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1 Introduction

The more obscure their actions are to constituents, the weaker politicians' incentives to perform are (Przeworski *et al.*, 1999). Especially in low-income, newly democratizing countries, civil society often lacks the capacity to monitor incumbents' actions (Diamond, 1994), and the media often misrepresent politicians' performance due to elite capture and partisan bias (Boas & Hidalgo, 2011). Absent reliable information about politicians' actions, voters resort to using noisy heuristics to inform their vote, such as private "clientelistic" handouts (Kramon, 2016) or investments in the very few outcomes that are directly attributable to politicians (Harding, 2015). Rather than focusing on performing their legally defined job duties, such as legislative actions and monitoring of public services, politicians tend to cater to voters' heuristics, generally to the detriment of citizen welfare (Fox & Shotts, 2009). Private handouts encourage corruption in order to generate the necessary funds, and often come at the expense of public services (Hicken, 2011). Investments in attributable outcomes involve diverting money and attention away from less attributable (but vitally important) policies, goods, and services (Bueno De Mesquita, 2007). The main goal of this study is to increase understanding of the conditions under which politicians are incentivized to carry out their legally defined job duties more effectively.

Drawing on models of political accountability (e.g., Barro (1973), Ferejohn (1986)) and contextual knowledge of accountability relations in low-income countries (e.g., Mares & Young (2016)), we theorize that incumbents will increase their efforts to carry out their legally defined job duties when there is common knowledge among voters—and between incumbents and voters—that constituents received information on their performance *well in advance of the next election*. In response to heightened performance transparency, incumbents will shift efforts toward fulfilling their statutory duties, assuming that voters will use the new information to inform their vote (Casey, 2015), and to deter the entry of high-quality challengers (Gordon *et al.*, 2007). While all incumbents may fear the entry of a challenger, this threat is more likely in competitive constituencies, especially in newly democratizing countries where weakly institutionalized and cash-strapped opposition parties are strategic about where they compete (Riedl, 2014). Thus, we further hypothesize that incumbent performance transparency initiatives will have a stronger effect in competitive constituencies.

We test these predictions by investigating whether a non-partisan, local civil society organization can improve politicians' performance of their legally defined duties by collecting such information and disseminating it to voters. In a multi-year field experiment involving 408 politicians across 20 district governments in Uganda, we collaborated with a local NGO that produces annual scorecards on how effectively politicians carry out their legally defined duties. Throughout the 2011-2016 term, scorecards for *all* incumbents were presented annually to politicians, district officials, and party representatives in district plenary session meetings. Scorecard information presented at the district level, however, did not trickle down to constituents.

For a set of randomly selected politicians, the NGO directly disseminated the scorecard information to the incumbents' constituents in the middle of the electoral term over a two-year period. This grassroots transparency initiative involved holding community meetings, distributing materials to hang in public spaces, and sending periodic text messages reminding meeting attendees of the meeting content. Treated politicians were fully informed of the NGO's dissemination efforts, invited to community meetings, and were sent simultaneous text messages. Citizens were likewise informed that their elected representative knew that the scorecard information would reach voters, which created common knowledge among politicians and their constituents about the scorecard dissemination. Notably, the treatment effect of scorecard dissemination isolates the effect of pressure on politicians from voter response (and/or challenger entry) *above and beyond* intrinsic, peer, or party pressure due to the construction of the scorecard itself and its presentation in district plenary meetings.

However, it is far from certain that such a transparency initiative would improve politicians' accountability in their legally defined duties, for three main reasons. First, politicians cater more to their constituents shortly before elections (Golden & Min, 2013), presumably because voters disengage from politics between elections (Michelitch & Utych, 2014) and have 'short political memories' (Healy & Lenz, 2014). Politicians may therefore have little incentive to exert more effort between elections. Second, politicians may believe that voters care much less about their performance of statutory duties than they do about the distribution of handouts (Lindberg, 2010) or congruence in redistributive preferences (Carlson, 2015). Third, politicians may attempt to derail homegrown transparency initiatives by discrediting the NGO's methodology or questioning their impartiality (Humphreys & Weinstein, 2012).

To measure the effect of disseminating incumbent performance information to voters, we construct a composite index of performance that includes a variety of data on politicians' performance: (1) the annual scorecard assessing their performance of legally defined duties, (2) peer politicians' evaluations, (3) district bureaucrats' performance ratings, and (4) the amount of effort exerted to help primary schools apply for grants. To further assess the treatment effects on public service provision, we also (5) cull data on constituency development projects derived from the districts' annual budgets and (6) conduct two rounds of unannounced school and health center audits.

Our major finding is that disseminating information about politicians' fulfillment of their legally defined duties to constituents significantly improves their performance across a range of outcome measures, *but only in competitive constituencies*. Exploiting the panel nature of the scorecard data, we find that this effect appears immediately after treatment assignment for both years of the grassroots dissemination, but does not appear in the election year (in which only district-level scorecard dissemination took place). As for public service delivery outcomes, the transparency initiative increased development project procurement in competitive constituencies, but it had no discernible effect in health centers and schools, as discovered in the unannounced audits.

This study advances the political accountability literature in four important ways. First, to the best of our knowledge, it is the first to show that a homegrown NGO initiative can improve politicians' accountability in legally defined duties in the years between elections by creating common knowledge that voters are receiving information about politicians' performance of such duties. This result is consistent with theories of accountability stressing that politicians will shift their focus in response to perceived changes in voters' evaluative criteria (Casey, 2015, Fox & Shotts, 2009), and that politicians' efforts increase as the risk of a challenger entering the race rises (Gordon & Huber, 2007). This result is especially notable against a backdrop of conventional wisdom from low-income newly democratizing countries that emphasizes the dominance of targeted transfers and distributive congruence as accountability criteria.¹

Second, we show that only politicians hailing from competitive constituencies responded to increased transparency by exerting greater effort in their legally defined duties. This finding is consistent with the idea that inter-party competition is a necessary condition for transparency of performance to discipline politicians. While current models of accountability assume that there is ubiquitous electoral pressure from viable candidates (Ashworth, 2012), this study explores the implications of the fact that there is wide variation in constituency competitiveness (Przeworski, 2015). And while previous empirical studies of the nexus of transparency and politician behavior almost exclusively focus on the *amount* of information citizens have (e.g., due to variation in media coverage (Larreguy *et al.*, 2016, Snyder & Strömberg, 2010)), this study widens the empirical analysis of transparency by instead highlighting a *contextual condition*—competitiveness—that moderates the effectiveness of political information.

Third, we contribute to a body of work that emphasizes the relationship between electoral cycles and accountability. Contrary to conventional wisdom, we find evidence that—through the joint impact of a transparency initiative and electoral pressure—politician performance can be improved between elections. Past studies have shown that politicians generally concentrate their efforts immediately before elections (Golden & Min, 2013). This “political business cycle” constitutes a major barrier to accountability, as incumbents make many consequential decisions in the lengthy time between elections. Our study suggests that increasing transparency by institutionalizing the dissemination of information on incumbents' actions can hold politicians to account even years before the next election.

Fourth, we contribute to a debate over whether information about *politicians' actions* or *development outcomes* is more likely to incentivize incumbents to perform their duties more effectively (Berry & Howell, 2007). Public information on incumbents' actions is effective because (1) it is attributable to a single office holder and (2) positive change is under the politician's control. Indeed, we find that the transparency initiative improved outcomes that individual politicians could reasonably affect (e.g., constituency development project spending). By contrast, public ser-

¹In settings characterized by weakly institutionalized, non-ideological parties, congruence is defined by the extent to which candidates are expected to pursue constituents' interests while in office (Chandra, 2004).

vices outcomes, which require the cooperation of many government actors (and are not uniquely attributable to individual politicians) did not improve. In fact, there may be adverse consequences for the health of democratic institutions when politicians are held accountable for outcomes that are neither part of their job duties nor under their direct control ([Ashworth, 2012](#)).

Finally, this study expands the empirical literature on the determinants of politician performance, writ large. Past studies have examined the role played by the media ([Snyder & Strömberg, 2010](#)), politicians' attributes ([Volden & Wiseman, 2014](#)), beliefs about voter behavior ([Grimmer, 2013](#)), town hall meetings or debates ([Bidwell et al. , 2015](#), [Fujiwara & Wantchekon, 2013](#)), and shared identity with voters ([Butler & Broockman, 2011](#)). Building on seminal theories of democratization ([Diamond, 1994](#)) and past scorecard initiatives ([Humphreys & Weinstein, 2012](#)), this study focuses instead on the disciplining role of civil society.²

2 Theoretical Framework

How to hold politicians accountable for their performance is a core political science question ([Przeworski et al. , 1999](#)). In this study, we examine whether a civil society transparency initiative can discipline local politicians' performance between elections in Uganda. The initiative involves disseminating information about politicians' performance of their legally defined duties to constituents annually. We assess the initiative's effect on politicians' subsequent performance. Below, we detail a theoretical framework that allows us to generate testable hypotheses about the initiative's effect on politician behavior.

2.1 Lack of Transparency of Politicians' Actions

The relationship between voter information and politician performance lies at the heart of many accountability models. The political accountability literature describes politicians' incentives to perform their duties as based on the twin mechanisms of electoral sanctioning and selection ([Przeworski et al. , 1999](#)). Yet politicians motivated by either of these mechanisms still have private interests to pursue while in office that may conflict with furthering the public interest, and voters face the problem of how to incentivize better politician performance. Under the sanctioning approach ([Ferejohn, 1986](#)), voters only re-elect politicians whose observable output during the previous term exceeds a certain threshold. Given a pool of identical replacement candidates, incumbents will increase their performance to meet this threshold or else face sanctioning. Under the selection approach, voters consider heterogeneous candidates and use elections to select the better "type" (e.g., more competent, honest). The core assumption is that a candidate's type determines his or her level of effort exerted in the public interest ([Grossman & Hanlon, 2014](#)). In

²A complementary literature studies the effect of disseminating politician performance information to citizens on *voting behavior* but not *politician performance* (see [Kosack & Fung \(2014\)](#) and [Pande \(2011\)](#) for useful reviews). See especially [Metaketa](#), a set of ongoing coordinated field experimental studies.

order to be re-elected, “bad types” must mimic the actions of “good types,” which generally, but not always, improves public welfare (Prat, 2005). Indeed, a growing empirical literature demonstrates that the more informed citizens are, the greater effort politicians exert in office (Snyder & Strömberg, 2010, Strömberg, 2004).

However, when voters lack information about politicians’ actions (and types), they sanction incumbents or select between the incumbent and challengers based on “noisy signals,” or heuristics that might poorly map onto politicians’ actual actions and types (Fearon, 1999). In anticipation, politicians can then skew their efforts away from optimal performance and instead focus on satisfying these noisy heuristics criteria (Ashworth, 2012). Under both approaches, the worse the quality of the information voters have about politicians’ performance, the more politicians shirk their responsibilities or skew their efforts—and the more voter welfare is reduced (Fearon, 1999).

One noisy criterion voters might use to assess politicians’ performance is salient government outcomes, such as the quality or level of public services (e.g., public schools). Problematically, however, such outcomes generally cannot be attributed to individual politicians’ efforts; they commonly result from the actions and interactions of multiple actors in different government branches (legislators, bureaucrats, service providers) and often across multiple levels of government (national, subnational, local) (Powell & Whitten, 1993). Government outcomes could further be subject to positive or negative external shocks (e.g., financial crisis).³ Naturally, political accountability is weakened when the electorate holds politicians accountable for outcomes that are neither under their mandate nor their direct control (Ashworth, 2012). More so, when outcomes are used as voting criteria, politicians have an incentive to skew their efforts toward visible and attributable actions (Harding, 2015). This may be contrary to the public interest if such actions come at the expense of less attributable (but vitally important) government outputs (Bueno De Mesquita, 2007).

A second noisy heuristic that (too) often informs voter choice is the receipt of personal handouts. Handouts, which are highly visible and attributable (Keefer & Vlaicu, 2008), could consist of private transfers in cash (e.g., for school fees, medical bills) or in kind (e.g., sugar, soap). Other forms of clientelistic exchange may include patronage jobs, or help securing government contracts. Demands for handouts can come throughout the electoral term, but politicians are especially pressured to distribute them during the campaign season, when challengers and incumbents compete for constituent votes (Nichter & Peress, 2016).⁴ Although distributing private handouts is not part of their legally defined job duties, politicians typically succumb to demands for such handouts, and most feel that they are held accountable for delivering them. In a telling study, Lindberg (2010) surveyed Ghanaian politicians to investigate the nature of citizen–politician accountability

³Encouragingly, when an outcome can be clearly attributed to a particular politician and his or her constituents are relatively well informed, voters have been shown to sanction elected their representatives for poor performance (Berry & Howell, 2007, Ferraz & Finan, 2008, Harding, 2015).

⁴Handouts are usually offered with an implicit, rather than explicit, notion of *quid pro quo reciprocity in electoral support, given the secrecy of the ballot* (Rueda, 2015). Handouts could also be a proxy for competence, in that they may signal business acumen.

relations. Politicians responded that the greatest pressure they faced was to distribute “clientelistic handouts;” many admitted that they felt little accountability pressure to perform their legally defined job duties, especially those voters cannot observe (e.g., legislative duties). The surveyed politicians reported that they wished voters would become educated about their legally defined duties, so that they could be held accountable for doing what they were elected to do, rather than meeting ever-increasing demands for personal transfers. Indeed, providing such handouts is expensive, especially in competitive constituencies (Cruz *et al.* , 2015, Kramon, 2016), which pressures politicians to engage in corruption to pay for them (Hicken, 2011). Past work has shown that handouts help entrench the incumbency advantage of politicians from the ruling party (Collier & Vicente, 2012), and has emphasized the likely tradeoffs between private transfers and the provision of broad public services (Keefer & Vlaicu, 2008, Khemani, 2015).

In sum, a lack of transparency regarding politicians’ *actions* diminishes citizens’ ability to hold them accountable, and relying on noisy heuristics (e.g., public service outcomes or private transfers) is not an effective metric for voters to assess an incumbent’s performance. Transparency initiatives that seek to provide voters with attributable politician performance information are thought to address this problem. As we explain in the next subsections, there are certain conditions under which the dissemination of performance information may be more effective at improving politician performance.

2.2 Conditions under which *Citizens* use Politician Performance Transparency

Politicians will only react to performance transparency initiatives if they think citizens may use the information to vote them out of office. The first step in improving politician performance through increasing the transparency of their actions is thus to increase the likelihood that citizens will use the newly acquired information to inform their vote choice.

First, past work has stressed the importance of disseminating performance information that is *salient* to voters (Lieberman *et al.* , 2014). Second, all disseminated information should be *benchmarked* relative to other politicians or challenger candidates (Gottlieb, 2016)—especially if there are no commonly held performance standards. Third, voters in low-information contexts may have a hard time connecting politicians’ actions to government outcomes, even if the information provided is salient and benchmarked. For this reason, performance information dissemination campaigns should include a civic education element that explains politicians’ responsibilities and how their legally defined job duties can affect outcomes that are salient to voters (Chong *et al.* , 2015).

Fourth, in addition to highlighting problems arising from a dearth of information on politicians’ actions, political accountability models stress the importance of voter coordination around common evaluative criteria (Chwe, 2013). Put simply, citizens are unlikely to change their voting behavior and base it on quality credentials if they think most other constituents will vote based on other criteria (Bidwell *et al.* , 2015). Problematically, however, such coordination is

costly to achieve, and voters seldom have common knowledge of *sociotropic* performance, even in advanced democracies (Clinton & Grissom, 2015). Without such knowledge, constituents are rendered *egotropic* voters, deepening a coordination failure to hold politicians accountable for their actions (Ferejohn, 1986). One way to enable coordination is to publicly disseminate performance information. Consistent with this argument, several studies find that voters use politician performance information to sanction politicians when it is disseminated publicly, but not privately (Adida *et al.* , 2016, Arias *et al.* , 2016, Bidwell *et al.* , 2015).

2.3 Conditions under which *Politicians* React to Politician Performance Transparency

Even if citizens are armed with politician performance information, there are yet other conditions under which the information must be disseminated in order for politicians to respond by exerting greater effort. First, politicians and voters must have common knowledge of the performance information that voters hold. If politicians are unaware of the criteria on which voters are expected to coordinate (i.e., the newly disseminated information), they can hardly react in anticipation of voter sanctioning. Voters, in turn, are more likely to increase their expectation of higher performance when they know that their elected politicians knows that they know their actions.

Second, to mitigate against the political business cycle discussed above, politician performance information must be disseminated *well in advance of the next election*. Information that is disseminated early in the term can critically shape citizens' perceptions of politicians' types. Politicians may worry that once they are perceived to have a bad reputation, citizen perceptions would be hard to change. In addition, negative information about incumbents' actions released early in the term can embolden potential challengers, giving them time to organize a campaign. This is especially important in low-income countries, where opposition parties are weakly institutionalized and challengers mostly self-finance their election bids. A challenger's entry also further increases uncertainty regarding an incumbent's re-election prospects. Naturally, providing information earlier during their term gives politicians sufficient time to improve their performance. In fact, there is some evidence that disseminating information just prior to elections might have detrimental effects. Since this does not give politicians time to improve along those performance dimensions, incumbents may respond to negative information by increasing their vote buying (Bidwell *et al.* , 2015, Cruz *et al.* , 2015).

Third, in order for politicians to alter their behavior in response to disseminated performance information, they must believe that the information is reliable, trustworthy, and sustainable. They will attempt to derail transparency initiatives if they believe the reported information is not impartial or does not reflect their actual performance (Humphreys & Weinstein, 2012), and they are unlikely to change their behavior if they do not believe such information will continue to be circulated to voters. Monitoring politician performance and providing vetted, periodic information to the public are vast public good undertakings, and are subject to free-riding. Thus, non-partisan

and high-capacity civil society groups may need to lead initiatives to render politician performance transparent (Dahl, 1973, Diamond, 1994).⁵ In many low-income countries, however, civil society organizations lack the resources, capacity, sustainability, and therefore the credibility to undertake this role.

Taken together, we postulate the following hypothesis:

H₁ When there is common knowledge that voters will receive reliable, benchmarked, and salient politician performance information well in advance of an election, politicians will increase their efforts in the areas assessed.

2.4 Competitiveness

Political accountability theories hold that, without a ready pool of viable challengers, voters cannot credibly threaten to remove incumbents (Gordon & Huber, 2007). Indeed, much of the formal accountability literature examining the effect of transparency on voters' ability to discipline incumbents *assumes* that there are viable challengers available to replace poorly performing incumbents (Ashworth, 2012). However, in practice, many elections lack serious challengers, even in advanced democracies (Cox & Katz, 1996). A large body of empirical work finds that where challengers exert greater electoral pressure—i.e., in competitive constituencies—re-election-seeking incumbents perform significantly better (Besley & Burgess, 2002). Incumbents hailing from “safe” constituencies may reasonably conclude that even if the electorate becomes more informed, this will not reduce his or her prospects for re-election. In order for the transparency of politician actions to improve accountability, it may thus require a minimum level of political competition.

H_{2a} When there is common knowledge that voters will receive reliable, benchmarked, and salient politician performance information well in advance of an election, politicians will increase their efforts in such domains, but only in competitive constituencies.

It may be the *fear of future challengers* that disciplines politicians. Transparency initiatives may make it more likely that new challengers will run in future elections, especially if the information reflects poorly on the incumbent (Ashworth & Shotts, 2015, Gordon *et al.*, 2007). Since potential challengers are unlikely to run if their likelihood of winning is sufficiently low, given that campaigning is costly, “bad” information about the incumbent can transform “safe seats” into competitive ones. However, while all incumbents may fear the entry of new challengers, this threat is more probable in historically competitive constituencies, where opposition forces have already organized. In newly democratizing countries, where parties are weakly institutionalized and cash strapped, candidates and parties are especially strategic about where they compete.

⁵While the opposition takes on this role to expose politician performance information in rich countries, it has partisan interests in misinforming the public, and is thus not credible.

H_{2b} When there is common knowledge that voters will receive reliable, benchmarked, and salient politician performance information well in advance of an election, politicians will increase their efforts in such domains, but to a greater extent in competitive constituencies.

Building on the above framework, we examine an initiative to discipline politicians between elections by partnering with a non-partisan Ugandan local civil society organization that monitors and reports on politicians' performance of their legally defined job duties. We evaluate the effect of disseminating politician performance information to constituents years before the next election, both unconditionally and conditionally on the constituency's competitiveness. This study thus attempts to contribute to the literature on the nexus of political information and accountability in ways that previous studies have not. Despite the importance of both politician and citizen behavior to the study of political accountability, the majority of information accountability studies have narrowly focused on citizens' response to transparency shocks, rather than on politicians. Although government performance is important throughout the electoral term, past studies have mostly examined the effect of information disseminated just prior to elections. Despite the importance of competition as a foundation upon which transparency improves politician performance, past work has tended to examine transparency and competitiveness in isolation. In the next section we describe the political context and civil society intervention that we use to test the hypotheses.

3 Study Context, Standard NGO Activities, and Intervention

This study was undertaken in partnership with Advocates Coalition for Development and the Environment (ACODE), a leading non-partisan Ugandan NGO that seeks to improve the performance of elected politicians in the 20 district (LC5) governments that comprise the study area.⁶ In this section, we describe the district political institutions, the standard ACODE activities conducted throughout the study area, and the intervention.

In our empirical analysis, we especially draw on information from multiple original surveys conducted throughout the study area: (a) a pre-treatment (baseline) survey of a random sample of constituents (N = 6,122), (b) a baseline politician survey (N = 396), (c) a post-treatment (endline) politician survey (N = 375), (d) a post-treatment bureaucrat survey (N = 77), and (d) a random sample exit poll of citizens following program implementation to examine information comprehension and retention (N = 1,766). See the Supplementary Information (SI) for more detail on those surveys.⁷

⁶ACODE selected the districts in order to include diversity in regions, age (i.e., new/old districts), and development levels. Appendix Figure 7 contains a map of these districts.

⁷All research activities were undertaken in collaboration with Innovation for Poverty Action.

3.1 District Local Governments in Uganda

Below the central (national) government level, Uganda has three local government tiers: district (LC5), subcounty (LC3), and village (LC1). District local governments are comprised of a set of civil service offices and an elected legislative body, the district council. Bureaucrats (called “technocrats” in Uganda) are chiefly responsible for implementing public services and projects according to the budget and work plan developed annually via collaboration between the technocratic and political branches and passed by the district council. District councils are vested with the power to make laws (unless they conflict with the constitution), regulate and monitor the delivery of public services, formulate comprehensive development plans based on local priorities, and supervise the district bureaucracy. Uganda’s degree of decentralization thus gives the district governments relatively broad discretion in allocating central government funds.

Councilors (elected representatives to the district council) have four areas of legally defined job duties, as stipulated in the Local Government Act (1997): *legislative* (e.g., passing motions in plenary, committee work), *lower local government participation* (e.g., attending LC3 meetings), *contact with the electorate* (e.g., meeting with constituents and local NGOs), and *monitoring public service provision* (e.g., visiting schools to monitor whether service delivery standards are met).⁸ There are two main types of councilors in the district council, which we incorporate into our randomization strategy. In 2006, Uganda implemented a gender quota mandating that at least one-third of all councilors are female. To achieve this goal, so-called special woman constituencies, in which only female candidates can compete, were overlaid on top of “regular” subcounty constituencies. Special woman constituencies encompass between one and three subcounties, depending on population size. Thus, citizens are represented by two councilors: a (usually male) “regular councilor” and a (female) “special woman councilor,” who may represent up to two additional subcounties. In the study area, there are 149 special woman councilors and 247 regular councilors.

Uganda is an electoral authoritarian regime, the most common type of regime for low-income countries globally (Schedler, 2006) and the modal regime type in sub-Saharan Africa (Weghorst, 2015). The National Resistance Movement (NRM) has been in control of the national executive and legislature since 1986. Multiparty elections were introduced for the 2006 general elections. Our study takes place between the second and third multiparty elections in 2011 and 2016, respectively. In the study area, 72% of councilors caucus with the NRM (SI, Table 2). Notably, the share of NRM councilors varies across districts, from as low as about 20% of district councilors from the NRM (in Lira) to 100% in Kanungu and Ntungamo (SI, Figure 1). Given the recent introduction of multiparty elections, the majority of councilors (53%) are serving their first term.⁹

To compete in elections, politicians must distribute personal handouts (Green, 2010). About two-thirds of councilors report paying handouts to voters: during the 2011, campaign over 2 mil-

⁸Councilors are expected to monitor, not implement, the delivery of public services.

⁹In the 2005–2011 term, 47% served as a district councilor, while 33% held no position, and 15% served as an elected official at a lower level of government; the rest held unelected political positions.

lion Ugandan Shillings (600 USD) were handed out. This is not insignificant in a country where GDP per capita is below 700 USD. Performing their legally defined duties is not only less expensive for incumbents than handouts; it is also a performance criterion that is unavailable to challengers. Thus, shifting voter criteria to legally defined duty performance should be attractive to (at least high-quality) politicians (Lindberg, 2010), especially in competitive constituencies, where campaign costs tend to be significantly higher (Cruz *et al.*, 2015).

3.2 Standard Activities: Performance Scorecard Initiative

In 2009, ACODE launched the Local Government Councilor Scorecard Initiative in consultation with various local stakeholders to improve district councilors' performance in their legally defined duties as stipulated in the Local Government Act (1997).¹⁰ By training councilors on these duties and generating information about their performance, the initiative mainly seeks to improve councilors' capacity to fulfill their responsibilities.

At the beginning of the legislative term (Spring 2011), ACODE conducted training sessions for all councilors in the study area. These sessions discussed councilors' legally defined duties, offered advice on how best to fulfill these duties, provided councilors with useful tools (e.g., planners, monitoring checklists), and described the yearly scorecard. Figure 1 details the scorecard components (and subcomponents), and their respective weights.¹¹ ACODE researchers collect the underlying data to produce the scorecard annually in reference to the previous legislative term (June-July).¹² Once the scorecards are complete and vetted each year, ACODE disseminates them in district plenary session meetings attended by district councilors, key bureaucrats, and party officials.

ACODE activities, summarized in Table 1 in light grey, are salient to councilors. At baseline, 96% knew about the program, and over 80% could name their score within 10 points at endline. Importantly, the initiative is also well received by councilors, who generally view ACODE as unbiased and its scorecard as reliable. Tellingly, 94% of councilors recommended that the scorecard initiative should be scaled up throughout the country (SI, Section 2.5).

3.3 Experimental Intervention: Intense Dissemination of Performance Scorecard to Citizens

This study evaluates the effect of ACODE's Intensive Dissemination (ID) program of the councilor scorecard.¹³ ACODE implemented the ID program in consultation with the research team

¹⁰Local stakeholders include the Ministry of Local Governments, Uganda Local Government Association, district officials, and various other NGOs.

¹¹The total score is set between 0 and 100, intentionally mirroring the conventional scoring used in Ugandan schools.

¹²See [ACODE's 2014–2015 scorecard annual report](#) for further details. Note that the scorecard is solely based on administrative data and does not rely in any way on citizen's attitudes or perceptions.

¹³ACODE implemented an additional cross-cutting randomly assigned program, which allowed citizens to report public service problems to councilors via SMS. This program is evaluated in a companion paper, since there is no interaction effect.

PARAMETER/INDICATOR	Actual Score	Maximum Score
1. LEGISLATIVE ROLE		25
i) Participation in plenary sessions		8
ii) Participation in Committees		8
iii) Moved motions in Council		5
iiii) Provided special skills/knowledge to the Council or committees		4
2. CONTACT WITH ELECTORATE		20
i) Meeting with Electorate		11
ii) Office or coordination centre in the constituency		9
3. PARTICIPATION IN LOWER LOCAL GOVERNMENT		10
i) Attendance in sub-county Council sessions		10
4. MONITORING SERVICE DELIVERY ON NATIONAL PRIORITY PROGRAMMES AREAS		45
i) Monitoring of Health Service delivery units		7
ii) Monitoring Agricultural Projects		7
iii) Monitoring Education facilities		7
iv) Monitoring Road projects		7
v) Monitoring Water facilities		7
vi) Monitoring Functional Adult Literacy programmes		5
vii) Monitoring Environment and natural resources		5

Figure 1: ACODE Scorecard

in two rounds of parish-level community meetings held in treated constituencies.¹⁴ The first set of meetings took place in fall 2013 (354 meetings; 12,949 attendees) and the second in fall 2014 (339 meetings; 14,520 attendees). Thus, the scorecard dissemination occurred in the middle of the electoral term over a two-year period.

Given that ACODE conducted professionalization activities and released the scorecard annually in a workshop in plenum with the councilors, key district officials, and party officials, the ID program represents the effect of the additional transparency of the scorecard to citizens above and beyond the standard activities. Notably, the treatment effect of scorecard dissemination isolates the effect of pressure on politicians from voter response (and/or pressure from challenger candidates) *above and beyond* intrinsic, peer, or party pressure from district plenary session meetings. Below we discuss the ID program treatment components, which are further summarized in Table 1 in bold font.

¹⁴Parishes include 3–10 nearby villages that share basic services (e.g., health clinics, secondary schools) and market structures (e.g., trading center).

Intense Dissemination (ID) program	Control
Councilor Professionalization Councilor Scorecard Production Dissemination of Scorecard at District level Civic Education Councilor Legally Defined Job Duties in Meetings, Texts, Public Ads Civic Education Public Service Delivery Standards in Meetings, Texts, Public Ads Dissemination of Scorecard to Citizens in Meetings, Texts, Public Ads Councilors Informed/Invited Meetings, Receive Texts	Councilor Professionalization Councilor Scorecard Production Dissemination of Scorecard at District Level

Note: Activities conducted throughout the study area in gray. Activities conducted in treatment areas in black.

Table 1: Treatment Table

Meeting Recruitment. An average of 40 individuals attended each community meeting. Although open to the public, ACODE especially mobilized local leaders to attend the community meetings, targeting lower-tier government officials, religious leaders, service providers, and members of village organizations (e.g., PTAs, women’s and youth groups). Local leaders were intended to act as initial nodes in a wider dissemination process to other community members. To that end, meeting attendees were given fliers, posters, and calendars (see Figure 9) with a summary of the disseminated information to share information about the councilors’ performance in prominent public places.

Meeting Content. ACODE demonstrated how councilors’ actions fit into the delivery of public services by providing information on their job duties, national and district government responsibilities, and legally defined standards of service provision. Then, ACODE disseminated councilor scores benchmarked against the scores of all other district councilors. Last, ACODE collected the cell phone numbers of meeting attendees and subsequently sent out periodic text messages reinforcing the information delivered at the community meetings (SI, Table 7). The research team deployed enumerators to the community meetings to monitor the implementation of the meeting agenda and conduct an exit poll with five randomly selected participants to test for content comprehension and retention. In the SI (Section 2.6) we demonstrate that the meetings were successful in fulfilling their goals with these data.

We use the baseline citizen survey, conducted in summer 2012, to demonstrate that the information ACODE disseminated to constituents was both new and salient. First, only 9% of survey respondents reported hearing “something” about the scorecard before the program began.¹⁵ Tellingly, when asked to evaluate their councilors’ baseline performance across the four types of legally defined job duties, respondents’ evaluations did not positively correlate with the 2011–2012 councilors’ scores (Figure 10), and a majority of respondents admitted that they had no means of assessing their councilors’ efforts to fulfill his or her job duties. Further, citizens at baseline knew little about councilors’ legally defined duties. For example, 41% of respondents asserted that paying personal handouts (e.g., medical bills) is a legally defined duty, while 50% viewed such personal transfers as a *de facto*, if not a *de jure*, duty.

¹⁵ ACODE publishes the scorecard publicly online [website](#), but internet access is rare in the study area.

The information was also salient: the activities reported by citizens as their main priority for councilors are highly correlated with their legally defined duties, and thus scorecard indicators (see Figure 11, and SI, Section 2.7). The most important duty cited by a plurality of citizens was visiting schools and health centers (i.e., “monitoring services”), followed by regularly visiting villages (“contact with the electorate”), participating in council sessions and committees (“legislative” role), and providing assistance to communities and participating in LC3 and LC1 meetings (“lower local government participation”).

Treating Councilors. ACODE invited treated district councilors to all dissemination meetings in their constituency and informed them of the meetings’ content. Councilors were also notified (via text message) whenever scorecard information was shared with constituents via text message (SI, Table 8). Therefore the scorecard dissemination was common knowledge to voters and politicians. The results of the councilor endline survey suggest that politicians were successfully treated (SI, Section 2.8). Three years after they were informed of their participation in the ID program, treated councilors were significantly more likely to assume that a larger share of their constituents was aware of their score than those assigned to the control group (e.g., 50% and 37%, respectively, reported that a high or very high number of constituents knew about their score), and, importantly, were more likely to believe that the scorecard would affect their chances of re-election (e.g., 26% versus 35% claimed the scorecard would *not* affect their re-election prospects).

4 Experimental Research Design

4.1 Randomization and Balance

We use an experimental research design to study the effect of the ID program, assigning treatment in summer 2012. Since “regular” constituencies are nested within “special woman” councilor constituencies, our unit of randomization is the special woman councilor constituency. Thus, citizens’ regular and special woman councilors are assigned the same treatment. We further blocked randomization at the district level. Appendix Table 5 shows that, except for post-secondary education and number of challengers in 2011, the randomization achieved a good covariate balance across treatment groups with regards to councilor mandate, gender, partisanship, political experience, ACODE 2011–2012 (pre-treatment) total score, and competitiveness in the 2011 election (vote share and margin of victory). Furthermore, there is no significant difference in constituency-level characteristics such as logged population size, ethnic fractionalization, and level of development.

4.2 Data and Measurement

While we naturally use ACODE’s scorecard as an outcome measure, we further collect data on other measures of councilor performance. Specifically, we also measure councilor peer evaluations and bureaucrats’ assessments, which capture what district officials—rather than an NGO—

consider to be high-level performance.¹⁶ Councilors and bureaucrats may use different dimensions than ACODE or assign different weights in evaluating performance. We also implemented a unique exercise—a school improvement grant—to provide a behavioral measure of councilors’ efforts to improve constituents’ welfare that is separate from their ACODE scores. See SI, Section 3 for further information on each outcome, including distribution plots of the raw data.

Performance Scorecard. Our first outcome measure is councilors’ scores on ACODE’s annual scorecard. The first scorecard (2011–2011) captures performance prior to treatment assignment, and subsequent scorecards (2012–2013, 2013–2014) capture post-treatment performance.¹⁷ We focus on the effect of the treatment on the total score, but also report treatment effects on the scorecard’s four subcomponents. In the baseline 2011–2012 scorecard, the mean total score is 46 out of 100 (range 10 to 87), allowing councilors ample room for improvement.

Councilors’ Peer Evaluation. Our second outcome is performance evaluation elicited from fellow district councilors. All councilors were interviewed in person at endline, and were asked to evaluate the performance of five (for survey brevity) randomly selected district co-councilors based on *what they considered* to be the most relevant performance dimensions. Peers evaluated performance on a five-point scale. Since this design produced 3–7 ratings for each councilor, we averaged all peer assessments to create a single peer evaluation mean score.

Bureaucrats’ Assessment. We further constructed a performance measure based on the evaluation of district bureaucrats who have unique insight into the effort that district councilors exert to improve public service delivery, as well as their effectiveness. Several activities that councilors undertake—e.g., writing reports, or lobbying for targeted projects—require contact with the district offices responsible for the provision of public services (e.g., health, water, roads, education). Data for this measure was collected via in-person interviews with key civil service staff in health, education, and general administration offices in each district. As part of the survey, technocrats were asked to assess each of the councilors along four performance dimensions, using a five-point scale.¹⁸ We averaged ratings on these four dimensions across surveyed technocrats to create a single composite normalized index (Cronbach’s alpha = 0.91).

School Grant Applications. We implemented an original behavioral task that measures the level of effort councilors were willing to exert to improve public service delivery in their constituencies “off the scorecard.” One possible critique of performance scorecards is that they likely exacerbate the multitasking agency problem, whereby agents focus on some observable tasks (on which they are rewarded) at the expense of other equally important tasks that are more difficult to measure (Dewatripont *et al.*, 2000). Our behavioral measure is important, because we are interested

¹⁶See Humphreys & Weinstein (2012) for a similar strategy in a study of Uganda’s members of parliament.

¹⁷ACODE did not disseminate the 2014–2015 scores widely.

¹⁸Ratings were provided for: (1) the number of times a councilor has visited or called the sector’s office in the past six months, (2) how knowledgeable the councilor is about the standards, rules, and procedures for resource allocation, (3) the quality of a councilor’s monitoring of public services, and (4) the level of effort the councilor puts into improving public service delivery in their constituency.

in testing whether the dissemination performance information increases the broader representational function of politicians, even if these actions are not part of the scorecard initiative.

After the endline survey, councilors were informed of a Primary Education Development Grants program that the research team funded in coordination with all district education offices (DEOs). In this activity, councilors were presented with an opportunity to help primary schools in their constituency apply for a grant of 300,000 Ugandan Shillings (about US\$100) to support an initiative of their choice. Grant applications involved collaborating with the school headmaster and PTA chair, whose signatures had to appear on the application forms. Councilors could submit one application per school for all schools in their constituency.¹⁹ Councilors were given two weeks to submit the applications to the DEO, where the applications were time stamped. Completed and on-time applications were then entered into a public lottery drawing (to which councilors were invited) at the district headquarters.²⁰ The number of grants assigned to each district was proportional to the district population and ranged between two and five.²¹ We received a total of 1,662 applications out of a possible 4,585. Of the submitted grant applications, 1,388 were valid and entered into the lottery and 61 grants were allocated to schools. To construct a measure of performance, we used the absolute number of complete grants, and conducted robustness checks using the number of incomplete grants and a binary variable indicating whether the councilor facilitated at least one application.

Composite Index. We combined the above performance outcome measures into a single composite index. Following [Anderson \(2008\)](#), the index is a weighted mean of standardized outcomes in which the weights—the inverse of the covariance matrix—are used to maximize the amount of information captured.²² This approach improves the statistical power and is robust to over-testing, because each index represents a single test. Individual measures are positively correlated with Cronbach’s alpha of 0.57.

Intense Dissemination (ID). The core independent variable is an indicator variable, (*ID*), that equals 1 for councilors assigned to the treatment group, and 0 for those assigned to the control.

Constituency Competitiveness. We assembled pre-treatment electoral returns data from the 2011 elections from the Ugandan Electoral Commission. We first calculated each councilor’s margin of victory (measured as the difference in vote share between the councilor and his/her main challenger), and then dichotomized the variable at the median value to create a binary variable, *competitive*, which has a value of 1 for more competitive constituencies. The median value of councilors’ margin of victory is 0.22.²³

¹⁹Each school could apply twice, given the overlap in regular and woman councilor constituencies.

²⁰Grants were considered valid if handed in within three days of the deadline and signed by all required stakeholders.

²¹The number of grants varied based on the number of district councilors to ensure that the probability of winning was constant for all councilors. We acknowledge, however, that the number of schools per subcounty varies, and therefore the winning probabilities for schools vary even if every councilor submitted the maximum number of applications.

²²The SI (Section 4.1) shows that the results are robust to alternative summation methods, including the unweighted mean of the standardized measures.

²³The margin of victory was set to 1 for the 36 councilors who ran unopposed.

Additional Explanatory Variables. We estimate models with and without covariate adjustment. Councilor-level variables include continuous measures of baseline scorecards and the number of challengers in the 2011 election, as well as indicator variables for ruling party membership (*NRM*), “special women” councilor mandate, first-term councilors, and attaining at least a post-secondary education. Constituency-level variables include a continuous measure of (log) population, measures of ethnolinguistic fractionalization, and assets-based poverty level derived from the 2002 census. Table 2 shows descriptive statistics for all variables used in the study’s empirical analysis.

Variable	Mean	Std. Dev.	Min.	Max.	N
Independent variables					
ID treatment	0.5	0.5	0	1	408
Vote share (2011)	0.62	0.18	0.28	1	400
Margin of victory (2011)	0.33	0.29	0	1	399
Competitiveness	0.5	0.5	0	1	399
Covariates					
NRM	0.71	0.45	0	1	408
Special women councilor (SWC)	0.4	0.49	0	1	408
Post-secondary education	0.55	0.5	0	1	408
SMS	0.5	0.5	0	1	408
First-term councilor	0.64	0.46	0	1	408
N. challengers 2011	1.82	1.28	0	7	408
Total score 2011–2012	46.07	17.23	10	87	381
Constituency population (log)	10.32	0.53	8.63	11.99	408
Poverty Index (constituency)	-0.14	0.25	-0.66	1.15	408
Ethnic fractionalization (constituency)	0.29	0.22	0	0.89	408
Outcome variables					
Total score 2012–2013	55.71	16.01	21	89	371
Total score 2013–2014	52.74	19.95	0	89	372
Total score 2014–2015	51.37	19.83	1	99	369
Mean peer evaluation	3.11	0.70	1	5	381
Complete school grant application	1.78	3.21	0	16	408
Total school grant applications	3.58	4.85	0	27	408
Technocrats’ assessment					
Technocrats’ mean assessment	3.12	1.17	1	5	1,275
Technocrats’ assessment (std)	0	1	-1.81	1.61	1,275
Office visits	3.05	1.37	1	5	1,235
Knowledgeable	3.28	1.21	1	5	1,148
Monitoring	3.28	1.26	1	5	1,141
Effort	3.19	1.21	1	5	1,127

Table 2: Summary statistics

4.3 Empirical Model

For all outcome measures, we estimate a series of cross-sectional ordinary least square (OLS) regressions, captured by Equation 1:

$$Y_i = \alpha + \beta_1 ID_i + \phi + \gamma X + \epsilon_i, \quad (1)$$

where Y_i denotes the performance measure of councilor i at the endline, ID the treatment, ϕ district fixed effects (our blocking variables), and ϵ the error term clustered at the district level.²⁴ We report models with and without X , a vector of pre-treatment councilor and constituency covariates, defined above.²⁵

Since we hypothesize that the effect of the ID program would be greater in competitive constituencies, we re-estimate Equation 1 including the variable *Competitive* and its interaction with the *ID* indicator. Since competitiveness in the 2011 election is pre-treatment, the interaction between *ID* and *competitive* is well identified. However, while the ID treatment has been randomized, the competitiveness of elections has not. The effect of competitiveness may therefore be the combined effect of electoral competition and a bundle of factors that make a constituency competitive, which would affect our interpretation of the variable and its interaction. Appendix Table 6 shows, for example, that councilors from competitive constituencies are less educated, less likely to caucus with the NRM, and face more challengers. We thus include all available councilor and constituency covariates that might be correlated with electoral competition in our conditional effects regression analysis. Importantly, competitiveness itself is well balanced across treatment groups (Appendix Table 5).

5 Results

Our major finding is that the ID program significantly increases councilor performance, but only in competitive constituencies. For brevity, we report the average marginal treatment effects for all outcomes in graphical form (including both 90% and 95% confidence intervals); the regression tables are available in the SI (Section 4). The graphs use standardized outcomes to ease coefficient interpretation, and are based on the more conservative model, adjusting for pre-treatment covariates.

As Figure 2 makes clear, the ID program had no discernible effect on councilor performance across all outcome measures. The point estimate of the ID effect on the composite index is close

²⁴Since the number of districts is relatively small, standard errors are bootstrapped using 500 repetitions. Results are robust to clustering instead standard errors at the special women constituency level, the unit of randomization.

²⁵Following Lin *et al.* (2016), when we adjust for pre-treatment covariates, we set missing covariate values to the mean values of the covariates across treatment groups, and include an indicator variable that equals 1 for imputed values. The results are robust to letting the missing covariate render the entire data point missing from the analysis.

to zero (0.04 standard deviations) and insignificant ($p - value = 0.463$). Similarly, using the total scorecard as the outcome variable, the point estimate of the ID program is small (0.08 standard deviations) and insignificant ($p - value = 0.376$). Tellingly, for none of the study's five outcomes measures is the ID effect larger than 0.1 standard deviations.

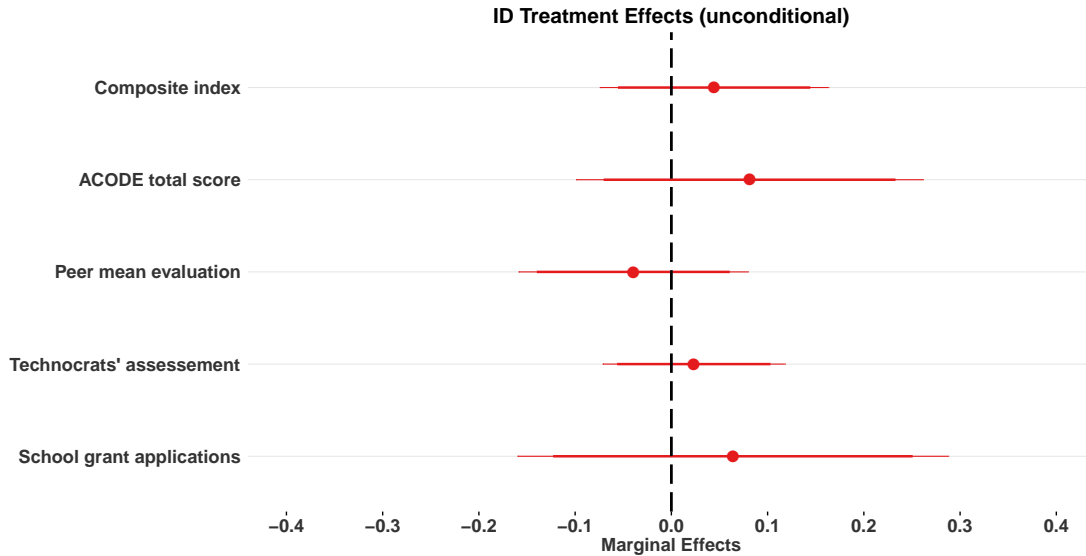


Figure 2: DV: Performance Outcome Measures. Error bars denote 90% (thin) and 95% (thick) confidence intervals. Based on regression models that include covariate adjustment. ACODE total score averages across the two widely disseminated post-treatment scores (2012–13 and 2013–14)

By contrast, we find that the ID program had a large and significantly stronger effect on councilors hailing from competitive constituencies. Figure 3 illustrates the marginal effect of the treatments conditional on competitiveness, as well as the difference between the marginal effects, across our range of performance outcome measures. For example, using the composite index, the effect of the ID program in competitive constituencies is 0.2 ($p - value = 0.031$), and the difference in the effect of the ID program between competitive and non-competitive councilors is 0.29 standard deviations ($p - value = 0.044$).

Similarly, the effect of the ID program on ACODE's total score is 0.22 standard deviations in competitive constituencies ($p - value = 0.018$) and 0.14 standard deviations using councilors' peer evaluations ($p - value = 0.068$). The significant conditional ID effect for the school grant applications is especially revealing. Whereas councilors assigned to the control groups hailing from competitive constituencies visited an average of 3.12 schools, councilors assigned to the ID treatment from competitive areas visited 5.6 schools. The effect of the ID in competitive constituencies is highly significant ($p - value = 0.002$).

Importantly, the positive ID effect in competitive constituencies is consistent across all outcome measures, and robust—as demonstrated in greater length in SI, Section 4—to different model specifications, measurements of the outcome variable, the use of a continuous rather than binary measure of competitiveness (Figure 4), and the inclusion or exclusion of pre-treatment covariates.

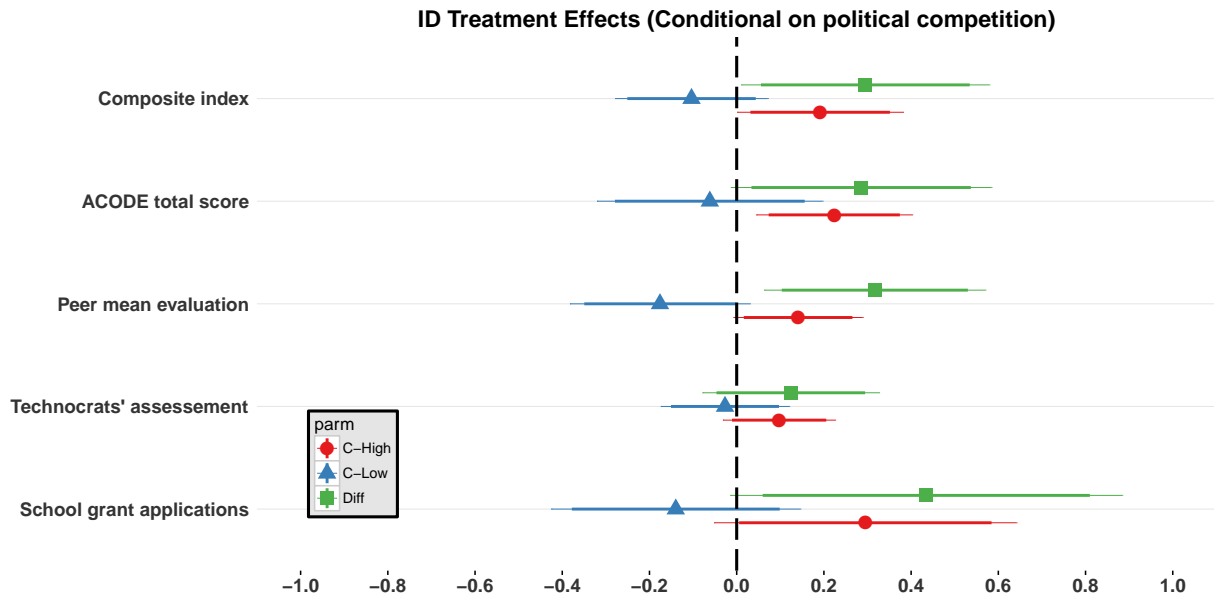


Figure 3: Treatment Effects Conditional on the Competitiveness of the Constituency. Results are based on *separate* cross-sectional OLS regressions, using standardized measures of the defendant variables to allow for better comparison. Reported models adjust for covariates, as described above.

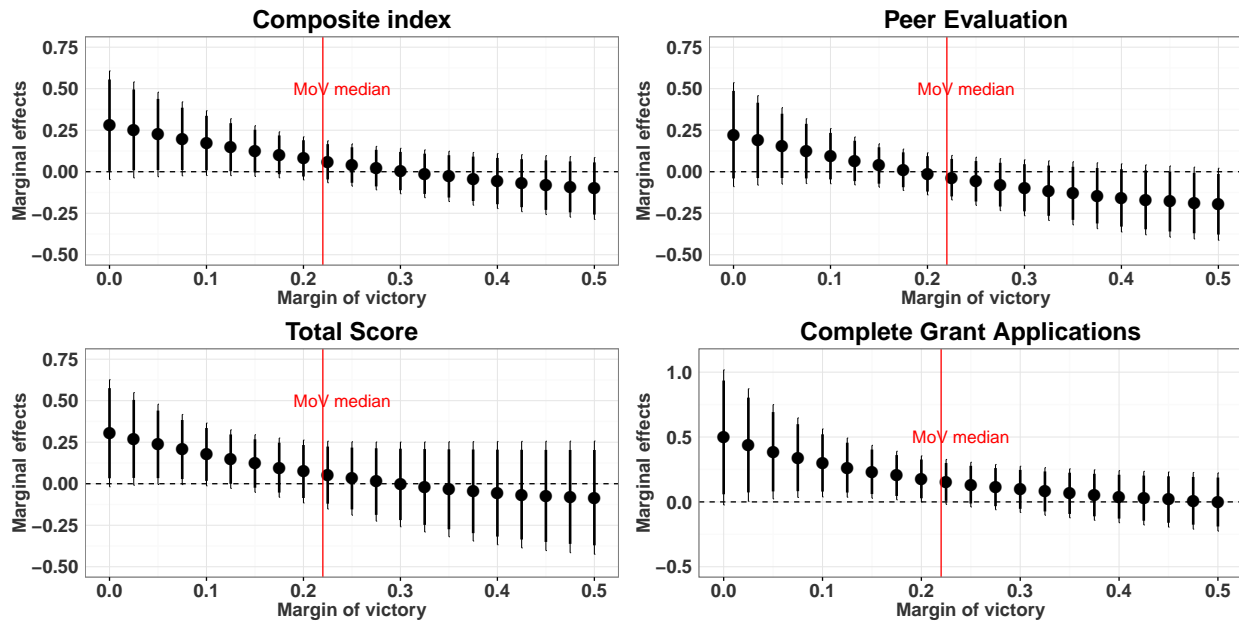


Figure 4: Marginal effects of ID treatment conditional on political competition measured as the margin of victory (MoV) in the 2011 local election. Models include the quadratic term of MoV, district fixed effects, and covariates adjustment.

5.1 By Year ID Effect Between Elections

As discussed above, a core theoretical interest of the study is whether the ID program can help mitigate the electoral business cycle problem. To assess how quickly the effect of the ID program was realized, we rerun Equation 1 using ACODE’s total score in each year as the dependent variable. Figure 5 shows that the effect appears immediately after treatment assignment and is consistent in both post-treatment years in which the scorecard was widely disseminated. There is no effect of the treatment in the last year, before which there was no announced dissemination.²⁶

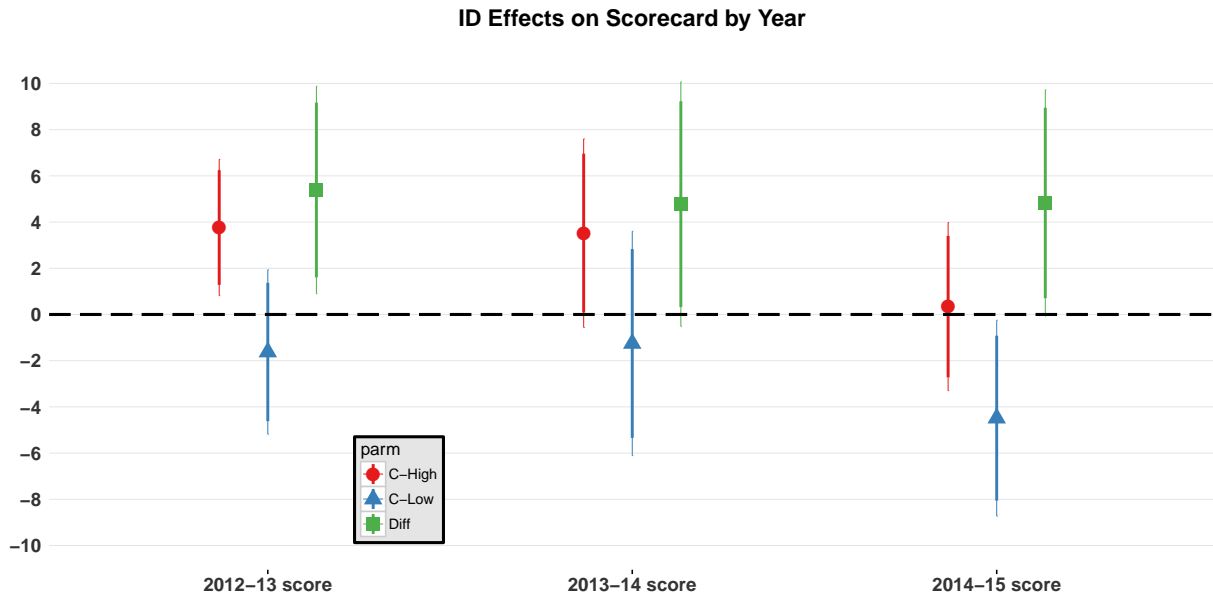


Figure 5: ID effect on ACODE scorecard by year. Results are based on *separate* cross-sectional OLS regressions, in which the dependent variable is the scorecard’s total score in a given year. All models adjust for covariates as described above.

5.2 Scorecard Performance Dimensions

We further explore the performance dimensions that are most affected by the dissemination campaign by examining the conditional treatment effects of each scorecard component. The results suggest that the significant effect of the ID program on the total score in competitive constituents is driven by an increase in incumbents’ legislative roles and greater involvement in the governance of lower-level local governments (LC3 and LC1), with somewhat weaker effects with respect to efforts to monitor public services (see Figure 6). These are interesting findings, especially given that politicians’ legislative work is considered among the most opaque to voters (Lindberg, 2010).

In sum, we find a consistent result that *when councilors come from competitive constituencies*, widely disseminating information about their performance has a positive and significant effect

²⁶This dissemination would have occurred directly during the primaries and campaign period before the 2016 elections, and ACODE felt this would be too sensitive to do.

on the amount of effort they exert on behalf of their constituents. Using ACODE’s scorecard, the effect appeared immediately after treatment and every year thereafter during the electoral term.

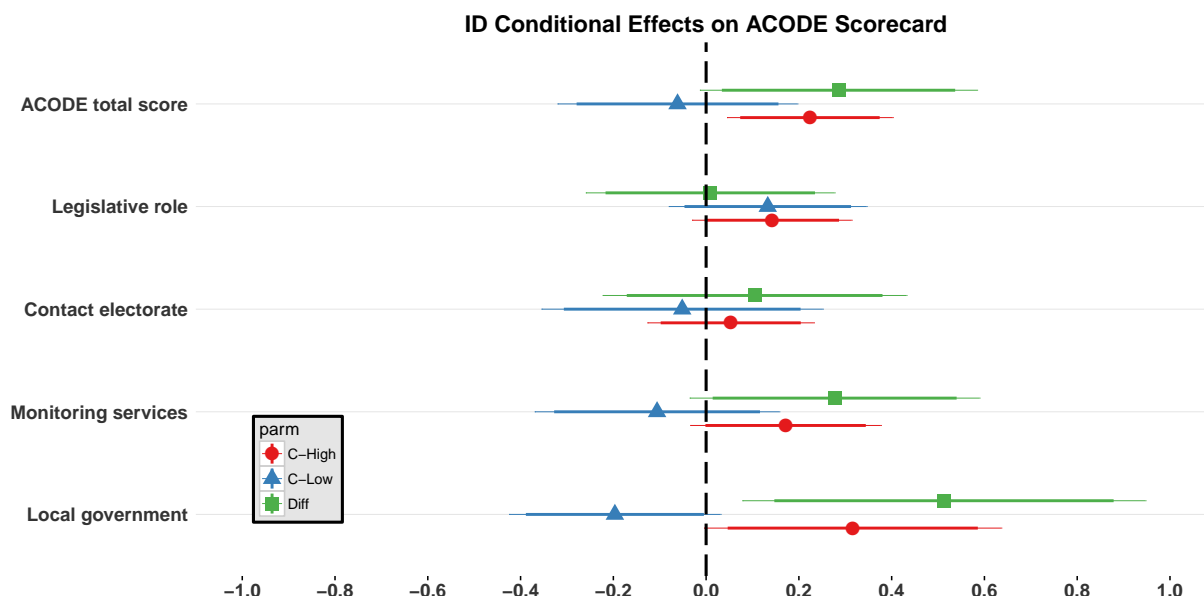


Figure 6: ACODE Score Components: The effects of the ID program conditional on political competition, using mixed-effects models with year and district fixed effects, and councilor- and constituency-level controls.

5.3 Extension: Development Outcomes

Politicians who exert greater effort in fulfilling their legally defined job duties do not necessarily produce tangible benefits for their constituents. Thus, we extend the study to examine whether the ID treatment contributed to development outcomes, using two data sources. First, we culled data on the location and size of all development projects in the annual district budget.²⁷ We aggregate across sectors and parishes to create two annual measures of spending in each subcounty: (a) the number of development projects and (b) log spending per capita²⁸ Since allocations in a given year reflect the approved budget of the previous year, we code 2012/13 as pre-treatment and 2013/14 and 2014/15 as post-treatment. Using a difference-in-differences (DID) estimation strategy, we estimate multi-level random-effects models, with and without covariate adjustment.

We do not find a significant (unconditional) effect of the ID program in the post-treatment period (Tables 3 and 4, Columns 1–2). However, consistent with the results reported above, we find that councilors assigned to the ID treatment from competitive constituencies are able to secure more development projects (Table 3) and higher development spending per capita (Table 4) than

²⁷These data, assembled by the Ministry of Finance, Planning, and Economic Development, are made publicly available on the [Uganda Budget Information website](#). These data do not include direct central government spending or recurrent spending (e.g., salaries). We also exclude projects that are not allocated geographically.

²⁸Our subcounty population data comes from the National Population and Housing Census 2014 provisional results (see the [Uganda Bureau of Statistics website](#)).

comparable councilors assigned to the control group, though the spending outcome falls slightly below standard levels of significance. These findings demonstrate that Ugandan councilors have the power to substantively affect citizen welfare.

	Unconditional		Low competition		High competition	
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
ID	-0.096 (0.102)	-0.152* (0.092)	0.018 (0.126)	0.001 (0.118)	-0.071 (0.147)	-0.157 (0.140)
Post	0.215** (0.085)	0.218** (0.085)	-0.174 (0.144)	-0.165 (0.142)	0.549*** (0.089)	0.551*** (0.089)
$ID \times Post$	0.241*** (0.093)	0.234** (0.093)	0.073 (0.152)	0.080 (0.152)	0.271*** (0.103)	0.265*** (0.102)
Constant	-23.279*** (2.500)	-26.531*** (2.997)	-23.839*** (3.339)	-30.678*** (3.381)	-27.438*** (2.940)	-27.693*** (3.632)
$\sqrt{\psi_{(2)}}$	-0.593*** (0.146)	-0.696*** (0.177)	-1.139*** (0.378)	-23.849 (22.277)	-0.458*** (0.157)	-0.540*** (0.157)
σ_e	-0.602*** (0.061)	-0.603*** (0.061)	-0.479*** (0.084)	-0.509*** (0.085)	-0.793*** (0.087)	-0.793*** (0.087)
Year FE	X	X	X	X	X	X
District FE	X	X	X	X	X	X
Controls		X		X		X
N	550	550	204	204	346	346

Notes: $\sqrt{\psi_{(2)}}$ refers to variability between councilors, and σ_e is the estimated standard deviation of the overall error term * p<0.10, ** p<0.05, *** p<0.01

Table 3: DV: Number of Development Projects (log)

	Unconditional		Low competition		High competition	
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
ID	0.008 (0.100)	-0.062 (0.083)	0.176 (0.135)	0.017 (0.113)	-0.053 (0.136)	-0.158 (0.118)
Post	-0.197** (0.088)	-0.200** (0.088)	-0.295** (0.119)	-0.315*** (0.120)	-0.039 (0.104)	-0.037 (0.105)
$ID \times Post$	0.038 (0.083)	0.041 (0.083)	-0.137 (0.114)	-0.088 (0.115)	0.119 (0.110)	0.109 (0.110)
Constant	-1.937 (2.424)	6.443** (2.734)	1.004 (3.590)	9.088** (3.775)	-6.659*** (2.533)	1.468 (3.002)
$\sqrt{\psi_{(2)}}$	-0.689*** (0.093)	-0.998*** (0.085)	-0.836*** (0.150)	-1.555*** (0.283)	-0.643*** (0.109)	-0.916*** (0.104)
σ_e	-0.799*** (0.081)	-0.803*** (0.081)	-0.704*** (0.120)	-0.704*** (0.118)	-0.924*** (0.114)	-0.925*** (0.114)
Year FE	X	X	X	X	X	X
District FE	X	X	X	X	X	X
Controls		X		X		X
N	561	561	210	210	351	351

Notes: $\sqrt{\psi_{(2)}}$ refers to variability between councilors, and σ_e is the estimated standard deviation of the overall error term * p<0.10, ** p<0.05, *** p<0.01

Table 4: DV: Development Projects Spending (log)

Second, the research team conducted two rounds of unannounced audits of randomly selected health and education service providers in the post-treatment period—the first in early 2014 and the second in late 2014. The “in-charge” worker of the health center was asked about the center’s infrastructure, the availability of key medicines, and recent staff hiring and firing. Similarly, we interviewed the school headmaster regarding the availability of classrooms, chalkboards, and books, as well as staff hiring and firing. We use these data to construct a variety of measures of levels of service provision. We do not find consistent effects of the ID treatment either pooled or using a DID estimation, and relegate further details to the SI.

5.4 Scope and Limitations

We consider the scope conditions of the results, one of which is the candidate-centric majoritarian electoral institutions used in Uganda. A party-centric proportional representation system largely centers on party discipline of individual politicians, necessitating other theories of accountability and different civil society initiatives to improve individual politicians’ performance of their legally defined duties.

Second, we expect our findings to be broadly applicable to contexts in which preferences for congruence do not completely crowd out competence as an evaluative criterion for politicians. For example, the importance of co-partisanship or co-ethnicity as a proxy for congruence may be much more important than competence to voters in national-level elections or in countries that are highly polarized along partisan or ethnic lines ([Carlson, 2015](#)).

Third, we do not expect the initiative to be successful in countries without a baseline level of political freedom for civil society to monitor and disseminate information about the performance of elected officials. Given the sheer dominance of its ruling party, Uganda is perhaps a hard test of the ability of transparency initiatives to incentivize better government performance. However, even in electoral authoritarian regimes, civil society may be freer to monitor and conduct transparency initiatives at the subnational level. Testing the validity of these scope conditions is an interesting avenue for future work.

This study is not without limitations. For one, we were not able to capture all aspects of electoral pressure. For example, while we capture inter-party competition in the 2011 elections, data on party primaries—i.e., intra-party competitiveness—are not publicly available. Thus in a sense, we underestimate previous electoral pressure, which should act to bias against our findings, if at all. Further, we found that treated politicians hailing from competitive areas secured greater budgetary spending for their constituencies, which raises questions of general equilibrium if scaled up to all councilors in a district. If budgets are fixed and performance information on all councilors is disseminated widely, then all councilors would have similar incentives to increase the number and size of development projects. Yet if the initiative were to be scaled up, it might nonetheless have consequences that improve citizens’ welfare. As politicians become more demanding, they may

lobby the central government for larger transfers or pressure the bureaucracy to ensure that funds are not lost due to leakages and kickbacks (Raffler, 2016). This possibility is another promising avenue for future work.

6 Discussion and Conclusion

This study examines the effects of a multi-year civil society initiative in Ugandan district government designed to remove informational barriers that obscure politicians' performance of their legally defined job duties from constituents. It involved partnering with a local NGO that produces an annual scorecard on politicians' performance of their legally defined job duties. Using a field experimental research design in 20 districts with over 400 elected politicians, we examine the effect of disseminating the scorecard to constituents across a wide range of performance indicators—subsequent performance on the NGO's scorecard, fellow politicians' evaluations, and performance assessments of the district's senior bureaucrats, as well as an original behavioral measure in which we gave councilors the opportunity to help primary schools apply for an improvement grant. Further, we examine whether the treatments may affect service delivery by using constituency project expenditure from the district local government budget, as well as findings from unannounced audits of schools and health clinics.

We find that politicians exerted greater effort to fulfill their legally defined job duties in response to the dissemination of performance information to their constituents, but only where their chances of re-election were uncertain. The effect captured by the scorecard appears immediately after treatment assignment, three years before the subsequent elections. Further, we find that the transparency program, contingent on competitiveness, leads to increased constituency development spending, but not to improvements in public service provision. To the best of our knowledge, this study is the first to demonstrate that a homegrown NGO can improve accountability by informing citizens about politicians' performance of their legally defined job duties. In this concluding section we discuss the study's core insights.

First, this study underscores the importance of competitiveness in moderating the relationship between transparency and political accountability. Specifically, our findings are consistent with the idea that the historical competitiveness of a constituency may be a necessary contextual condition that enables transparency initiatives to affect politician performance. Our findings were not consistent with an expectation that transparency initiatives can improve performance across the board, even in previously safe seats, due to fears of a new challenger entering the race. While more research is necessary to explore the origins of political competition, it may be that in newly democratizing countries, opposition parties are generally too weak to mount credible campaigns widely, at least in the first few elections. Future work should continue to investigate the nexus of competition and transparency for accountability, which may depend critically on the type of disseminated information or comparative institutions (e.g., politicians' mandates). Indeed, we

are currently assembling data on the behavior of incumbents, challengers, and voters in the 2016 elections for a companion paper examining the downstream consequences of the transparency intervention.

Second, the study joins other efforts to find ways to incentivize politicians to compete on the basis of performance. For example, [Fujiwara & Wantchekon \(2013\)](#) consider the effect of town hall meeting deliberations on politicians' electoral strategies, while [Bidwell *et al.* \(2015\)](#) consider the role of debates. As discussed above, the study's findings were uncertain *ex ante*, considering the growing evidence of the difficulty of disciplining politicians in many low-income countries ([Kosack & Fung, 2014](#)). Notwithstanding the introduction of formal electoral institutions, accountability relations with respect to legally defined duties have remained weak, in part, because politicians and voters are thought to be locked in a reinforcing pattern of clientelistic exchange ([Kramon, 2016](#)), and because voters have low expectations of government performance ([Gottlieb, 2016](#)). Our finding that arming voters with politician performance information—and notifying politicians that voters have this information—can cause politicians to shift efforts towards performing their legally defined duties is consistent with the idea that voters do care about incumbent performance but resort to using other criteria primarily due to a lack of information. Our study's key result is thus especially notable in a political context characterized by high demand for clientelistic transfers and a dominant ruling party.

Third, our paper underscores the importance of institutionalizing continuous oversight of politicians' performance *throughout their term*. Our finding that politicians adjusted their behavior immediately following treatment assignment—years before the next election—is especially relevant for the political business cycle literature. This body of work emphasizes the ebb and flow of politicians' performance during the electoral cycle; politicians generally increase their performance when citizens politically engage close to elections ([Michelitch & Utych, 2014](#)). This study's findings suggest that political business cycles may be mitigated through transparency initiatives.

Fourth, there have been growing calls to strengthen weak accountability relations in low-income countries by disseminating benchmarked information about *development outcomes* (e.g., [Khemani \(2007\)](#)). Our study's findings underscore the importance of disseminating information about politicians' *actions*. Recall that while treated councilors secured a larger share of development spending in their constituencies, we do not find a similar effect for unannounced audits of service providers, arguably because public service delivery outcomes are a function of many actors' efforts. Such outcomes are thus a noisy signal of performance; they are difficult to attribute to individual elected officials, enabling politicians to assign blame to other agents ([Powell & Whitten, 1993](#)). By contrast, politicians' actions in their legally defined job duties are not only unambiguously attributable, but also provide—at least in our context—a strong incentive to affect development outcomes under their control. The dissemination of politicians' action information likely also gives citizens a relevant signal to inform future vote choices, an outcome we plan to explore in future work.

Fifth, it is noteworthy that our audits of public services did not seem to be affected by the transparency initiative. Political accountability studies tend to focus almost exclusively on the relationship between citizens and elected officials, and largely ignore the rest of the ensemble of bureaucrats and service providers involved in producing development outcomes. Indeed, the “long chain” of accountability relationships (between citizens and elected officials, elected officials and bureaucrats, and bureaucrats and service providers) makes it difficult to theorize and empirically evaluate how elected representatives can be held accountable for service delivery outcomes (Kosack & Fung, 2014). However, political scientists must tackle this dilemma, perhaps by isolating distinct accountability relationships such as the present study or Raffler (2016)’s study of politician–bureaucrat relations. In short, transparency and accountability initiatives may need to target performance improvements across several actors simultaneously in order to sustainably improve public service delivery.

Last, recall that the school grant application exercise that the research team implemented was designed to measure councilors’ representation efforts using a behavior that is explicitly not part of the ACODE score. In that respect, our finding of large, positive (conditional) effects of the ID program on the number of grants that councilors facilitated suggests that scoring politicians on observable performance indicators does not necessarily exacerbate the multitasking problem discussed above. The scorecard dissemination may have generated positive externalities because it scores politicians on many dimensions simultaneously. Better understanding the conditions under which third-party scorecards create positive externalities “off the score” is another interesting avenue for future work.

In addition to contributing to the political accountability literature, this paper offers some policy-relevant lessons. Specifically, the findings suggest an odd disconnect in the scholarship on governance and public goods provision. Too often, studies seek to address the problem of weak accountability relations by bypassing politics (Pande, 2011). For example, many initiatives have been set up to improve service delivery outcomes by enlisting communities to monitor public service providers (Banerjee *et al.*, 2010) or by pressuring service providers directly (Duflo *et al.*, 2012). However, the government remains the primary actor that administers, allocates resources to, and monitors public service delivery. This study lends support to arguments that if the root cause of low public service provision is a governance crisis, then sustainably improving public service delivery requires strengthening—rather than circumventing—political accountability mechanisms (Khemani, 2007).

This paper also informs other politician scorecard initiatives, which have been a core interest for practitioners and policymakers globally. A key challenge of any such initiative is ensuring that low-scoring politicians do not attempt to derail the program by discrediting its methodology or intentions (Humphreys & Weinstein, 2012). Our conversations with ACODE and district officials suggest three possible reasons why politicians in Uganda accepted ACODE’s scorecard program. First, ACODE is a Ugandan NGO that involved many local stakeholders in the early stages of the

project, which produced broad agreement that the scorecard components capture the aspects of councilor performance that are most relevant to the Ugandan local government context. Second, ACODE invested heavily in quality control to ensure that the scorecard initiative would be perceived as impartial and non-partisan. Third, district councilors reported that ACODE's capacity-building training and support at the start of the electoral term gave them a clearer expectation of the statutory responsibilities on which they were being scored.²⁹

Understanding the conditions under which political accountability might be strengthened is a core political science endeavor. The study's key findings underscore the central role of political competition in conditioning the effect of performance transparency on government responsiveness. Problematically, given the rising costs of election campaigns, viable alternatives often do not exist—especially in low-income countries, where weakly institutionalized opposition parties lack the financial resources to support candidates who could viably challenge the incumbent party (Riedl, 2014). Transparency of incumbent performance may beget opposition, however, if performance information creates a focal point that helps the opposition coalesce around particular candidates and mount successful challenges. Moving forward, it is essential that we devote more effort to understanding how electoral competition might arise to strengthen weak accountability relations, alongside (and in tandem with) performance transparency (Weghorst, 2015).

²⁹In a companion study, we match the 20 ACODE districts to non-ACODE districts to investigate the effect of the capacity-building activities as a whole.

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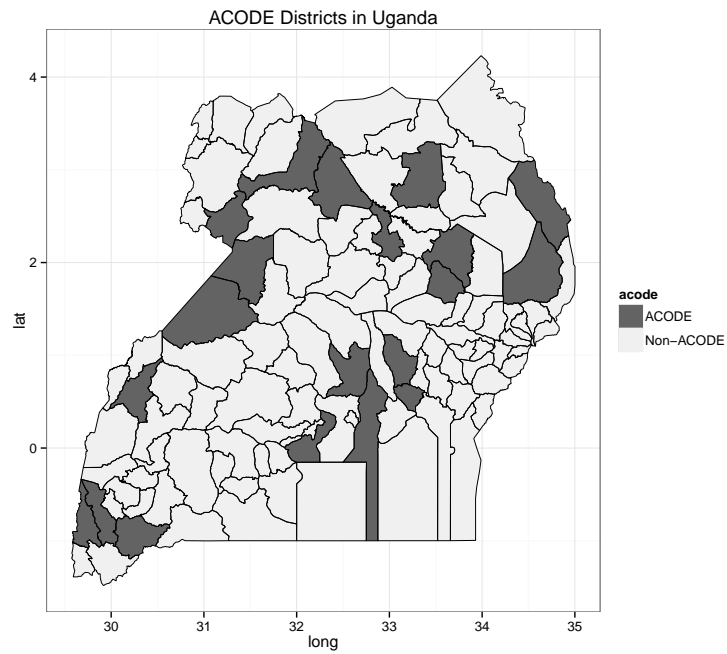
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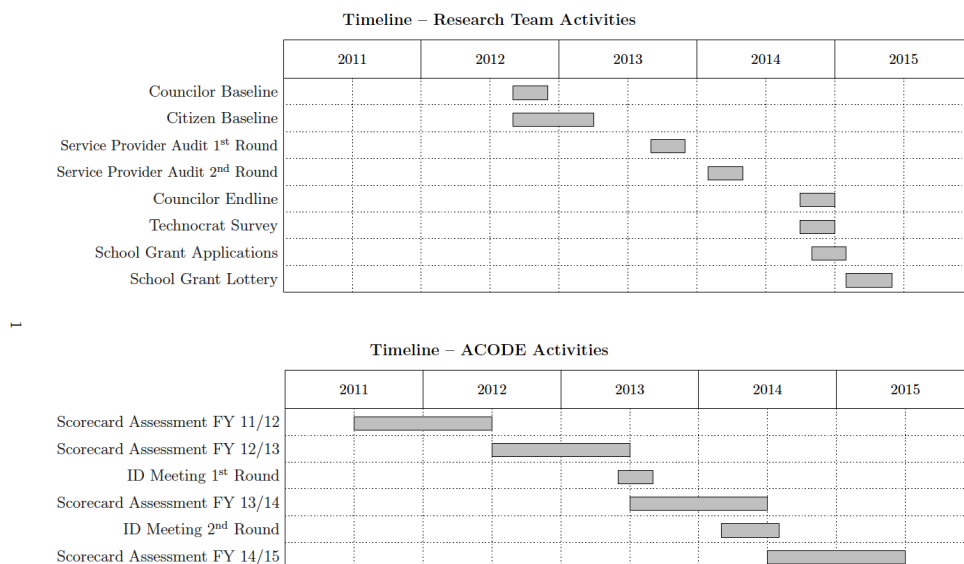
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Appendix



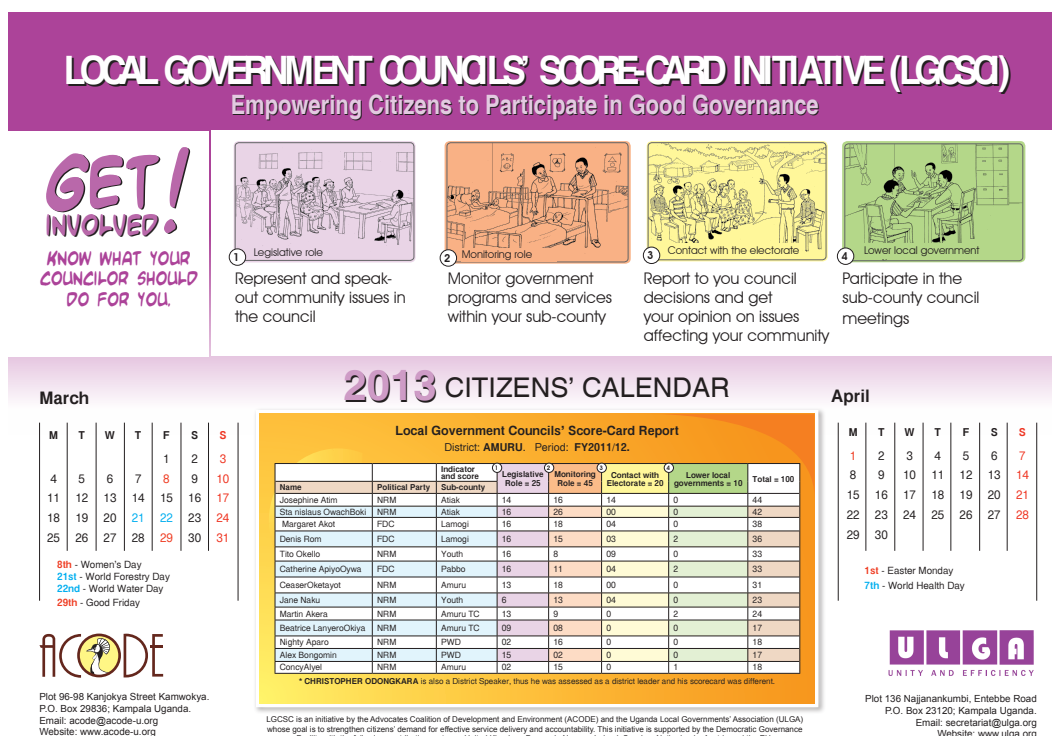
Note: The map depicts the 20 districts that make up the study area: Agago, Amuria, Amuru, Buliisa, Gulu, Hoima, Jinja, Kabarole, Kamuli, Kanungu, Lira, Luwero, Moroto, Mpigi, Mukono, Nakapiripirit, Nebbi, Ntungamo, Rukungiri, and Soroti.

Figure 7: Study Area



Note: The top panel depicts the research team activities, while the bottom panel depicts ACODE activities.

Figure 8: Study Timeline



Note: Examples of a calendar that was distributed in ACODE's community meetings with the intention of disseminating the performance information beyond meeting attendees.

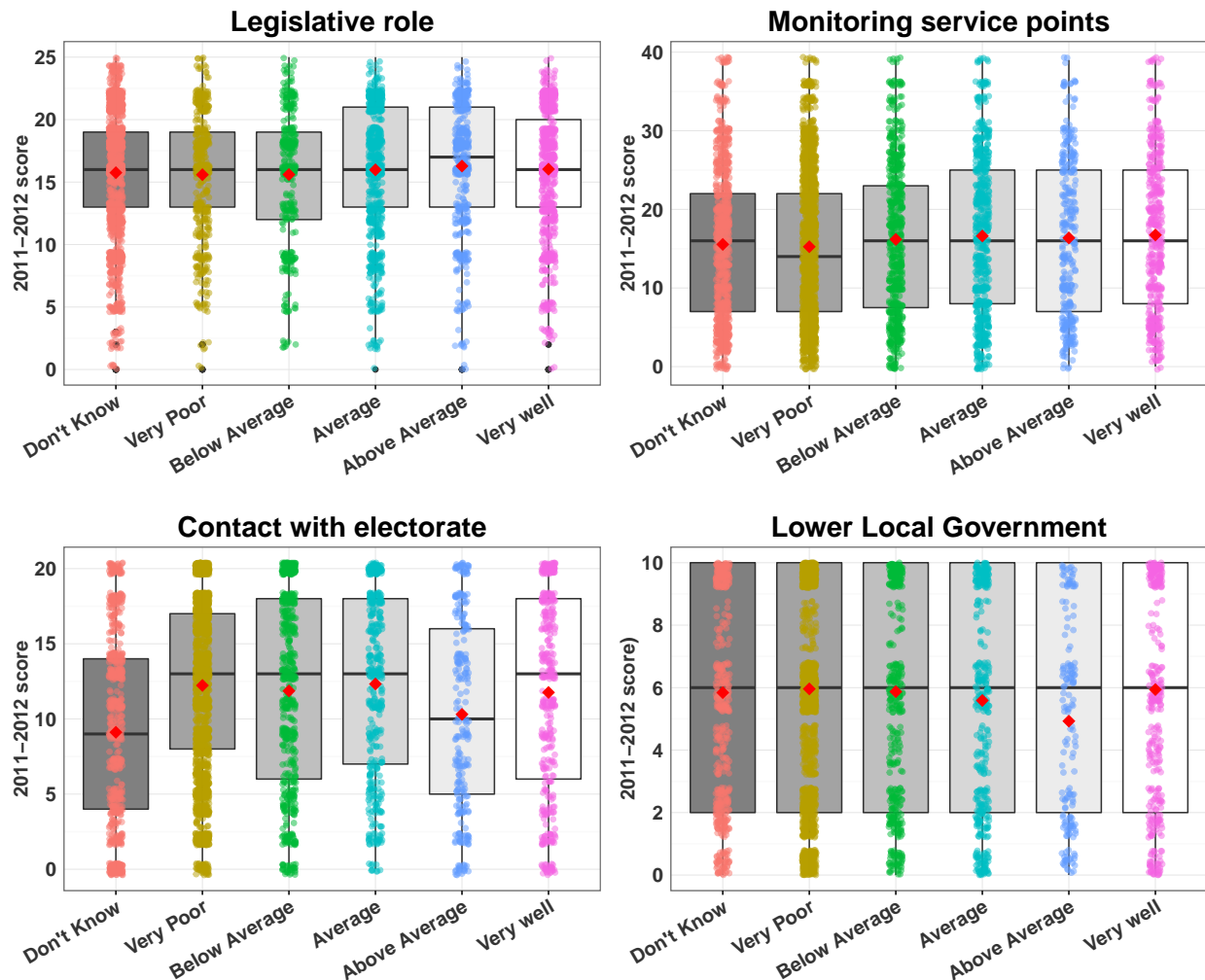
Figure 9: Calendar Example

	Control Mean	Treatment Mean	Difference of Means	p-value for Difference of Means
Councilor:				
Special Women Councilor	0.411 (0.035)	0.398 (0.034)	0.013 (0.049)	0.792
Female councilor	0.450 (0.035)	0.413 (0.034)	0.038 (0.049)	0.441
NRM	0.708 (0.032)	0.714 (0.032)	-0.006 (0.045)	0.900
First-term councilor	0.669 (0.032)	0.610 (0.033)	0.059 (0.046)	0.193
Post-secondary education	0.505 (0.035)	0.600 (0.034)	-0.095 (0.049)	0.054
Total score 2011-2012	44.798 (1.280)	47.343 (1.213)	-2.546 (1.763)	0.150
SMS	0.490 (0.035)	0.505 (0.035)	-0.015 (0.050)	0.766
Past elections:				
Vote share 2011	0.615 (0.012)	0.626 (0.013)	-0.011 (0.018)	0.538
Margin of victory 2011	0.324 (0.020)	0.333 (0.021)	-0.010 (0.029)	0.737
Competitiveness (binary)	0.490 (0.035)	0.508 (0.036)	-0.018 (0.050)	0.727
N. challengers 2011	1.948 (0.095)	1.704 (0.083)	0.244 (0.126)	0.053
Constituency:				
Constituency log population	10.346 (0.035)	10.285 (0.040)	0.061 (0.053)	0.248
Constituency ELF	0.297 (0.016)	0.292 (0.015)	0.005 (0.022)	0.822
Constituency poverty	-0.147 (0.016)	-0.128 (0.019)	-0.019 (0.025)	0.449
N	202	206	408	

Table 5: Covariate Balance By Treatment Assignment

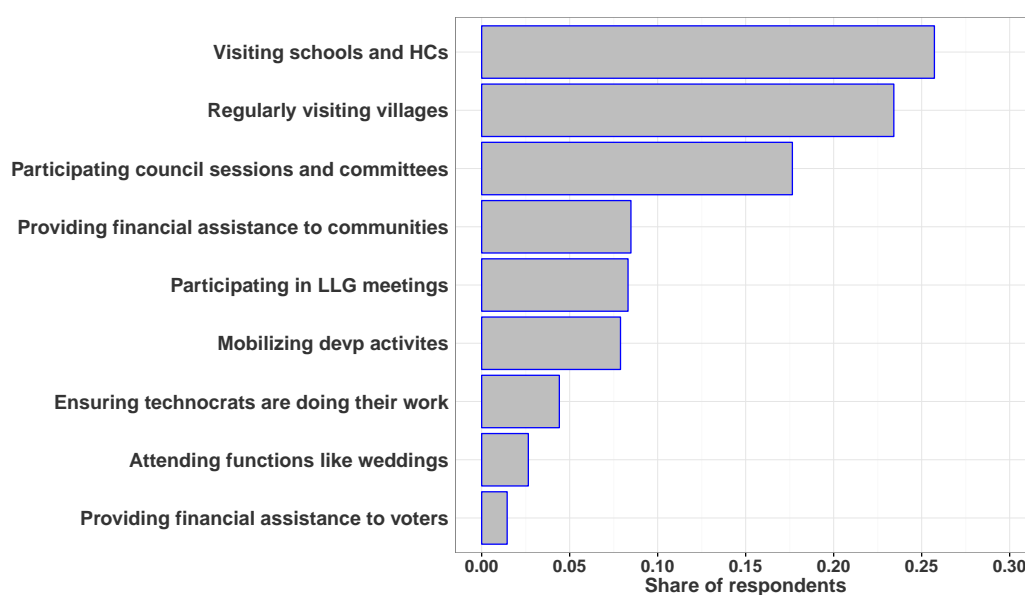
	Non-competitive Mean	Competitive Mean	Difference of Means	p-value for Difference of Means
Councilor:				
Special Women Councilor	0.405 (0.035)	0.417 (0.035)	-0.012 (0.049)	0.189
Female councilor	0.430 (0.035)	0.447 (0.035)	-0.017 (0.050)	0.138
NRM	0.875 (0.023)	0.543 (0.035)	0.332 (0.042)	0.000
First-term councilor	0.599 (0.033)	0.673 (0.032)	-0.074 (0.046)	0.193
Post-secondary education	0.595 (0.035)	0.497 (0.036)	0.098 (0.050)	0.032
Total score 2011-2012	49.448 (1.278)	42.512 (1.200)	6.936 (1.753)	0.000
SMS	0.470 (0.035)	0.538 (0.035)	-0.068 (0.050)	0.100
Past elections:				
Vote share 2011	0.748 (0.011)	0.490 (0.006)	0.259 (0.012)	0.000
Margin of victory 2011	0.543 (0.018)	0.113 (0.004)	0.431 (0.019)	0.000
N. challengers 2011	1.354 (0.075)	2.307 (0.093)	-0.952 (0.120)	0.000
Constituency:				
Constituency log population	10.322 (0.039)	10.306 (0.037)	0.017 (0.054)	0.884
Constituency ELF	0.301 (0.015)	0.283 (0.016)	0.018 (0.022)	0.194
Constituency poverty	-0.135 (0.018)	-0.138 (0.018)	0.003 (0.026)	0.815
N	200	199	399	

Table 6: Covariate Balance By Competitiveness (2011)



Note: Survey question read, “I am going to show you pictures of activities undertaken by councilors. I want you to tell me how well you think your district councilor performed in each of these areas. A. Participating in district council sessions and committees, B. Regularly visiting villages to hear concerns of subcounty residents, C. Visiting schools and health centers to ensure quality of service, E. Ensuring the district technical officers are doing their work well (e.g., DEO, DHO), F. Participating in meetings at lower government levels (LC1, LC3).” Responses were given on a five-point categorical scale.

Figure 10: Citizens’ Perception of Councilors’ Performance against Actual Score (Baseline)



Note: Survey question read, “There are several ways in which district councilors can spend their time. What are the most important activities of a district councilor in your view?”

Figure 11: Citizens’ prioritization of councilor activities