agency and political selection, information asymmetries can undermine responsiveness and impede accountability in electoral democracies through two distinct channels.

The Incentives Mechanism. The first channel, cited as early as 1816 by Jeremy Bentham (1999), emphasizes the ability of citizens to use the electoral mechanism to shape the incentives facing politicians (see also Barro 1973; Ferejohn 1986). In such models, politicians perform well because they fear being turned out of office if they do not. The extent to which they do so depends on the extent to which they value future returns from holding office. An uninformed citizenry, however, undermines the strength of the incentives mechanism and increases the scope for opportunistic politicians to shirk from their duties or to implement policies far from voters' ideal points without electoral consequences (Buchanan 1989).

Following this logic, transparency initiatives may work by creating strong incentives for politicians already in office to be on their best behavior. With access to richer information about how politicians behave once elected, voters will be in a position to hold their representatives accountable at the polls. Transparency thus provides strong incentives for politicians in electoral democracies to better represent the interests of their constituents.

A number of recent studies, some using observational data and others drawing on evidence from field experiments, have found evidence for propositions that derive from the incentives mechanism. Examining U.S. states, one study demonstrates that fiscal transparency induces greater effort on the part of politicians (Alt et al 2001). Another underscores the power of access to radio and confirms that voters with more information are more active and successful in ensuring that the political processes benefits their areas (Stromberg 2005). One study exploits a natural experiment and concludes that voter turnout rises when voters have more information about policy debates (Lassan 2005). A series of studies in India have shown similar effects: state governments are more responsive to falls in food production and crop flood damage when there is greater media penetration (Besley and Burgess 2002) and local politicians better allocate resources to those in need in communities in which villagers are literate and have the opportunity to participate in community decision-making (Besley, Pande, and Rao 2006).

In examining how transparency impacts the behavior of politicians, our paper contributes to a growing empirical literature that relies on field experiments. For example, Ferraz and Finan (2007) find that a municipal audit program in Brazil decreased the probability of reelection by 20 percent for each document corruption violation; these impacts were greater in municipalities with radio stations. Olken (2007), drawing on a randomized field experiment shows that audits reduce corruption in road-building projects.

Moreover, the impact is greatest in when village leaders face reelection within the near future. Reinikka and Svensson (2006) document the impacts of an information campaign designed to minimize the diversion of educational funding meant for local schools in Uganda. They find that schools in geographic areas with newspaper access received significantly more of the intended transfers; moreover, they offer evidence that the newspaper campaign worked because head teachers were better informed about the rules governing the grant program and the timing of the release of funds. In a second study, Reinikka and Svensson (2006) show that community monitoring of public health facilities—through a citizen report card implemented in a random subset of communities—contributes to the improvement of the quality and quantity of health care, as health unit staff exert greater effort to serve the needs of the community.

The logic of the incentives mechanism suggests the following hypotheses:

- H₁: [Voters' attitudes] Voters exposed to information about poorly performing politicians should express greater dissatisfaction with the incumbent and a decreased willingness to support his reelection.
- H₂: [Politicians' Behavior] Greater transparency will be associated with less shirking by politicians over time in advance of the next election.
- H₃: [Electoral outcomes] Greater transparency will decrease the reelection rate, vote share, and margin of victory of poorly performing incumbent politicians.

The Selection Mechanism. A second mechanism emphasizes the attributes of politicians. Without high quality information about candidates, voters are unable to “find those who are fit to serve.” (Besley 2005) Political *selection* is thus impeded in information poor environments with distressing results (Azam, Bates, Biais 2005).

Again, transparency has been proposed as the solution. Besley (2005), for example, envisions a world in which politicians differ from one another in their honesty, competence, and the extent of their public service motivation. Creating more accountable government then depends on finding trustworthy politicians—a matter of selection, not incentives. He argues that higher-quality politicians will be more likely to enter electoral contests (and experience higher success rates) when voters are well-informed about candidate characteristics, as in a political environment with a vibrant media. Although there are

theoretical arguments in the tradition of Downs and Coase suggesting that the characteristics of leaders should matter little, recent empirical research suggests that characteristics of politicians appear to matter a great deal for the policies that are implemented (Chattopadhyay and Duflo 2004; Jones and Olken 2005).

The difficulty in parsing the selection from the incentives mechanism lies in the fact that, *to the extent that it is possible* for one type of politician to mimic another, the incentives and selection mechanisms produce observationally equivalent behavior. Thus hypotheses 1 and 3, which are consistent with the incentives mechanism, are also implied by the selection mechanism. Hypothesis 2, however, is not—at least for the present electoral round. An additional hypothesis can be identified that permits us to distinguish between these mechanisms; it does not rely on the behavior of incumbents, but rather on the behavior of challengers.

H₄: Constituencies exposed to information about poorly performing politicians will exhibit a higher rate of new candidate entry, an improved quality of opposition candidates, and a (larger) positive difference between the performance of newly elected MPs after the 2011 elections and that of the candidates that they replaced (relative to the control areas).

Adverse Effects. Finally, there are theoretical reasons to believe that increased transparency may produce perverse effects. As a general matter, more information about the actions of agents is typically believed to be better for principals (Holmström 1979) to the extent that it allows them to write complete contracts. However, greater transparency may reduce competition among firms by facilitating the enforcement of collusive agreement; by an analogous argument, transparency could facilitate collusion among politicians to minimize the collective effort they expend on citizens. In contrast, a lack of transparency might lead to *greater* effort by political leaders to perform well in order to overcome the informational problems and demonstrate their capacity (Holmström 1999; Dewatripont et al 1999). Recently, Prat (2005) has shown that when outcomes are observable, but the relationship between actions and outcomes is better understood by the agent than by the principal, more transparency may lead to conformist action by agents and a reluctance to act on private information that could result in better outcomes. Stasavage (2004) develops a model in

which transparency can result in a greater level of “posturing” by politicians; rather than reaching political compromises, politicians select bargaining strategies to signal their policy positions to constituents.

A handful of empirical studies provide evidence of such adverse effects. Datta (2006) shows that, when political discussions are televised in India (Question Hour in Parliament), the voice of ordinary MPs is reduced as party establishments ensure that nationally prominent politicians dominate the proceedings. He finds no evidence that making discussions public increases the degree to which MPs represent their constituents’ interests. In another study, Gentzkow (2006) shows that access to television reduces turnout, in part because voters substitute away from richer sources of information.

The final hypotheses we consider focuses on these adverse effects.

- H₅: Greater transparency will result in a substitution of effort by politicians from less observable actions to more observable actions, even at a cost to the welfare of voters.
- H₆: Greater transparency will result in a substitution of effort by politicians from issues of national interest to issues more narrowly of interest to constituents.
- H₇: Greater transparency will result in a less voter knowledge about MP behavior beyond that made directly available through the scorecard.

Non-Electoral Channels. Although not amenable to empirical testing through the field experiment we propose, it is possible that the impact of transparency operates through intra-party rather than electoral dynamics. Consider that the rewards of being a politician depend not only on remaining in office but also on rising in the party hierarchy. Positions of leadership in the party grant politicians significant power: they have greater resources at their disposal to secure reelection; they exert control over positions and resources that other politicians want, making it possible for them to more often get their preferred policies implemented; and, if in the ruling party, they are more likely to receive posts as ministers and state officials in a parliamentary system. But sitting party leaders face a difficult challenge in deciding how to allocate positions of leadership: they have very few indicators of the quality of politicians in the pool. Of course, some decisions are made on the basis of personal ties, but other leadership positions may be awarded to those who distinguish themselves as

competent. If transparency efforts increase the volume of information about how politicians behave, this may induce party leadership-seeking office holders to improve their performance. Constituents play no role in this story: a desire for leadership roles in the party accounts for the impact of transparency on performance.

We will not be in a position to assess this story using data from the field experiment. However, drawing on observational data, we can look for temporal evidence that transparency drives increased party discipline, and that those politicians with the strongest incentives to signal competence to party leaders (ie. those lacking personal ties to the party leadership or with the most limited outside options) exhibit the greatest improvements in measured performance over time.

Transparency and the Ugandan Parliament

The potential governance pathologies that flow from information asymmetries pose a particular challenge in the environment we study. Africa's voting population is largely uneducated, typically rural, and lacks access to a well-developed media that might transmit information about the characteristics or activities of politicians. Moreover, as compared to the relationship between voters and the executive, the problems posed by information asymmetries with parliamentarians are severe: constituents know little about the proper role and function of an MP and receive almost no information about the activities of MPs once they are elected. There are strong reasons to believe that the predictions of political agency and political selection models—of shirking, opportunistic behavior, and a mismatch between politicians' actions and citizens' preferences—are likely to be prevalent in Uganda's Parliament.

Background

The Parliament is the legislative arm of the Ugandan government and derives its mandate and functions from the 1995 Constitution. Elected for a five year period, the Parliament is composed of 215 MPs who represent geographic constituencies and 117 MPs representing special interests including women, youth, workers, people with disabilities, and the Uganda People's Defense Forces. Its functions are laid out in broad terms and include passing laws for the good governance of Uganda, providing for the financing of government business (through the authorization of taxation and the acquisition of loans), scrutinizing government

policy and administration, debating matters of topical interest, and vetting the appointment of persons nominated by the President.

Uganda's Parliament has played a central role in recent political debates in the country, although its record as an effective, representative body is mixed and some recent political events have brought the legislative body into disrepute. For example, President Museveni's controversial initiative in 2005 to change the constitution to permit him to run for a third term was an issue debated and approved by Parliament in a 220-53 vote, even though more than half of Ugandans opposed the constitutional amendment (Afrobarometer 2005). It was later revealed that sitting MPs received cash from the executive branch, in the form of constituency development funds, in advance of the controversial vote. More recently, Parliament has interjected itself into discussions of Uganda's overseas deployment of troops. After the President deployed troops to Somalia without parliamentary approval (even though it was required by the constitution), MPs stepped in and repeatedly rejected the government's motions to authorize the overseas deployment. Government MPs eventually approved the deployment (while opposition MPs boycotted the vote), although bargained behind the scenes for government subsidies to support the purchase of vehicles to be used for "parliamentary" business. Opposition MPs have been particularly vocal in Parliament, often staging walkouts to protest, for example, the detention and mistreatment of officials affiliated with opposition parties.

Despite its mixed record, the Parliament is seen by many as a critical linchpin in the effort to build sustainable democracy in Uganda. Outside donors have committed significant resources to the strengthening of the legislative (and the judicial) branch in an effort to check the growing power of the executive. It is hoped that, with the introduction of multi-party politics in 2006, Parliament can and will become a forum for the discussion of opposing viewpoints on critical national issues.

It is not surprising though, given the vignettes offered above, that Ugandan citizens express very mixed opinions about Parliament (Afrobarometer 2005). On the one hand, nearly 74% of Ugandans can accurately report the name of their MP, 70% express some or a lot of trust in Parliament, and 63% approve or strongly approve of the performance of their own MP. Ugandans overwhelmingly recognize the importance of the independent role of the legislature as well. 91% of Ugandans would disapprove or strongly disapprove of any move to abolish elections and the parliament in order to vest complete authority in the

President. 81% agree or agree strongly with the idea that MPs represent the people and should make laws for the country *even if the President does not agree*.

Yet, when one investigates opinions about MPs in more depth, the results are not as encouraging. 79% of Ugandans expect regular visits from the MP to the constituency (once a month or more), while 69% report that their MP never visits or comes only once a year. 77% of respondents complain that MPs never or only sometimes listen to their concerns. Nearly 70% believe that MPs are actively involved in corruption. And 40% describe elections as working not very well or not well at all as a mechanism for ensuring that MPs reflect the views of their voters. This skepticism about Parliament is not simply a Ugandan phenomenon. Mattes and Chiwandamira (2004) find a “yawning chasm” between citizens’ views of MPs and how MPs see themselves in Zambia. More broadly, Nijzink et al (2006) report that, across a sample of African countries in which public opinion surveys were conducted, parliaments were almost uniformly viewed less positively than the executive branch, although respondents’ average satisfaction with their own MP hovered in the range of 50-60%.

The Parliamentary Scorecard

In an effort to promote more effective representation in the legislative process, the Africa Leadership Institute (AFLI), a Kampala-based non-governmental organization, formed a partnership with Columbia and Stanford universities to develop, release, and disseminate the Parliamentary Scorecard. Building on a parliamentary performance audit conducted in advance of the 2006 elections, the Parliamentary Scorecard seeks to provide a high-quality, annual, and sustainable mechanism for delivering information to voters about the activities of their representatives—consistent with the constitutional right of citizens to access information about government. The broader goal is to create the conditions for a programmatic parliament, active on issues of concern to voters, and one whose members are accountable to their constituents for the activities they undertake once elected.

Prior to our partnering with it, AFLI had already produced a pilot audit of the 7th Parliament in 2006, just before parliamentary elections were held. The report provided detail about the activities of MPs in Parliament’s plenary sessions (including attendance, bills introduced, motions made, questions asked, etc.) for a small sub-sample of sittings during one year of the MPs’ five-year term. Grades were assigned to each MP, although the coding

rules for matching contributions and grades were not transparent. The audit was released in a press conference in Kampala weeks before the 2006 elections and it received media coverage in the newspapers and on the radio in the capital. No efforts were made to disseminate the results to largely illiterate, rural voters. The audit likely had little effect on the voting public, although its existence was noted by MPs, some of whom spoke out in criticism of the methodology. The document did suggest it would be an annual effort, but our sense is that few MPs took serious note of its existence, and many new MPs (more than 50%) joined the 8th Parliament with no previous exposure to the auditing mechanism.

Building on lessons from the pilot audit, AFLI has raised significant resources to develop a higher-quality, comprehensive Parliamentary Scorecard. Beginning in July 2006, after the new Parliament was inaugurated, we partnered with AFLI to begin building a comprehensive database on the performance of every sitting MP. The new scorecard will draw on this database to generate reports on the activities undertaken by MPs in Parliament's plenary sessions, which represent the most public forum in which legislative business is conducted. The new scorecard will also describe the participation of MPs in committee work and report the extent to which MPs engage with their home constituencies. Informal consultations with MPs suggested that a focus on plenary, committee, and constituency work would be sufficient to capture accurately the distribution of activities in which parliamentarians engage. The data sources for the scorecard include Parliamentary Hansards (verbatim transcriptions of every plenary session), transcriptions of committee meetings, attendance logbooks for plenary and committee sessions, majority and minority committee reports, and structured interviews of local government officials in each MP's district and constituency.

Indicators of Performance

Each scorecard will include a series of indicators of performance for the year, generally presented as a percentile in order to facilitate comparisons among MPs. The challenge in creating these measures is to identify indicators that are sufficiently clear in their measurement so as not to become the subject of dispute, but still rich enough to capture salient dimensions of political action. We collect two types of measures: indicators of "effort" and "position". An example of the scorecard is given in Figure 1, with indicators of effort occupying the top half of the scorecard and positional indicators on the bottom.

(Figure 1)

For work in plenary sessions, MP effort will be evaluated using three indicators that describe MP **attendance**, **participation**, and **initiative**. Attendance is the simplest and most transparent indicator. Measured as the share of plenary sessions in which the MP's signature appears in the attendance logbook, it captures a minimal condition of political activity in plenary sessions.² The **participation** measure is more difficult. Although measures of the quality of participation are desirable, in the absence of a measure that would not be subject to dispute we employ a simple quantitative metric—the total number of lines each MP speaks in the Hansard. Our measure of **initiative** is the most challenging of the three. We seek a measure of the extent to which MPs are acting as political entrepreneurs. However, much entrepreneurial activity takes place behind the scenes and cannot be readily associated with the actions of a given MP. Yet the introduction of new items, such as bills and amendments, to parliament, is associated with particular MPs, although disproportionately so with those already high up in a party's hierarchy. To generate a measure of initiative that is relatively immune to manipulation and which aims to take account of the importance of issues introduced, we use an indicator that captures the total number of lines spoken by other MPs about items that a given MP has initiated.³ For each of these three measures, an MP is given a percentile ranking and an overall grade associated with these percentiles.

For effort in committee work, MPs will again be scored on attendance and participation. The **attendance** measure is given as the share of all committee meetings in which the MP's signature appears in the logbook; the **participation** measure uses tape recordings of all committee meetings to generate an indicator of the average number of lines spoken by MPs per committee meeting. These two measures will be presented separately for committee meetings of different types: legislative, oversight, budgetary, and those meetings in which a Minister or State Minister is present.

To capture effort in constituencies, each scorecard will include a measure of **LC-V activity**, **constituency infrastructure**, and **constituency visits**. The “LC-V activity” measure captures the share of local government (“LC-V” meetings) attended by the MP, as recorded in log books or LC-V meeting minutes. Our constituency infrastructure measure is

² In addition, if an MP speaks in plenary session (as captured in the Hansard) but is not recorded as in attendance in the logbook, we code him/her as having been present at plenary that day.

³ Quantitatively, initiative is calculated as the natural log of 1 plus the number of lines in the Hansard that are devoted to debating an item introduced by the MP (excluding those lines spoken by the MP herself).

an indicator for whether the MP has a local office and the constituency visits measure records how many times in the past six months the MP has been seen in the constituency by the local administrative officer. Ultimately, we hope to be able to augment these indicators with more bottom-up measures of the ability of constituents to make contact and communicate needs to their representatives. For each of these measures, the raw scores will be translated into percentiles for the purposes of presentation.

The indicators of position record the sectors in which politicians are most active (a “salience” indicator), as well as the extent to which they are adopt positions that are more or less pro or anti government. The greatest challenge we face in constructing these indicators is the absence of an automated process for recording votes; indeed, no written record is made of vote tallies except in unusual circumstances such as the third-term vote. Instead, we have based our measures on a coding scheme applied to the debates in plenary sessions. Each time an MP speaks, she is coded on a 5-point scale in terms of how strongly she supports or opposes the item under discussion. In addition, enumerators provide a metric of their level of certainty (also on a 5-point scale) about the position they have assigned. Then, all items discussed in plenary business are coded as government, opposition, or neutral according to the affiliation of the MP who introduced them. If the individual is a cabinet member, then the item is coded as “government.” If the item is introduced by a member of the shadow cabinet, it is coded as “opposition.” To be conservative, any items introduced by backbenchers are coded as “neutral,” except in the case of clearly partisan items such as a resolution praising the President for his State of the Nation address. Information on the degree to which an MP is pro-government is then calculated as the average position taken on items introduced either by government or shadow cabinet ministers when the enumerator is certain or very certain of the coding.⁴ In presenting this data on the scorecard, an MP’s average position is placed on a continuum generated by the MP’s percentile score among all MPs. Aggregate rankings are given for each MP’s relative to all MPs and relative to the MP’s own affiliation (government or opposition).

⁴ It should be noted that each Hansard is graded by two enumerators, and a third enumerator reconciles any discrepancies between the first two. For a position to be counted on an individual item, the average certainty of the first two enumerators must be greater than four *and* the certainty of the third enumerator must be greater than 4. Ultimately, the position used is that enumerated by the third enumerator who reconciles the first two positions.

We also include two positional measures that capture the substantive issues in which MPs are engaged. Each contribution to plenary debate is coded according to the sector/topic with which it deals. The scorecard then includes a chart describing how an MP's comments in plenary are distributed across the sectors as compared to Parliament as whole. Contributions are also assessed for the scope of the issue, whether it is a constituency, special interest, regional, or national issue. Again, a chart detailing how MP's (and how Parliament as a whole) allocate their comments across issues of different scope is included in the final scorecard.

Caveats

There are clear advantages and disadvantages to the indicators of performance we have selected. One of the advantages of our approach, aside from position data, is that it involves almost no subjective judgments on the part of our enumerators. They are clear, defensible measures that are easily replicated. However, by erring on the side of clarity and transparency, the scorecard will definitely fall short on some fronts that constituents care a great deal about. For example, does an MP make “valuable” comments? Can an MP get a bill passed or an amendment adopted if he puts his mind to it? Is an MP delivering on her campaign promise? Are MPs providing development benefits to their constituencies? We have elected to bypass questions of the quality of MPs' activities because we cannot generate a defensible, replicable coding rule for making such determinations. Our fear is that any effort to do this might undermine the whole project. The risk, of course, is that by measuring simple indicators such as those we have proposed, the scorecard itself might provide strong incentives for more “talking” but not for quality legislative activity.

On the issue of providing pork to constituents, we chose not to include a measure of transfers to each constituency for normative reasons: while we could generate a broad consensus on the value of providing incentives for more active and sustained participation in Parliament, there was substantial disagreement about whether we should provide additional incentives for MPs to raid the budget for pork for their districts. Unsurprisingly, perhaps, this is something that constituents expect from their MPs, but AFLI and its local partners felt strongly that including pork-barrel politics as a measure of performance would (a) systematically reward government MPs and (b) provide additional incentives for destructive budgetary politics.

There is still room for improvement, though, on our existing measures. In particular, we hope to improve our ability to accurately capture constituency activities. Surveys of local government officials provide us with an easy way of accessing people that would be in a position to know about the comings and goings of MPs by phone, but with one or two data points for each MP, the underlying behavior we care about is measured with error in many cases. We are working with Parliament to think about other ways to capture systematically the constituency visits of MPs—something legislators are obligated to do once a month as part of the rules of Parliament.

Dissemination Campaigns

For political reasons, the scorecard will be produced in the same way for all MPs in the country. We expect that it will be released in Kampala once a year (in September/October), a few months after that year's parliamentary session has concluded. As with the release of the pilot audit, the scorecard will be provided to MPs, civil society organizations, and representatives of the media. So while we will be in a position to observe temporal change in the behavior of MPs using our measures, in the absence of an experimental design at the national level, we will not be able to ascribe improvements in overall performance (if they occur) to the existence of the scorecard.

The research strategy therefore rests on another source of variation: variation in voter access to data from the scorecard. Our experimental protocol involves intensifying the accountability treatment through the implementation of sustained dissemination campaigns in a randomly selected sub-sample of geographic constituencies. Recall that 88% of Ugandan voters live in rural areas; only 18% have completed secondary school; and 60% never gets news from newspapers, which have been the most active media source in covering parliamentary business (Afrobarometer 2005). The public release of the scorecard in Kampala is thus unlikely to reach voters in geographic constituencies via traditional media channels; moreover, the scorecard as published for dissemination in the capital is not likely to be accessible to most voters given its publication in English and the literacy and numeracy required to understand the results.

In order to get this information to voters, each year, following the annual release of the scorecard, AFLI will organize a day-long constituency-wide meeting in 35 randomly selected constituencies. Although the exact format for these dissemination campaigns is still

being developed, at a minimum the dissemination workshops will include: (a) a constituency-wide public meeting with local officials, traditional leaders, and community members in which the scorecard project and the results are described; (b) the distribution of locally-appropriate materials in local languages that summarize the results for the MP (including posters to put in public places and materials that individuals can take home) and; (c) the establishment of a formal relationship with a local civil society organization in the constituency for the purpose of distributing future iterations of the scorecard. Each workshop will feature a discussion with the local MP, with an opportunity for the MP to defend his or her record before constituents and opposition candidates. Over four years then, and before the next Parliamentary elections, AFLI will cover 140 of the 294 MPs with some form of geographic constituency (215 representing traditional geographic constituencies and 79 women's MPs who represent a district). Each selected constituency will be visited only once; however, those constituencies randomly selected for treatment in earlier years will also receive materials for distribution in later years providing some variation in the intensity of the treatment across constituencies in advance of the next election.

We emphasize that because the scorecard is created for all MPs but disseminated in only some constituencies the research strategy should be properly thought of not as estimating the effect of the dissemination of the score card not of its generation.

Nevertheless, the structure of the intervention is such that the generation of the scorecard is central to the research strategy. In particular, the design is such that MPs will be able to adjust their performance over the course of the intervention to alter their scores. Before conducting the lottery to determine which constituencies will receive a dissemination campaign, AFLI expects to discuss the effort with party leaders, explaining that not all constituencies can be covered by this intensive outreach for budgetary reasons. AFLI will then describe the lottery process, making the argument that random selection is the fairest way to determine which MPs will have workshops conducted in their districts. The lottery itself will be conducted four years in advance of the 2011 elections and the results will be communicated to all MPs together with a detailed briefing to MPs in selected constituencies regarding the structure of the consultations.

Hypothesis Testing

Our empirical strategy for assessing the impact of transparency on political accountability thus hinges on a comparison of outcomes across constituencies in which the scorecard will be disseminated and those where it will not. The ideal experiment would consist of producing a scorecard and *releasing* it for some MPs and not for others, however, such a design is politically infeasible. Because voters are so disengaged from what happens in the capital, however, we are confident that an assessment of the causal impact of the dissemination campaign itself will provide valuable information about how transparency shapes political behavior in Uganda.

We envision estimating the impact of the treatment using three main types of outcome measures: MP performance, voter attitudes and electoral behavior.

MP Performance. The scorecard serves usefully both as a tool for the intervention, but also as a set of indicators about how MPs behave. If greater transparency has its intended impact, we would anticipate temporal changes in performance as MPs become aware of the scorecard; for the purposes of assessing the aggregate impact of the dissemination workshop, we will examine whether levels of performance and temporal changes in performance differ across MPs represented treated and untreated constituencies [H_2 , H_6]. In addition, we can use the data to measure the differences between the performance of new politicians relative to the incumbents they replace [H_4]. Our database is, however, considerably richer than what can be summarized on the scorecard. Measures of MP behavior, such as richer positional data with respect to issues of constituent interest, can also be used to examine the adverse impacts of transparency by examining the alignment of MP activity and constituent preferences across treated and non-treated constituencies [H_5].

Voter information, attitudes, and welfare. The second set of outcome measures will be gathered through the administration of household surveys in treated and untreated constituencies at two intervals: one after two years of the dissemination workshops (when 70 constituencies have been treated), and a second round after four years of the dissemination workshops (when 140 have been treated), but just before the election. We will use the household survey to collect detailed data on: (a) how voters evaluate the performance of their MP and government more generally [H_1]; (b) the extent of exposure citizens have to

their MP [H₂]; (c) household welfare and access to political benefits [H₃], and (d) the political information and behavior of citizens [H₄]. In order to distinguish the direct effect of information from the indirect effect of anticipatory improvements in MP performance (that result from the announcement of constituency workshops), we will embed an experiment within the household surveys. A random subset of households in our panel will be provided with copies of their MPs scorecard along with an oral explanation of the content of the score card. In areas in which workshops are not held, the direct effect of information in the absence of anticipatory changes in MP behavior can be observed.

Electoral Outcomes. A third set of outcome measures relates to electoral competition and performance in the 2011 Parliamentary elections. We expect to gather data on the electoral contest in each constituency including the number and characteristics of the competing candidates, the level of voter registration and turnout, the margin of victory, and most importantly, the reelection rate of incumbent politicians [H₃].

It bears mention that estimating treatment effects in this context will be made more difficult because the effects of the dissemination campaign may spill over into untreated constituencies. For example, aware that a scorecard now exists, civil society organizations in untreated constituencies may utilize the freely available national materials to disseminate information about the performance of their own MP. It is also possible that opposition candidates in untreated constituencies may bring the scorecard results into the electoral campaign, even if no dissemination was done in that area. There are numerous possibilities. If we do not account for these spillover effects, we will underestimate the impact of the dissemination strategy. Our household surveys will be one useful tool for assessing the extent of spillover that occurs, both in the period without electoral competition and in the immediate run-up to the campaign. But we will also be in a position, following Miguel and Kremer (2004), to exploit the random location of our treated geographic constituencies in generating measures of the density of treatment within geographic areas to proxy for spillover effects.

Results of an Early Evaluation

One concern with our approach (as with many experimental designs) is that the effect size may be too small to measure with any confidence. Greater transparency about what MPs do may matter, yet be only one of many factors that affect the behavior of MPs in Parliament. In order to get an initial assessment of the impact of increased information on MP performance, we took advantage of an intervention designed originally to provide publicity for the scorecard. In March 2007, AFLI organized an awards ceremony to recognize top performers from the pilot audit. The awards ceremony offered an opportunity to provide MPs with a description of the evolution of the scorecard. AFLI invited high performing MPs from the previous Parliament (some of whom continue to serve) to the awards ceremony, along with a random sample of 58 additional MPs, stratified by party (NRM versus non-NRM MPs).⁵ In actuality, very few MPs attended the event. As a result, AFLI pursued the goal of informing the new Parliament about the scorecard through a series of briefings in the parliament buildings (in April and May) in which the content and use of the scorecard was explained. The same random sample of MPs was invited to these briefings as part of an expanded list including 58 NRM and 43 non NRM MPs. Each NRM MP was selected with probability .29 and each non-NRM MP was selected with probability .46.⁶

Of the 101 MPs selected for briefing, 31 actually attended (33% of invited NRM MPs and 29% of non-NRM candidates). Those that failed to show up did so for a wide range of reasons. Some were busy or traveling; for many others, we could find no telephone number or were unable to reach them by telephone (and were thus unable to issue an invitation). Beyond the 31 who participated from the pool of sampled MPs, 3 additional MPs attended the briefings even though they were not invited. In these cases, MPs heard about our information sessions and asked to come or accompanied a colleague to a session.

The format of the intervention was simple. Taking place in either one-on-one or small group sessions, AFLI staff welcomed MPs and then asked them to complete a short survey gauging their prior knowledge of the scorecard and their views of the role of an MP. They were then given information about the scorecard, following the script provided in

⁵ We exclude from our analysis the 13 ex-officio and the 10 representatives of the army in parliament.

⁶ 100 of the total of 101 selected MPs were selected using a random number generator. The 101st was selected because her phone number was mistakenly taken as that of another (selected) MP.

Figure 2. Before departing, MPs were asked to complete a short exit survey and were invited to ask questions of the AFLI representative.

(Figure 2)

To assess the impact of being informed about the scorecard on subsequent performance, we rely on publicly available data on the behavior of MPs in plenary sessions. For each MP, we generate a simple indicator of whether she took part in parliamentary debate or not. We calculate this measure for a pre-intervention period (February 2007) and a post-intervention period (mid-June to mid-July 2007). An examination of the pre-intervention performance data suggests that those that were informed about the scorecard (the “treated”) were not systematically different from those that were not (the “untreated”). This is especially important since not all those (randomly) assigned to participate in a briefing did so. In Table 1, we provide the full breakdown of our sample across the two strata and also by status with respect to selection and participation. In addition, we provide the average score for the pre-intervention outcome measure for each of these groups and present the differences between the scores of those who participated and those who did not participate in each group. The table demonstrates that, overall, as well as within each stratum, there is no significant difference between those who received the briefing and those who did not, as measured on our outcome measure pre-intervention.

(Table 1)

The outcome data after the intervention are presented in full in Table 2. The data show that, across all four categories, the performance among MPs who were briefed is higher than among MPs who did not. For the population as a whole, this difference is significant at the 90% level (using a t-test). Among MPs who did not attend a briefing the rate of participation is .36. If the MPs who did attend briefings had the same propensity to participate as those who did not, we would expect 12 of the 34 MPs in the treatment group to speak on the floor. In fact, we observe 18 participating in the plenary session. Using a binomial test, the probability of observing 18 or more given a probability of .36 is .034. The probability of seeing as many as 18 or as few as 6 is .05.

(Table 2)

These simple test statistics provide support to the hypothesis that information matters for MP participation, but they leave out some important factors. First, they do not make use of the pre-intervention data available to us; second, they do not take account of

the fact that NRM and non-NRM MPs were sampled with different probabilities; finally, they do not take account of the fact that those who participated were possibly a non-random sub-sample of those who were invited to attend a briefing. While we can demonstrate that MPs who participated were similar to MPs who were invited but did not in terms of the outcome measure before the intervention, we cannot rule out the possibility that there are some differences between the two groups. Although perhaps far-fetched, it is possible in principle that a subset of MPs intended to improve their performance after February and that the first step for them in doing so was to attend our briefings.

Analyses that take account of these factors are provided in Table 3. The first column presents the results of a (ordered probit) regression in which the dependent variable is the change in participation over the two periods; taking the value or -1, 0, or 1. The ordered probit coefficient is significant at the 90% level and suggests that treatment reduces the probability of a *decline* in participation by 8 percentage points ($p=.035$) and increases the probability of a rise in participation of 10 points ($p=.116$). In this model, the NRM intercept is not statistically different from 0.

(Table 3)

The second column provides the marginal effects from a model of the post-intervention outcome, controlling for party membership in the NRM. The results are consistent with those observed in Table 2, with an estimated marginal effect of 16 percentage points. Column III provides the results for a difference in differences analysis; in this analysis, we use data from both periods and identify the treatment effect as the interaction between an indicator for attending the briefing and the later time period. Conditional on this treatment effect, we expect no direct effects associated either with the indicator of participation (as this captures the differences in the groups before the treatment) or the period indicator (as in both cases, data are drawn from a single month of sessions). This is, in fact, what we observe and we find an estimated effect of participation in the briefings of 19 percentage points.

The final column reports an intention-to-treat analysis. It shows the effect of being invited to participate in the briefing whether or not the person actually attended the briefing. Given our low compliance rates, it is not surprising that we are unable to reject the null of no intention-to-treat effect. The coefficient from model IV implies an increase in the probability of higher participation and a reduction in the probability of reduced participation

of about 3.5 percentage points in each case resulting from being selected; these estimated effects are not statistically significant at conventional levels.

Nonetheless, the data provide reasonably strong evidence that being informed about the scorecard exerts a substantively and significantly powerful effect on the likelihood of participation in Parliament. Our rates of non-compliance are high, making it difficult for us to pass the most difficult statistical tests. But we are in a strong position to rule out obvious sources of selection bias that might account for the large post-intervention differences in behavior that we observe.

Conclusion

Many argue that greater transparency improves government performance and increases political accountability. Information, in particular, is seen as an antidote to one of the major challenges inherent in an electoral democracy: voters are not able to observe most of the actions of politicians, or to know with any certainty their underlying preferences. This information asymmetry provides room for politicians to act opportunistically and ignore the needs or preferences of their constituencies. Transparency, it is hoped, solves the problem by putting citizens in a better position to police their politicians.

This paper describes the design and first results from a field experiment designed to estimate the impact of greater transparency on the performance of members of Parliament in Uganda, the attitudes of voters, and ultimately electoral outcomes. We develop an innovative accountability mechanism – Uganda’s Parliamentary Scorecard – and randomize its dissemination across geographic constituencies to explore its impact thereby producing variation both in voter information and in the salience of the information in the scorecard for MPs. This approach allows us to avoid many of the identification issues that plague previous studies on access to information and government performance. Beyond estimating the average impact of the transparency mechanism on MP and voter behavior, our approach also provides an avenue for uncovering the mechanisms through which information affects behavior, whether by electoral or non-electoral channels.

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Figure 1: Sample Scorecard

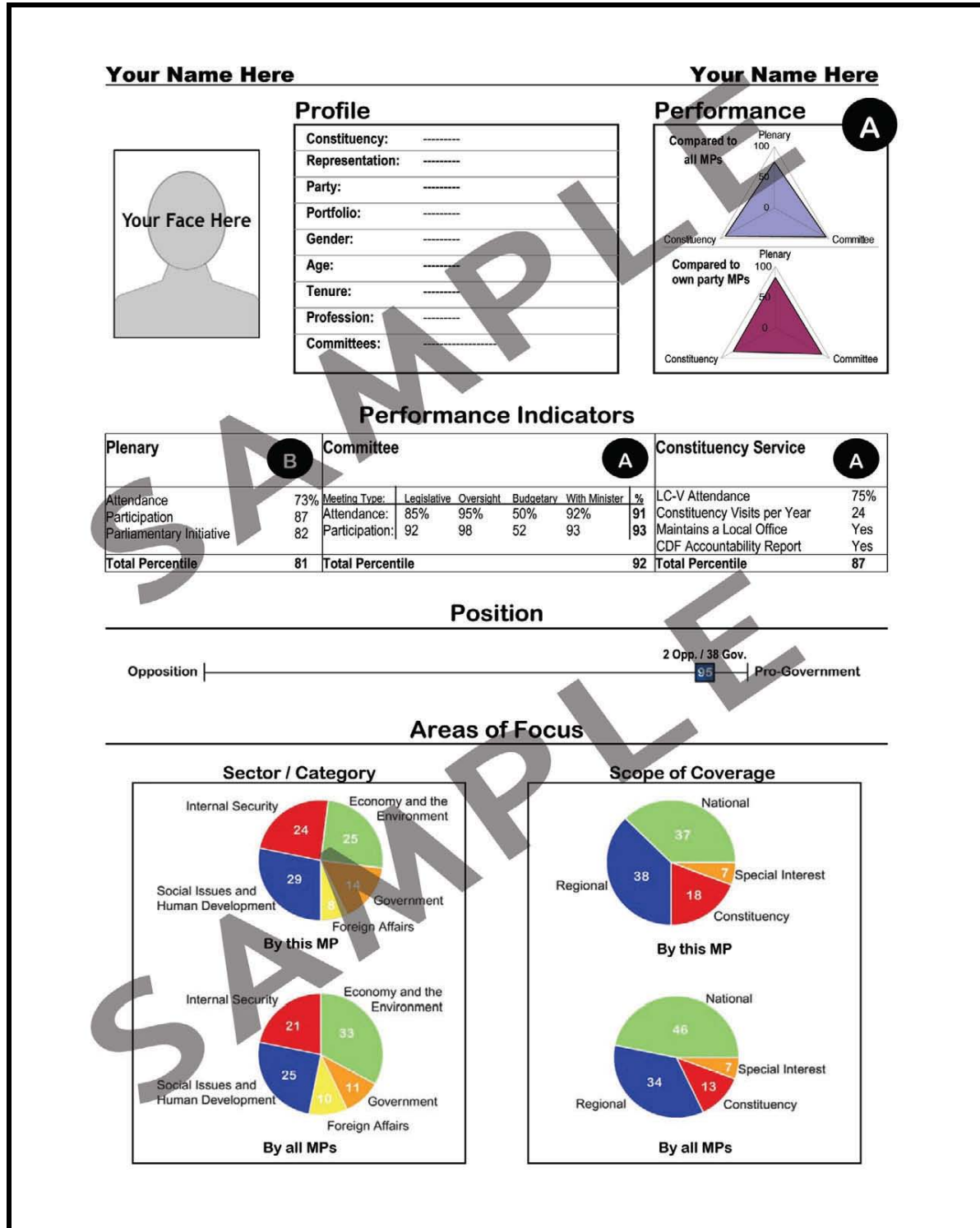


Figure 2: Treatment Script

Now I would like to show you a draft of a sample Scorecard so that you can see the information that we are going to collect and how we are going to present it, and then I'll get your feedback on our ideas. [Hand them a color copy of the draft sample.] You see here the three areas I already mentioned [in the entry survey], the plenary, the committee, and the constituency services.

For the plenary, we're going to use the official attendance book to record how often you attend plenary sessions, and we're going to read through the Hansards to grade two things. The first, here, is participation, which is just a measure of how often and how long you speak in plenary sessions. The second thing we'll measure from the Hansard is parliamentary initiative, which means whether you take the initiative to drive the business of Parliament forward, by bringing new bills, new resolutions, new amendments, and so on to the floor of Parliament. The numbers and grades you see here are comparative, they are percentiles—meaning that a score of 82 for parliamentary initiative, for example, means that you did better than 82 percent of other MPs.

Next, for the committees we're also going to measure attendance, using the attendance logs kept by the clerks of each committee. We have also been working with the Clerk of Parliament and the Hansard office to record every public committee meeting, the meetings where members of the press can come in to make recordings. We're going to create transcriptions of those recordings, so they'll be essentially committee Hansards. We're going to use these to record your participation in committee meetings, just like in plenary sessions. In particular, we're also going to look at your participation in committee meetings that are legislative, where you're discussing bills; meetings where your committee is engaged in some sort of oversight function; budgetary committee meetings; and meetings where there is a minister or state minister from the government present, somebody who you could lobby directly to try to influence government policy.

Finally, we're also going to expand into grading constituency work. Constituency services are definitely the most challenging area for us to measure because they are so decentralized and often very informal, without any record of your activities. Because of these challenges we may not include these scores in the first year's scorecard, and we're not going to include these scores until we can guarantee that they are accurate and objective. We are going to work with the Ministry of Local Government to develop a system that is nation-wide and objective to collect this information. First, we want to survey the clerks to the LC-V councils throughout the country, to measure how often you attend LC-V meetings. We also want to survey the assistant chief administrative officers (A-CAOs) to ask them how often you visit your constituency and whether you maintain a local office with a staff person, a place where your constituents can go to reach you with their problems even when you are here in Kampala. Finally, if there is a CDF, we're going to report whether or not you submitted a report to account for how you used this money.

We'll also collect some information that will not contribute to your grades, but which we think your constituents will still find useful. In particular, we're going to use the Hansard to measure the extent to which you side with the government or with the opposition, what categories or topics you specialize in and spend the most time talking about, and what scope you focus on—whether national, regional, local, or special interest.

We're going to publish this scorecard every year, with a summary after five years, before the next election. We're going to distribute these through national media organizations, and we'll hold workshops with civil society organizations and local leaders in about 40 constituencies each year. These workshops will have two parts. First we'll have a civic education component, in which we'll talk about the proper role of an MP and explain that they should be expecting you to perform these responsibilities in Kampala rather than asking you to build roads or pay for school fees. Then we present them with this scorecard, which we will translate into the local language, so that they can distribute them and educate constituents about the work you do.

Now I would like to ask you to fill out this brief questionnaire, which I am using to get a little anonymous feedback in writing from all of the MPs that I speak with. It should only take about 5 minutes, and then I can answer your questions and we can discuss what advice or concerns you might have.

Table 1: Strata, Sample, Treatment and Participation: February 2007

	Not NRM Not sampled	Not NRM Sampled	NRM Not sampled	NRM Sampled	Total
Not Treated (<i>N</i>)	0.57 (49)	0.28 (29)	0.37 (143)	0.44 (41)	0.41 (262)
Treated (<i>N</i>)	0.50 (2)	0.21 (14)	1.00 (1)	0.47 (17)	0.38 (34)
Difference (<i>p</i>)	-0.07 (0.85)	-0.06 (0.67)	0.63 .	0.03 (0.83)	-0.03 (0.77)
Total (<i>N</i>)	0.57 (51)	0.26 (43)	0.38 (144)	0.45 (58)	0.41 (296)

Table 2: Strata, Sample Treatment and Participation: June/July 2007

	Not NRM Not sampled	Not NRM Sampled	NRM Not sampled	NRM Sampled	Total
Not Treated (<i>N</i>)	0.49 (49)	0.38 (29)	0.33 (143)	0.32 (41)	0.36 (262)
Treated (<i>N</i>)	0.50 (2)	0.50 (14)	1 (1)	0.53 (17)	0.53 (34)
Difference (<i>p</i>)	0.01 (0.98)	.12 (0.46)	.67 .	0.21 (0.13)	0.17* (0.06)
Total (<i>N</i>)	0.49 (51)	0.42 (43)	0.33 (144)	0.38 (58)	0.38 (296)

Table 3: Participation in Parliamentary Debates

Dependent variable:	I	II	III	IV
	Difference $t_2 - t_1$	Level t_2 only	Level t_1 and t_2	Difference $t_2 - t_1$
Model	Ordered Probit	Probit	Probit (Difference in Differences)	Ordered Probit
TREATED	0.39	0.15	-0.04	
$t=2$	[1.78]*	[1.66]*	[0.40]	
$(t=2) \times$ TREATED			-0.05	
			[1.36]	
			0.19	
			[1.77]*	
SAMPLED [But not necessarily treated]				0.15
				[1.01]
NRM	-0.14	-0.1	-0.07	-0.15
	[0.97]	[1.62]	[1.29]	[0.99]
Observations	296	296	592	296

Note: Absolute value of z statistics in brackets. Coefficients in Modes II and III are marginal effects. Model III pools across time periods but standard errors are allowed to cluster on unit (MPs). * significant at 10%; ** significant at 5%; *** significant at 1%. NRM (National Resistance Movement) is included as a stratum fixed effect.