Policing Politicians: Citizen Empowerment and Political Accountability in Africa

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Motivation

• Africa’s wave of democratization in the 1990s generated expectations (and some evidence) of greater political accountability
  – repeated elections (Lindberg 2006)
  – constraints of formal rules (Posner and Young 2007)
  – greater provision of public goods (Stasavage 2005; Kudamatsu 2010; Harding and Stasavage 2011)

• Yet electoral democracy in Africa has not fulfilled its promise in many ways
  – emergence of hybrid regimes (Levitsky and Way 2003)
  – persistence of patronage, rather than public goods-oriented politics (Wantchekon 2003; Kasara 2006)
  – little alternation in power (Posner and Young 2007)
  – fading popular support for democracy as it fails to deliver (Bratton 2004)
Why Elections are Insufficient

• **The problem**: Because voters do not observe the actions of politicians and may be uninformed about their behavior and their preferences, elections are an insufficient tool for policing politicians (Besley and Burgess 2002).

• **The solution**: Greater transparency has been advanced as a key mechanism for improving political accountability (Sen 1999; Besley 2005).

• **Question**: Does greater transparency improve governmental performance? How?
Preview

• Approach
  – Create measures of legislator performance, disseminate to voters in randomly selected constituencies
  – Focus on politicians and voters; introduce into national political process

• Findings
  – Voters incorporate new information, but no evidence that MPs respond or that reelection prospects are affected

• Interpretation
  – Limits of transparency: in a national political process, new information is contested by existing power holders
How Transparency Might Matter

- **Accountability**: Transparency strengthens incentives for politicians already in office to be on their best behavior as they fear punishment at election time (Bentham 1816; Barro 1973; Ferejohn 1986).

- **Agent Selection**: High quality politicians are more likely to enter electoral contests when voters are well-informed (Besley 2005; Besley et al 2006).

- **Perverse Effects**: Greater transparency might facilitate collusion among politicians to minimize their collective effort on behalf of citizens, generate more conformist actions (Prat 2005), or produce more political posturing (Stasavage 2004).
Hypotheses

- **H₁: [Voters’ attitudes]** Voters exposed to information that politicians are performing poorly should express greater dissatisfaction with the incumbent and a decreased willingness to support his or her reelection.

- **H₂: [Politicians’ behavior]** On average, greater transparency will be associated with less shirking by politicians in advance of the next election (with “shirking” defined on the basis of public information).

- **H₃: [Electoral outcomes]** Greater transparency will decrease the reelection rate, vote share, and margin of victory for poorly performing incumbent politicians.

- **H₄: [Perverse effects]** 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.
A Field Experiment on Transparency

• Informational asymmetries particularly severe in Africa, especially viz. African legislatures
  – Low education levels, limited media exposure
  – Little understanding of the activities, role of MPs
  – Legislatures critical accountability mechanism

• Measure the impact of Uganda’s Parliamentary Scorecard on MPs, voters, and electoral outcomes
  – produce a detailed scorecard reporting on the activities of MPs
  – randomize the dissemination of the scorecard to voters across geographic constituencies
  – introduce information into the national political process
Performance Measurements

• Performance: Plenary Sessions
  – attendance
  – participation
  – initiative

• Performance: Committee Work
  – attendance
  – participation

• Performance: Constituencies
  – LC-V activity
  – constituency infrastructure
  – accessibility
Museveni Janet Kataaha

Constituency: Ruhama County
District: Ntungamo
Status: Minister of State
Party: NRM
Portfolio: Karamoja
Committees: Social Services
Office Location: Opposite UGAFODE Ntungamo Ranch
Off. Assistant: N/A


Performance

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Score</th>
<th>Percentile</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Participation</td>
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<td>12</td>
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<tr>
<td>Debate Influence</td>
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<td>0</td>
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<tr>
<td>Attendance</td>
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<td>5</td>
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<tr>
<td>Total Sittings</td>
<td>96</td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Score</th>
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<tr>
<td>Participation</td>
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<td>53</td>
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<td>Attendance</td>
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<td>6</td>
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<td>Total Meetings</td>
<td>35</td>
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MP's Position

We did not have enough information to determine this MP's position relative to Government in plenary sittings. This should not be viewed as a comment on the MP's position, but rather on the fact that AFLI is conservative in its position scoring, only presenting a score where we are confident of the accuracy of the results.

Peer Assessment

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Dimension</th>
<th>Quality</th>
<th>Analysis</th>
<th>Teamwork</th>
<th>Oversight</th>
<th>Intra-Party Influence</th>
<th>Public Conduct</th>
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<td></td>
<td>87</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>87</td>
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<td>Overall Percentile</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td>97</td>
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</table>

Area of Focus

MP's Report

How did you spend the CDF money for 2007 - 2008?

This MP did not provide information concerning how he/she spend the CDF Money for 2007-2008.

For more on this MP's constituency activities, see http://www.aflia.org
Validation

• Do the performance metrics in the scorecard capture accurately the relative quality of an MP’s performance?
  – Explore relationship between objective metrics of performance and MP rankings using peer assessments

• Does the scorecard capture dimensions of performance that constituents care about?
  – Baseline survey of voters’ priorities
Objective vs. Subjective Metrics

Figure: Distribution of 2008 peer assessment scores for MPs broken down by 2008 scorecard grades. The strong negative trend corresponds to a correlation of 0.41 with an associated t-score of 7.5.
Exposure of MPs and Voters to Treatment

• Implemented dissemination workshops in 150 randomly sampled constituencies, mostly in 2010
  – MPs were informed in 2007 of their selection
  – Workshops included county-wide meeting with local officials, traditional leaders, distribution of scorecard materials in local dialects, discussion with the local MP
• Carried out dissemination campaigns in randomly selected polling stations (in treatment areas), one month before the election (January 2011)
• Voter-level survey experiment in 2008 (pre-workshop) and 2010
Dissemination Materials
Empirical Results

• Do voters update their attitudes and intentions?
• Do MPs improve their performance?
• Does transparency affect electoral outcomes?
Do Voters Update?

Survey experiment:

- Voters asked for views of MP
- Voters taken through an exercise to describe MP behavior in detail
- Subset of voters provided information about their MP
- Voters asked again to rate MP (should he/she be re-nominated, approval, voting intention)
- Conducted in baseline, endline (and panel embedded)
Do MPs Improve their Performance?

Scorecard measures of performance:

• Examine aggregate impact of the scorecard, using change over time in performance
• Impact of scorecard dissemination, using random assignment to constituency workshops
• Adverse effects, using random assignment to constituency workshops
Figure shows numbers attending Parliament over time. Cutoffs mark key moments in publicity for the scorecard.

Some evidence of increases in attendance around publicity, but weak overall trend, and increases before scorecard. No impact on participation.
Impact of Constituency Workshops

<table>
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<tr>
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<th>Plenary</th>
<th>Committee</th>
<th>Constituency</th>
<th>Peer Assessment</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Workshop Effect</td>
<td>-4.736</td>
<td>-2.255</td>
<td>1.096</td>
<td>-0.673</td>
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<td></td>
<td>(1.42)</td>
<td>(0.61)</td>
<td>(0.32)</td>
<td>(0.19)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Control Average</td>
<td>53.640</td>
<td>52.844</td>
<td>49.116</td>
<td>51.104</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(22.97)***</td>
<td>(20.35)***</td>
<td>(20.52)***</td>
<td>(20.53)***</td>
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<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>296</td>
<td>239</td>
<td>292</td>
<td>265</td>
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</table>

Table 4: The estimated effect of dissemination workshops on parliamentary performance (dependent variables are percentile scores at the latest points of measurement (2010 data)). $t$-statistics in parentheses; * $p < 0.1$; ** $p < 0.05$; *** $p < 0.01$

MPs do not appear to improve performance in anticipation of needing to defend actions before their constituents.
Some evidence of worse service delivery in constituencies targeted for workshops.
Does Transparency Affect Electoral Outcomes?

Electoral results from 2011:

- Examine impact of dissemination on candidacy, reelection, and vote share, using random assignment to constituency workshop
- Examine impact of grades on reelection, using regression discontinuity
**Impact on Electoral Outcomes (Dissemination)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Elect</th>
<th>Elect</th>
<th>Elect</th>
<th>Ran</th>
<th>Ran</th>
<th>Ran</th>
<th>Share</th>
<th>Share</th>
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<tr>
<td>Workshop</td>
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<td>0.054</td>
<td>-0.068</td>
<td>-0.044</td>
<td>-0.006</td>
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<td>(0.19)</td>
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<td>(0.67)</td>
<td>(0.39)</td>
<td>(0.07)</td>
<td>(0.49)</td>
<td>(1.06)</td>
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<td>-0.002</td>
<td>0.001</td>
<td>0.001</td>
<td>-0.000</td>
<td>-0.001</td>
<td>0.001</td>
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<tr>
<td>(0.05)</td>
<td>(0.38)</td>
<td>(0.80)</td>
<td>(0.77)</td>
<td>(0.37)</td>
<td>(0.03)</td>
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<td>Plenary pct</td>
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<td>0.000</td>
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<tr>
<td>(0.08)</td>
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<td>(0.27)</td>
<td>(0.33)</td>
<td>(0.61)</td>
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<td>Committee pct</td>
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<td>(0.24)</td>
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<td>Constituency pct</td>
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<td>(3.05)**</td>
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<td>(1.35)</td>
<td>(1.35)</td>
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<td>(2.24)**</td>
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<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
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<td>(5.29)</td>
<td>(4.74)</td>
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<td>(10.37)</td>
<td>(9.05)</td>
<td>(10.06)</td>
<td>(12.19)</td>
<td>(10.69)</td>
<td>(10.40)</td>
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<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>293</td>
<td>239</td>
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<td>293</td>
<td>239</td>
<td>292</td>
<td>227</td>
<td>185</td>
<td>227</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 6: Intention to treat estimates of dissemination workshops. In each model the ‘interaction’ variable is the interaction between the workshop treatment and the score in question. * $p < 0.1$; ** $p < 0.05$; *** $p < 0.01$

Good performing MPs do not benefit from the dissemination of their performance information.
Impact on Electoral Outcomes (Grades)

Figure 7: Effect of letter grades on outcomes. Bars indicate the cut-offs for different grade allocations as a function of percentiles.
Empirical Results

• Do voters update their attitudes and intentions?
  
  Yes, but effects are short-lived and we cannot rule out Hawthorne effects.

• Do MPs improve their performance?
  
  No, though there is weak evidence of aggregate change over time and adverse effects.

• Does transparency affect electoral outcomes?
  
  No.
Possible Explanations

1. Implementation failure.
   – Low levels of awareness of the scorecard (12.2%), but workshops produced 32% increase in knowledge of performance metrics.

2. Lack of political competitiveness.
   – Average winning margin of 19%; 75% enjoyed a margin of 9% or more.

3. MP attention to parties, and not to voters.
   – Peer assessments are strongest predictors of whether MPs are re-nominated, and strong predictors of reelection.

4. Political interference.
   – Voters are less accurate in their guesses about MP performance in areas with workshops; also, there was no relationship between MPs scores and the “tone” of the workshop if the MP was in attendance.