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# Voter Demand for Legislator Attention in Kenya

Inbok Rhee  
KDI School of Public Policy and Management

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## **Voter Demand for Legislator Attention in Kenya**

### **Abstract**

What do African voters want from their legislators? Do they want legislators who focus mainly on national level policy-making? Or do they favor locally oriented legislators who prioritize the needs of their local constituency? Existing studies describe voters in sub-Saharan Africa as holding an overwhelmingly strong and uniform preference for legislators to spend more time and attention in their local constituencies rather than in national assembly. Yet this research is based on a relatively limited body of work with findings that may reflect artifacts of survey design more than the reality on the ground. This chapter proposes a new theory of voter preference for legislator attention as an allocation problem, informed by qualitative evidence gathered from an in-depth focus group discussion. Using a survey experimental evidence from Kenya, I find that voters do not uniformly favor local service to the exclusion of work in the parliament. Rather voters prefer a balance between national and local attention. I show that such a preference for a balance is similar to that exhibited by voters in advanced democracies.

## INTRODUCTION

What do African voters want from their legislative representatives? The existing studies say they want legislators to focus on local constituency issues rather than waste energy on national policy debates. Locally oriented voters in turn imply “rubber stamp” legislatures that do little to reign in executives. Existing work argues that the reason for this tendency lies, in part, at what voters expect from their elected representatives. Since the ordinary citizens – the argument goes - hold their members of parliaments (MPs) accountable not for their performance in legislative activities or executive oversight, but for constituency service and clientelistic activities, MPs end up spending most of their time and resources providing local, at the expense of national attention (e.g. Lindberg 2003; 2010).<sup>1</sup> This idea of voter demand for legislators’ local attention in Africa often has been taken for granted, and researchers have incorporated similar ideas of African legislatures as a mere rubber-stamping institution (e.g. Ichino and Nathan 2012; Grossman et al. 2014; Francois et al. 2015). Thus, the literature traces the absence of horizontal accountability in Africa back to African voters, and the preferences they have for local-minded representatives.

Despite this widely accepted image of African voters, it remains unclear whether and when voters actually have a strong preference for local-minded legislators in practice. Previous work faced significant challenges related to measurement and causal inference. Most empirical work on the topic in Africa is indirect – asking MPs what they think their constituents want (e.g. Lindberg 2003; 2010). This leaves the possibility that MPs might not have accurate beliefs about their constituents and the existing work inadvertently draws a misleading conclusion about voter

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<sup>1</sup> Following the existing literature (e.g. Lindberg 2010; Barkan et al. 2010), I consider constituency service, representation, legislating, and oversight as the four key legislator responsibilities, and further classify the first two as pertaining to local attention and the latter two to national attention.

preference. Other work studies voter demand for legislator attention by directly asking the voters what they want (e. g. Barkan et al. 2010; Weghorst and Lindberg 2013; Mattes and Mozaffar 2016). In many of these approaches, however, survey questions often force dichotomous responses (e.g. “*do you prefer local or national?*”), generating distorted and lopsided responses consisting only of extreme choices. A third tradition studies the historical fate of politicians who pay greater local versus national attention (e.g. Lindberg 2003; Barkan and Mattes 2012; Mattes and Mozaffar 2016). Reform-minded legislators who pay greater national attention seldom emerge, and even when they do, it is argued that they are more likely get voted out because they neglected providing enough local attention. However, selection bias poses serious challenges for these studies. If, for example, those who are more active in parliamentary floor debates also tend to be younger, more educated, and from urban constituencies where electoral competition is fiercer, it is difficult to conclude that providing greater national attention is the cause of their electoral vulnerability.

I seek to overcome these theoretical and empirical challenges. Instead of considering MP orientation as a dichotomous choice, I theorize that voters understand that the quality of their lives rests on MPs engaging in national level activities like policy making and also spending time in the constituency learning about the needs of their voters and trying to address them. Voters are not unsophisticated: they see the activities as linked, and demand their MPs to optimally allocate their efforts between local and national activities. Qualitative accounts from an in-depth focus group discussion collected during my fieldwork corroborate these expectations about voters’ sophisticated understanding about the legislator responsibilities.

My analysis is based on a vignette experiment embedded in a nationally representative public opinion survey in Kenya, building on the design of previous work by Vivyan and Wagner

(2015; 2016) conducted in the United Kingdom. In the experiment, I present respondents with a description of some hypothetical MP who divides the 5-days work week to be spend between the local constituency and the parliament. Some participants are randomly assigned to a group which hears about an MP who spends more time in the parliament (e.g. 2 days in the constituency and 3 days in the parliament), while other participants are exposed to an MP who spends more time in their local constituency (e.g. 3 days in the constituency and 2 days in the parliament). All participants are then asked whether they approve of the MPs performance as well as whether they are likely to vote for such an MP. By comparing approval ratings and voting likelihood in the various combinations of local versus national attention, one can measure voter preference directly without forcing extreme choice sets or selection bias. The main results are supplemented with considerations of heterogeneous treatment effects by sub-groups.

To preview the findings, I find that respondents prefer a balance between local and national attention. This contrasts with previous studies which argue that African voters have a strong and almost uniform preference for locally oriented representatives. Moreover, I show that Kenyan voters in my sample and British voters in Vivyan and Wagner (2016) closely resemble one another, in that they both prefer a balance between the local and national attention and show a non-linear preference between the two.

I also consider heterogeneous treatment effects across a number of respondent characteristics which are found to be relevant in the existing literature, and find null effects. That is, we might, for example, think that voters would differ based on the extent that they may rely on MP's local service or have a wider ideological disposition. But they do not: even with greater self-interest motivation or local disposition, voters appear to understand that their interests are served best by a combination of attention to the national and to the local.

This study makes a number of contributions. First, I believe it is the first experimental work which examines the micro-level voter preference for legislator attention in Africa. Existing studies have focused on either the cross-country variations stemming from institutional features (e.g. Barkan et al. 2010), or within-country variations based on interview and survey data (e.g. Lindberg 2003; 2009).<sup>2</sup> By randomly assigning information about MP time allocation at the individual level, this study is able to go beyond the macro-level variations, overcome selection effects, and provide a clearer picture about what voters demand from their legislators.

Second, this study has important implications for how we perceive and study of politician accountability. The conventional wisdom has been that African voters uniformly prefer politicians who provide greater local attention. Focusing on national policy-making and spending too much time in Parliament, in turn, might even get politicians voted out of the office. Yet if the expectation that the uniform local preference is merely an artifact of survey instrument design and the observation that nationally oriented politicians get voted out is mostly a by-product of selection effects, we ought to rethink how and why politicians are acting the way they do. To the extent that legislators do privilege local politics over national ones, this may be driven by factors other than voter preferences.

Third, my findings challenge the idea of African exceptionalism (e.g. Mozaffar et al. 2003, c.f. Brambor et al. 2005). While factors such as a culture of clientelism or short history of democracy are often cited as the cause of a preference for local attention in Africa, my findings not only question such a notion of uniform preference for local attention but also demonstrate a striking resemblance in the patterns of preferences shown by voters in Kenya and voters in an advanced democracy context – such as the United Kingdom.

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<sup>2</sup> Expectations based on cross-country variations in institutions, especially electoral systems, are unclear and fails to explain variations within systems. More detailed discussions can be found in the Appendix.

The remainder of this chapter is divided into four sections. First, I briefly review the existing literature on voter preference for legislator attention in Africa and highlight some of their key limitations. Second, I propose my new theoretical framework which is informed by the qualitative evidence gathered from an in-depth focus group discussion, and present my survey experimental setup to test the expectations derived from such a framework. Third, I present the main findings and consider complementary evidence from analyzing heterogeneous treatment effects by subgroups. Finally, I conclude the chapter with a brief summary of the findings and a discussion for future research.

## **THEORETICAL BACKGROUND**

### **Existing Approaches**

Anecdotal accounts from a number of African contexts illustrate that MPs expend substantial time and resources in their constituencies. In Kenya, for example, former Nairobi senator and current governor Mike Sonko stated in a newspaper interview: “from the time I walk in the office at six o’clock to the time I am leaving at around midnight, I usually see between 1,000 to 1,500 people, on a daily basis.”<sup>3</sup> Similarly in Ghana, Lindberg (2010) documents that “MPs in Ghana wake up almost every morning to face a queue of constituents (often 10–20 persons) that expect them to take time to address their concerns and provide various sums of money.”

Existing research reflects these anecdotes, portraying African voters as having strong and nearly uniform preferences for politicians who provide greater local attention. In one of the most comprehensive and systematic studies of African legislatures to date - the African

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<sup>3</sup> Mwaura Samora, “The making of Nairobi Senator Mike Mbuvi 'Sonko'”, August 30, 2013, The Standard (<https://www.standardmedia.co.ke/article/2000092315/the-making-of-nairobi-senator-mike-mbuvi-sonko>)



Legislatures Project (ALP) - Barkan et al. (2010) find that voters overall prefer locally focused activities like constituency service more than nationally focused activities like legislating and oversight using a combination of voter and politician survey data. The authors argue that this provides one explanation for the purported weakness of African legislatures: voters provide little incentive for legislators to focus on national policy-making or oversight of executives. Lindberg (2003; 2010), similarly finds that MPs in Ghana focus on providing personal benefits and constituency service because they think that these are what their constituents want based on his MP interviews. In fact, a number of studies make the observation that MPs who focus more on parliamentary than constituency work are more likely to get voted out of office than those who focus on the local constituency (e.g. Lindberg 2003; Barkan et al. 2010; Mattes and Mozaffar 2016).

Scholars interpret these findings as suggesting that the uniquely clientelistic nature of African politics privileges a political culture emphasizing service to individuals and group constituencies rather than legislative production and oversight (e.g. Englebert and Dunn 2013). On the basis of these findings, scholars infer that African legislatures are weak and rubber-stamping institutions without the capacity to counterbalance executives. For example, Francois et al. (2015) dismiss the need to include legislators into their examination of elite politics in Africa, because legislators are no more than rubber-stamps to the executive's decisions. Grossman et al. (2014) also cite legislatures being rubber stamps as one reason why politicians do not seek enough information from voters. Finally, Ichino and Nathan (2012) cite irrelevance of legislators' policy preference on national policy as one of the reasons why theories of primary elections adaptation derived from anywhere else in the world may not be adequate to explain primaries in Africa.

## **Limitations**

Although many scholars assume that African voters prefer politicians who focus on local issues over national ones, a number of factors weaken the validity of prior findings. First, many existing works derive their conclusions about voter demand based only on indirect evidence. For example, Lindberg (2003; 2010) conducts interviews with Ghanaian MPs and ask what pressure they perceive themselves to face from their constituents. MPs shared that their constituents demand personal benefits the most, followed by constituency service and representation; the demand for legislative activities and executive oversight is close to non-existent. Based on such evidence, he concludes that since voters demand that politicians spend their time on local constituency issues rather than national ones, MPs respond by providing it in a rational manner. While this indirect approach reveals much about what the MPs think, it may fall short of capturing actual voter preference. For example, in his subsequent coauthored work, Lindberg gathers voter survey data in Ghana and find that voters evaluate their MPs not just on the basis on constituency service and benefits, but also in terms of legislative performance (Weghorst and Lindberg 2013), thus revealing a possible disconnect between the indirect evidence and actual preferences.

Second, while an obvious alternative is to ask voters directly what they want from their legislators, the construction of existing survey questions reduce their validity because they force respondents to choose between false binaries, or other limited choice sets. Barkan et al. (2010), for instance, reports that when Afrobarometer respondents in six countries were directly asked what they consider to be the most important MP responsibility, the answer was overwhelmingly

for local constituency attention.<sup>4</sup> Mattes and Mozaffar (2016) later expand on this result and report that close to 80% of the more than 20,000 respondents in Afrobarometer Round 4 report a preference for local attention. Based on this survey evidence, they conclude that “African citizens, in general, expect their MPs to focus more on local issues than on national legislative or institutional issues” (Mattes and Mozaffar 2016: 205). In both of these cases, the responses are based on a question that asks interviewees to choose “the most important responsibility” of their legislators.<sup>5</sup> Another key question in the Afrobarometer used by Mattes and Mozaffar (2016) asks the respondents to choose between the following two statements: “*In electing a Member of Parliament, I prefer to vote for a candidate who 1. can deliver goods and services to people in this community. 2. can make policies that benefit everyone in our country.*” Yet the decisions that MPs face are never really about choosing one over others; and forcing such type of response inevitably distorts voter responses, making them appear more lopsided than they actually are. The image of voters as resolutely local in their orientation may therefore be an artifact of the way survey questions are constructed, not a true reflection of preferences.

Third, some of the existing questions may be too abstract or normatively preloaded with biases for the respondents to provide a meaningful answer. For example, one of the core question capturing the respondents’ preference for MP responsibility in Afrobarometer asks the following: “*Members of Parliament have different responsibilities. Which of the following do you think is the most important responsibility of your Member of Parliament?*” with the possible choice set of “*1=Listen to constituents and represent their needs, 2=Deliver jobs or development, 3=Make*

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<sup>4</sup> These six countries are: Kenya, Malawi, Zambia, South Africa, Namibia, and Mozambique.

<sup>5</sup> The exact question working is as follows: “*Representatives to the National Assembly have different responsibilities. Which the following do you think is the most important responsibility of your representative to the National Assembly: Listening to Constituents and represent their needs? Deliver jobs or development to your constituency? Make laws for the good of the country? Monitor the President and his government?*”

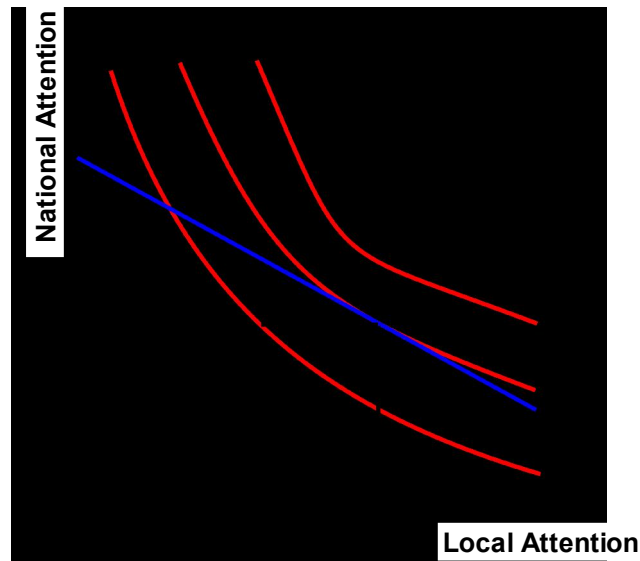
*laws for the good of the country, 4=Monitor the president and his government". Yet some of these choices, such as "listen to constituents" may be too broad and vague, while others, such as "make laws for the good of the country" may prime unintended positive bias and lead respondents in a particular direction.*

Finally, existing work based on interviews, case studies, and survey data likely suffers from selection bias. For example, as one conclusion derived from their extensive research across sixteen African countries involving both MP interviews and voter surveys, Barkan and his colleagues emphasize the importance of supporting and strengthening the few but brave so-called institutionalists who define legislating and oversight as part of their responsibilities (Barkan et al. 2010; Barkan and Mattes 2012; Mattes and Mozaffar 2016). They argue that these reformers are small in numbers but can eventually constitute a critical mass to bring about change for true legislative strengthening. Unfortunately, these institutionalists are also more likely to get voted out, they argue, precisely because they focus more on national rather than local issues, thus inferring characteristics of voter preferences from the re-election rates of politicians. Yet, several alternative mechanisms could explain the lower re-election rate of institutionalists. If they also tend to be younger, more educated, and to represent urban constituencies – as also observed by Barkan and Mattes (2012) – it is perhaps also more likely that these MPs face greater electoral competition than their rural counterparts. Using observational data on voter preference for MP attention can also suffer from a problem of selection into information. For example, those voters who have greater interests in national policies for whatever reason may be more likely to acquire information about MP's work at the parliament. In other words, we cannot disentangle whether legislator attention, constituency characteristics, or some other factor is driving the observed outcome MPs losing elections using this evidence.

## MY APPROACH

Building upon the existing works while taking into account these limitations, I propose a simple theoretical framework about voter preference for legislators' local versus national attention as a time-allocation problem and present a survey experiment to test voters' expectations based on such framework.

Imagine a voter having to choose between two goods, local and national attention that his or her legislator can provide. The voter recognizes that their MP operates with only finite resources of time and effort which can be allocated between national and local attention. A simple diagram in *Figure 1* captures the intuition. The indifference curves are marked in red, and the MP's budget constraint for time and effort marked in blue. From this diagram, it is obvious that the choice would rarely be the extremes lying on either axes. Instead, the voter's choice is more likely to be one of some balance between the two given the recognition about the resource constraints that his or her MP faces: i.e., at the intersection between the red curve and the blue line in *Figure 1*.



*Figure 1. A Simple model of Voter Preference for MP attention as an allocation problem*

An in-depth focus group discussion I conducted with ten subjects recruited from various parts of Nairobi, Kenya to better understand what voters want from their MPs provides support this simple framework of voter demand for legislator attention.<sup>6</sup> First, voters recognize that both local and national attention is important. When asked about why he said he would approve the performance of an MP who spends more days in the parliament, one participant stated the following:

*“My core function is legislation. They should have at least spoken in Parliament and even passed a bill that has some value to the common mwananchi [citizen]. Second, is*

<sup>6</sup> The recruitment and training of the focus group participants were done by Ipsos Kenya. The participants were intentionally recruited to ensure variations in terms of gender, class, occupation, ethnicity, and partisanship, among other attributes. The discussions were held on February 19, 2019.

*how he/her has utilized almost the 100M to do the development on the ground? More so the bursaries, the infrastructure, the schools and the likes.”*

Moreover, not only voters see that local and national attention are both important, they understand that they are connected – i.e. MPs cannot deliver local attention without working through the legislature, and they cannot do good work in the legislature if they do not understand their constituents. To this end, one participant explains:

*“[A]t the end of the day, you’ve spent three days on the ground, or you’ve spent four days on the ground and you’ve spent only one day in Parliament then where are you going to take issues that you have actually gathered from the ground to Parliament? How are they going to be processed; because all these issues that you gathered from the ground, must be processed in the National Assembly. They must again be turned into pieces of legislation, into policies, into programs, or you must use these issues to hold the government to account.”*

Therefore, voters see that local and national attention should be linked and they prefer a balance across them, not extremes:

*“As an MP, the first function that he/she is supposed to do is legislation. Second is now moving on the ground, working with the CDF,<sup>7</sup> and to do the development and the*

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<sup>7</sup> Introduced in 2003, the Constituency Development Fund (CDF) is a fund allocated at the constituency level to support projects mainly in the areas of education, health, agriculture, roads, security, environment and sports (<https://www.ngcdf.go.ke/index.php/about-ng-cdf>).

*bursaries. Now if he's failing at the first function which is legislation and he/she has been allocated staff that are supposed to more of the ground work, he's wasting the precious time he will be in parliament, legislating, passing laws, and defending what the people stand for and wasting them on the ground."*

These remarks not only show the sophisticated understanding of ordinary African voters echoing the findings by Barkan (1976) more than four decades ago, but also provides some context about how voters perceive priorities for MP responsibilities.

Based on such a theoretical framework, I designed and conducted a vignette experiment embedded in a nationally representative survey in Kenya, where I randomly assign information about MP attention. The design builds upon a similar design previously implemented in the United Kingdom by Vivian and Wagner (2015; 2016). My survey was conducted on July 2 – 10, 2017 with a sample of 2,209 respondents. After a short introduction and screening questions aimed to exclude respondents under the age of 18, interviewers read short vignettes describing a hypothetical MP. The experiment manipulated one factor, the number of days the MP spends working in the Parliament versus the local constituency. Specifically, in order to ensure non-extreme choices reflecting the theoretical framework, respondents received one of four treatments, each of which is a combination of days summing up to a five-day work week, as shown in *Table 1*.<sup>8</sup> In other words, a hypothetical MP who spends one day in the local constituency would also spend 4 days in the parliament. Likewise, a hypothetical MP who spends three days in the local constituency would spend the remaining two days in the parliament.

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<sup>8</sup> A figure depicting balance across different observable respondent traits can be found in the appendix.



Days spent in..	Number of Days			
Local Constituency	1	2	3	4
Parliament	4	3	2	1

**Table 1: Summary of Treatments**

The first vignette text, reflecting this design, read as follows:

*“Think about how you judge the performance of an MP. Imagine that some MP usually spends (1 day / 2 days / 3 days / 4 days) of a 5-day week working in the Parliament, and the remaining (4 days / 3 days / 2 days / 1 day) working here in the local constituency. How much do you approve or disapprove of how this MP spends his or her time?”*

In this first vignette, the treatment is based on the randomly assigned time allocation of a hypothetical MP, while the outcome variable is respondents performance approval. This is followed by the following question, which reiterates the time allocation, and instead of job approval asks for the likelihood that the respondent will vote for the hypothetical MP:

*“Thinking about the same MP who usually spends (1 day / 2 days / 3 days / 4 days) of a 5-day week working in the Parliament, and the remaining (4 days / 3 days / 2 days / 1 day) working here in the local constituency. If such an MP was running for an election, how likely are you to vote for such an MP?”*

After the vignette, interviewers asked respondents a variety of questions on demographic information, such as employment status, income, and ethnicity.

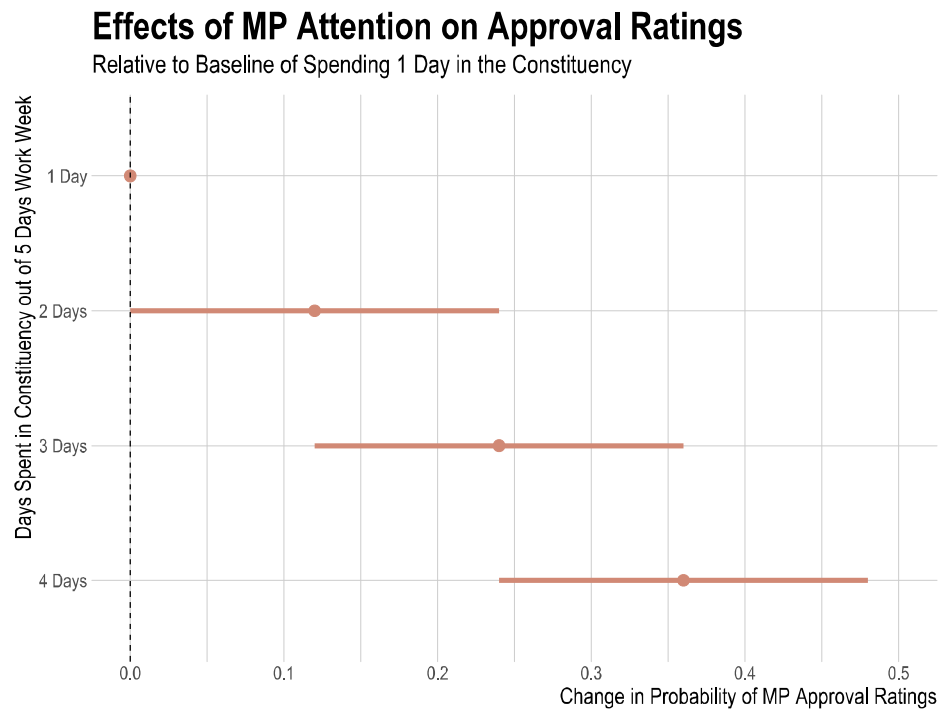
The vignette design overcomes a number of problems found in prior work. First, the MP effort is presented as a combination of local and national attention, and not as a dichotomous option, adopting the original design by Vivyan and Wagner (2015; 2016). Second, the vignette avoids using loaded language and simply provides the number of days out of 5-day week working between local constituency and the national parliament. Third, such information about MP attention allocation is randomly assigned to respondents. The experimental approach helps address the problem of selection effects for politicians or endogenous information acquisition by randomizing information across respondents, making the treatment groups equal on average. Compared to observational studies, it is more likely to yield unbiased estimates of causal effects. Finally, the survey design was intentionally made comparable to similar studies by Vivyan and Wagner (2015; 2016) conducted in an advanced democracy context – namely, the United Kingdom - in order to compare and contrast the African voters with those in other contexts.

## **EMPIRICAL STRATEGY AND RESULTS**

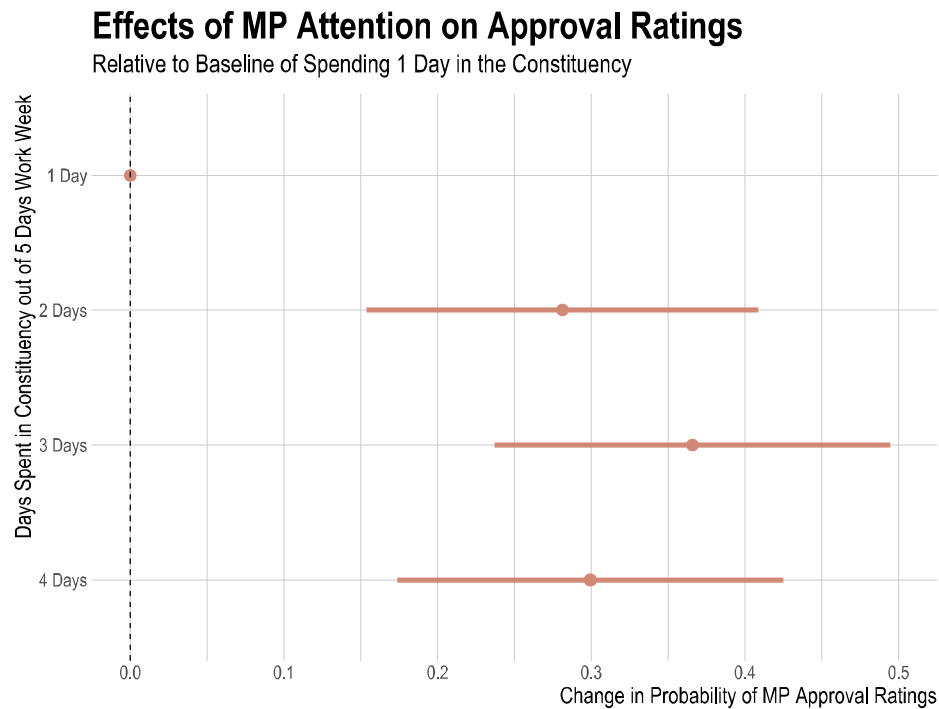
### **Main Results**

A simple difference-in-means analysis yields an unbiased average treatment effect (ATE) estimates. I therefore use ordinary least squares (OLS) analyses with dummy variables for each level of the treatments with spending one day as the baseline category. The dependent variables are based on questions about whether the respondent is likely to 1) approve the performance of, or 2) vote for the hypothetical MP described in the vignette.

If voters always prefer local attention from their MPs, we would observe a linear progression of preferences in the results – similar to the one depicted in *Figure 2* where the y-axis captures the change in probability of a positive approval rating for each additional day in the constituency.



***Figure 2. Hypothetical Example: Voters Prefer Local attention***



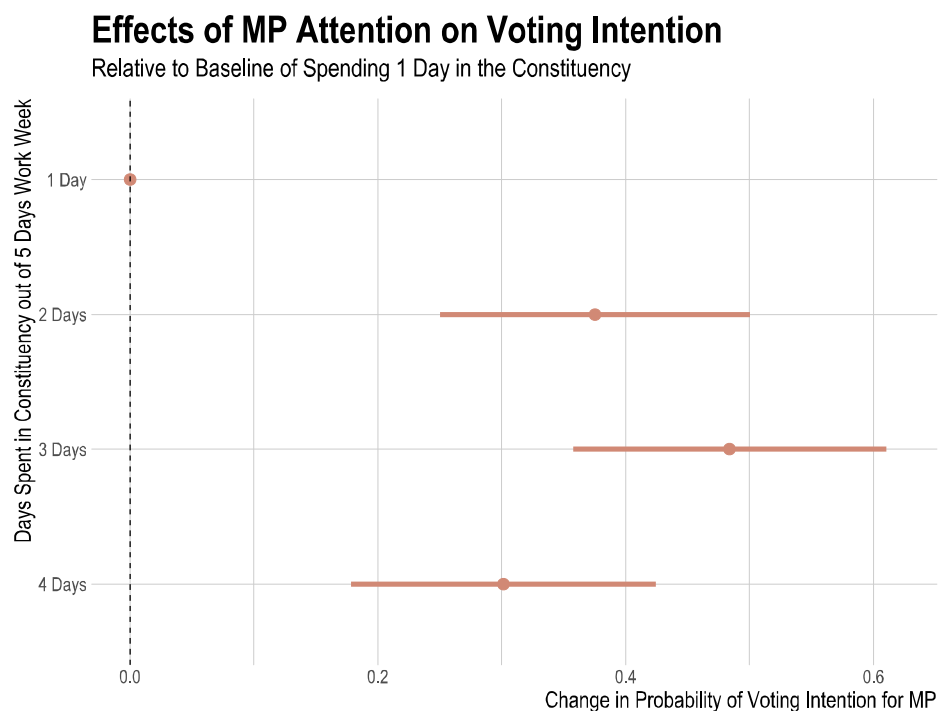
**Figure 3. Results (DV: Likely to Approve Hypothetical MP Performance)<sup>9</sup>**

The actual survey experimental data instead shows that voters are not binary in their approach to MP time. Looking first at the MP approval rating as the dependent variable, I find a non-linear relationship as depicted in *Figure 3*: voters do not strictly prefer either all-national or all-local attentions but a combination. The ordering of the combinations for MPs' days spent in the parliament versus constituency in both countries were (2, 3), (3, 2), (1, 4), and (4, 1) days, respectively. In fact, *Figure 3* shows increased approval as a result of adding local service days, but with most going from 1 day to 3 days — not 1 day to 4 days — and increases also in moving to 2 days as well as 4 days, where the largest increase is moving to balanced posture. This seems

<sup>9</sup> The results here are presented as a comparison between spending X number of days and spending one day, in order to keep them consistent with another study conducted in the UK (Vivyan and Wagner 2015; 2016) for later comparison. However, most of the treatment-by-treatment comparisons - other than between 2 days and 4 days spent at the local constituency - are statistically significant as reported in the Appendix (Figure A2).

to indicate that, unlike the conventional expectation, voters prefer *a balance* between local and national attention.

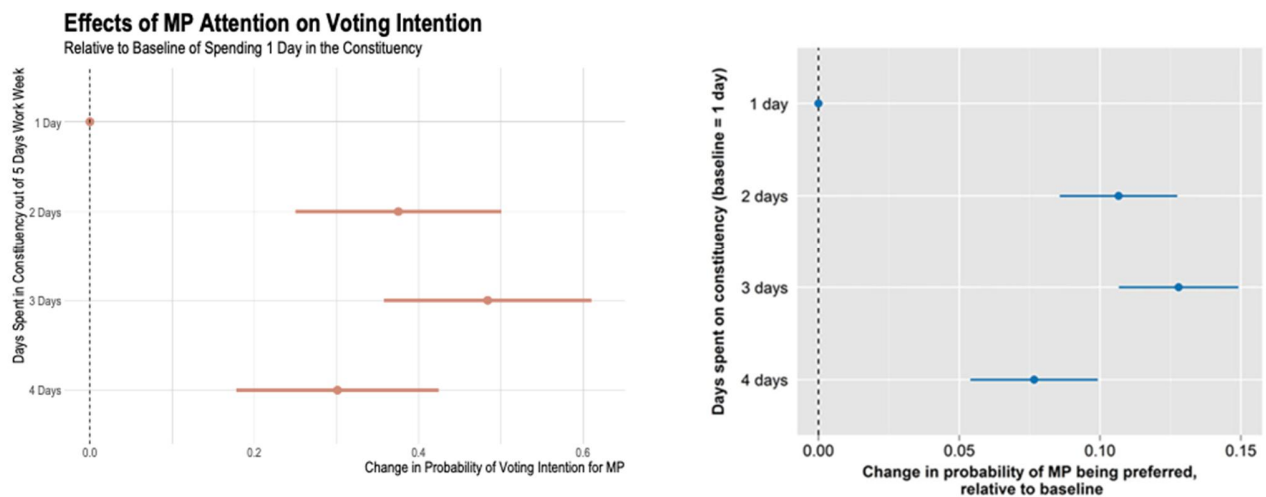
We can further examine the results with an alternative dependent variable, voting intention. Results depicted in *Figure 4*, again, consistently show a non-linear relationship where the voters seem to prefer, this time 3 days, over 2 days, over 4 days, over a day spent in the local constituency. While it is true that voters really reject the idea of an MP spending minimal time in the constituency (only one day), the conventional wisdom about the overwhelming uniform preference for local attention seems unfounded and may be an artifact of measurement.



**Figure 4. Results (DV: Likely to Vote for Hypothetical MP)**

Finally, we can compare this pattern of voter preference for legislator attention between the Kenyan voters in my sample and British voters studied by Vivyan and Wagner (2015; 2016). Figure 5 presents the outcome for voting intention side-by-side, where the left panel is from my

Kenyan study and the right panel is from the British study. We see that the pattern shown by the Kenyan voter sample is strikingly similar to that shown by the British voters, living in a country with arguably less culture of clientelism, a longer history of democracy, and vastly different macro political and economic institutions. While admittedly the comparison with the British case is simply descriptive, the close resemblance of the results suggests that African voters, at least in the Kenyan experimental context examined in this study, are not exceptional.



**Figure 5. Comparison between Kenyan and British Voters**

## DISCUSSION: WHY DO VOTERS WANT BALANCE?

The results of my experiment challenge the conventional wisdom that African voters prefer politicians who exclusively focus on local goods provision. Other than the suggestive evidence from the qualitative accounts based on in-depth focus group discussions that the preference for balance between local and national attention is likely to be driven by voters' sophisticated understanding about the responsibilities of legislators, my experimental findings do not tell us why we might be observing this aggregate preference for balance between local and

national attention, however. I therefore consider complementary approaches including examining heterogeneous treatment effects by different sub-groups.

### **Heterogeneous Treatment Effects: Subgroup Analyses**

Which voters are more likely to prefer locally oriented politicians? I examine heterogeneous treatment effects to explore two possibilities. First, I consider whether self-interested and instrumentally motivated individuals respond more to the treatment. Voters who look at politics instrumentally - asking themselves how the work of a representative could produce personal benefits for themselves – might naturally favor local attention (Griffin and Flavin 2011; Harden 2013). In the African context, patron-client relationships have been at the center of the discourse around governance and accountability (e.g. Lemarchand 1972; van de Walle 2003). Even several decades into the surge of procedural democratization (Gibson 2002), personal and informal contact between voters and politicians continue to characterize African politics. In his examination of politics in urban Ghana, Paller (2014) documents frequent patron-client contacts, especially around election cycles. Likewise, in the most up-to-date investigation on the subject, Mueller (2018) shows that at least one in three voters across twenty-seven countries in the Afrobarometer Round 5 have made personal contact with their elected politicians; moreover, most of their requests were clientelistic in nature. If voters who tend to seek personal contacts are more likely to favor local attention in advanced democracies, such tendencies may be even more acutely present in the sub-Saharan African context, as poverty and relative lack of public service provision, for example, might amplify the tendency for voters to view politics instrumentally and thus prefer local attention. More specifically, we could expect

that *on average, voters who stand to benefit more from local attention should have a greater preference for local over national attention.*

Second, instead of instrumental reasoning, voter preferences over legislator attention may be driven by some *underlying dispositions for local versus national politics* (Vivyan and Wagner 2016). For example, if an individual sees him or herself primarily as a member of a local community, that voter might tend to favor constituent service, whereas those with a greater national identification would favor national attention. While a number of works in the sub-Saharan African context examine factors affecting individual's local versus national disposition as a dependent variable, or how local versus national disposition affects aggregate outcomes, we know less about the effects of local-national disposition on individual-level outcomes.<sup>10</sup> Borrowing from literature in other contexts, I expect that *on average, voters who possess a stronger local rather than a national disposition to have a greater preference for local over national attention.*

In the case of British voters, Vivyan and Wagner (2016) find evidence of heterogeneous treatment effects for the local versus national disposition but not for the self-interest explanation. Specifically, they find that those who exhibit a greater national disposition tend to have a stronger preference for more days spent in the parliament. My data, however, presents no support for either of these explanations. First, I find that no evidence for the *self-interest explanation*. To test this, I split the sample between those who have themselves or know someone who has personally sought assistance from their local MP and look for any noticeable difference between

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<sup>10</sup> Some examples of the former type include those who study colonial history (Nunn 2008), electoral cycles (Eifert et al. 2010), or even soccer matches (Depetris-Chauvin et al. 2018) as factors affecting individual disposition. Examples of the later types include aggregate level outcomes such as public goods provision (Miguel 2004) or development (Michalopoulos and Papaioannou 2012).



the two sub-groups.<sup>11</sup> I find a consistent ordering supporting the balanced preference, with no statistical difference between those who did or did not seek help in the F-test ( $p=0.45$ ). Similarly, testing for any heterogeneous effects for *local-national disposition*, I consider the difference between those who answered they care more about local rather than national politics.<sup>12</sup> Here again, the F-test fails to reject the null hypothesis that the effect of MP days on local versus national work is the same across the two groups ( $p=0.47$ ). In fact, no discernable difference can be found across a host of covariates in addition to the ones mentioned above, such as education, income, assets, marital status, urban-rural residency, or religious affiliation.<sup>13</sup>

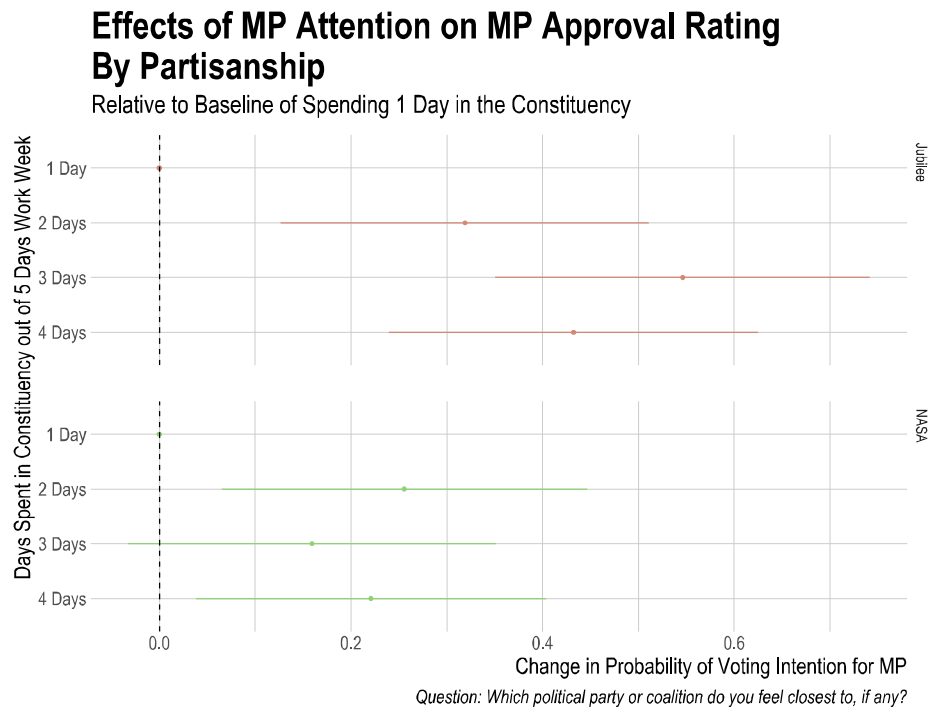
The only heterogeneous treatment effects identified is between ruling and opposition coalition supporters, as presented in Figure 6. Splitting the sample between those who self-identified as feeling closer to the ruling Jubilee coalition, the opposition NASA coalition, and others, I find that the F-test fails to reject the null hypothesis at the 95% confidence level ( $p=0.048$ ). A few notes need to be made. First, despite the heterogeneous effect by partisan identification, we can still confirm the general finding: unlike the conventional expectation, voters do not uniformly prefer local over national attention, and vice versa. In fact, in neither of the coalition categories, spending 4 days in the constituency is preferred over a more balanced posture of time expenditure. The rank ordering of the preference for Jubilee supporters is consistent with the overall finding – they prefer 3, 4, and 2 days spent in the constituency in rank order. While the overall MP approval ratings are lower, we can also see that their supporters support 2, 4, and 3 days spent in the constituency in rank order.

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<sup>11</sup> The exact question wording is: “Have you or has someone you know personally sought assistance from your local MP?”

<sup>12</sup> The exact question wording is: “You care more about how things are going in your local area than about how things are going in Kenya as a whole.”

<sup>13</sup> See Appendix for more detail.



**Figure 6. Heterogeneous Treatment Effect by Partisanship**

This difference between the ruling and the opposition supporters is interesting. On the one hand, it is possible that the information about the time spent by MPs conveys more than simply the attention allocation of the legislators. One of the main differences between ruling and opposition parties is access to central state resources. It is possible that the preference among the opposition supporters is highly polarized: for some, winning over the national policy and hence spending only 2 days in the constituency is preferable, while for others, focusing on local attention now is what matters most since central state resources are difficult to access anyways. Another possible explanation for this heterogeneous treatment effect is a simple draw of chance. Given the number of different subsample dimensions considered, at 95% confidence level, it is possible for one of the variables to come up with statistical significance.

## SUMMARY AND CONCLUDING REMARKS

This chapter sought to explore voter preferences for MP attention in Africa. Existing literature argues that voters strongly if not uniformly prefer local over national attention and suggest that these preferences lay at the root of the tendency of African legislators to focus on constituency service over national legislating, and even more broadly, the general insignificance of legislatures in African politics. I argue that this view of voter preferences reflects the wording of survey questions and selection effects. In short, it is an artifact of design choices, not a true reflection of African politics. Instead, I proposed a theory of voter preference for MP attention as an allocation problem and conducted a vignette experiment embedded in a nationally representative survey in Kenya. I find not only that voters in Kenya prefer a balance between local and national attention but also that such preference for balance highly resembles that shown by British voters. While I do not find any heterogeneous treatment effects by self-interest or local versus national disposition as expected in the existing studies, I do find an interesting variation across ruling and opposition party supporters that warrants further investigation.

The findings of this chapter raise an important question: if voters prefer a balance between local and national attention from their MPs, why do MPs fail to meet such expectation and act like constituency service is the only thing that matters to their constituents? If legislators are not responding to constituent preferences, what are they responding to? On the one hand, it is possible that real voter preferences for legislator attention diverge from those revealed in the experiment since survey responses entail no real costs or benefits. For instance, one may speculate that voters state that they prefer a balance between local and national attention when asked in a survey, but their real-world voting action will still strictly prefer local attention based primarily on self-interest. Inducing some real costs and benefits, perhaps in a lab experimental

setting, could be a useful extension for future research. On the other hand, it might be that MPs simply have it wrong, and the disjuncture is a product of poor knowledge about voters. While existing research in advanced democracy settings shows that politicians are likely to vote in line with constituent opinions when provided information about them (e.g. Butler and Nickerson 2011), the same dynamics have yet to be examined in the sub-Saharan African context. In the only paper to my knowledge that attempts to do so, Sacramone-Lutz (2018), finds that providing information about voter preferences for health budgets in Uganda did not change any substantive MP behaviors. Given this, examining and understanding how and when legislators may react to new and correct information about voter preference will be crucial going forward.

Finally, as with any study, this research has limitations. A key decision in designing the survey experiment was the attribute to manipulate. The first and most obvious choice was the days spent in the capital versus the local constituency, given the interest of this project on legislators' national versus local attention. While random assignment takes care of selection bias, the design of this study leaves some possibility that the voters care about attention allocation only as a proxy for other legislator attributes. For instance, given the subgroup difference based on partisanship, it may be possible that the opposition supporters are more likely to positively view national attention as opposed to local attention as opposition MPs push for reforms in the parliament. Given this uncertainty, a future line of research should investigate the channel through which partisanship affects voters' preference for legislator attention allocation.

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APPENDIX

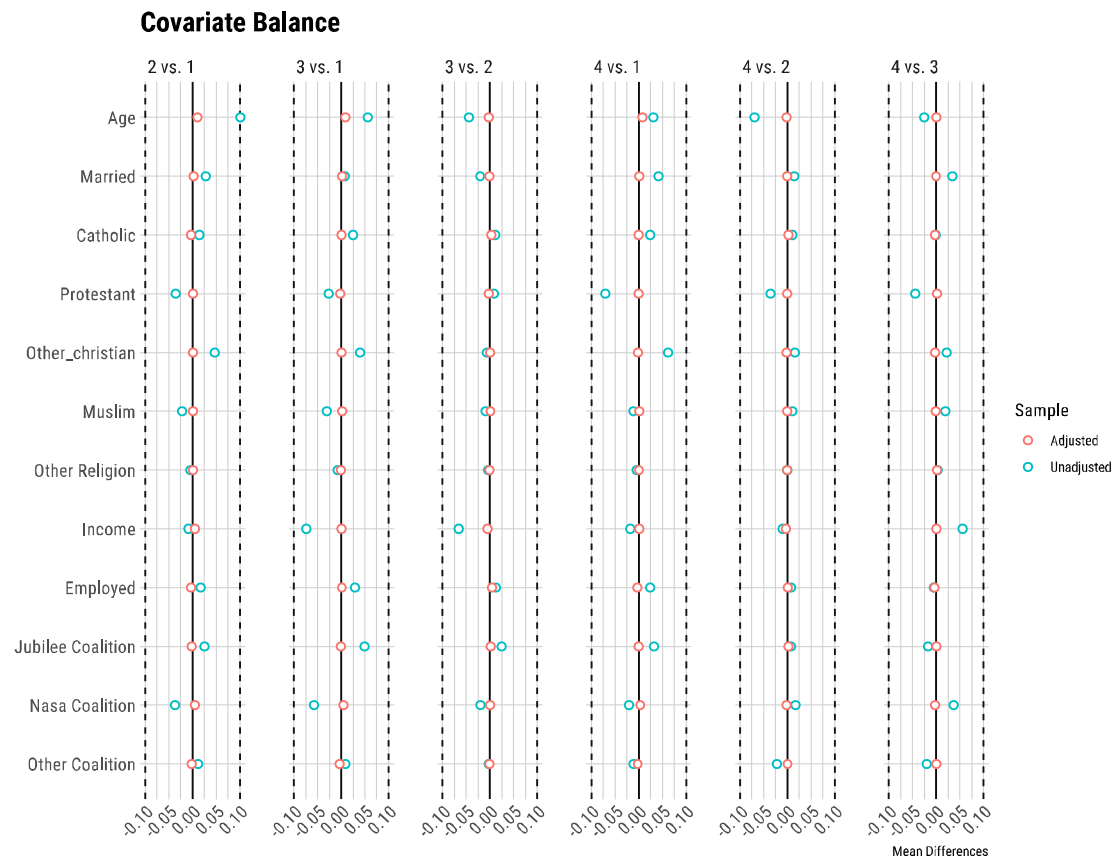
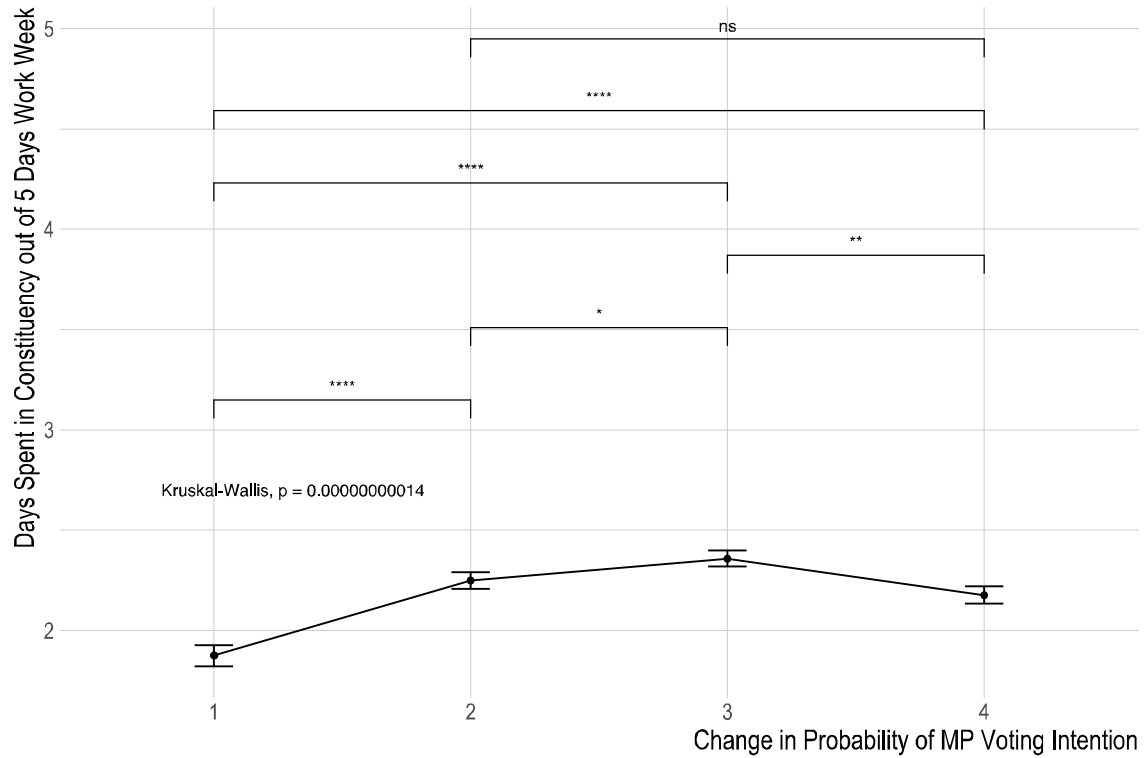


Figure A1: Balance Table

## Effects of MP Attention on Voting Intention

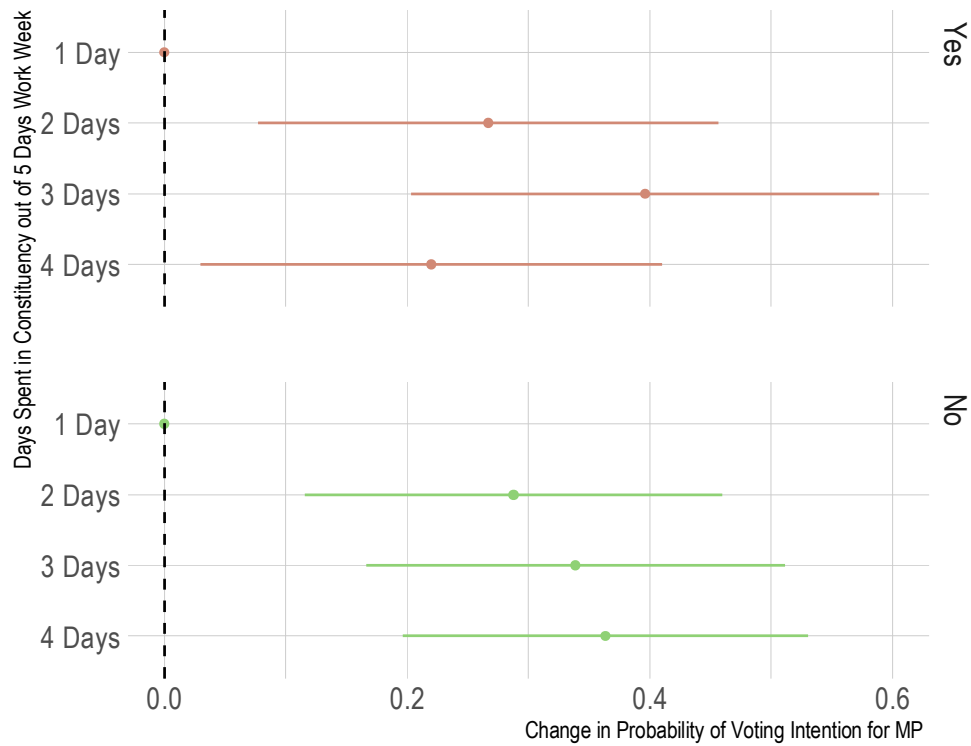
Relative to Baseline of Spending 1 Day in the Constituency



**Figure A2: Differences Are Significant**

## Effects of MP Attention on MP Approval Rating By Seeking Help

Relative to Baseline of Spending 1 Day in the Constituency

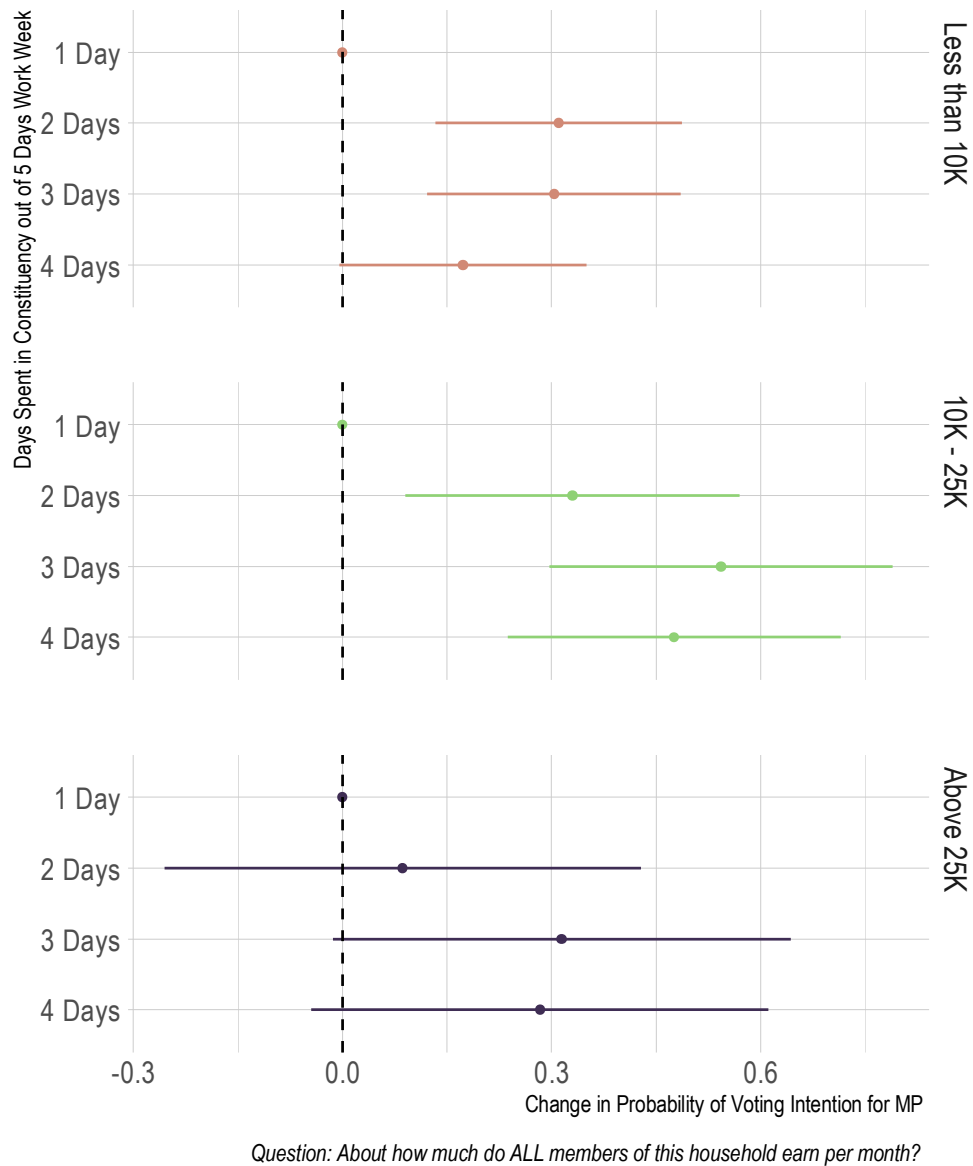


Question: Have you or has someone you know personally sought assistance from your local MP?

**Figure A3: Heterogeneous Treatment Effect – Self-Interest 1**

## Effects of MP Attention on MP Approval Rating By Family Income

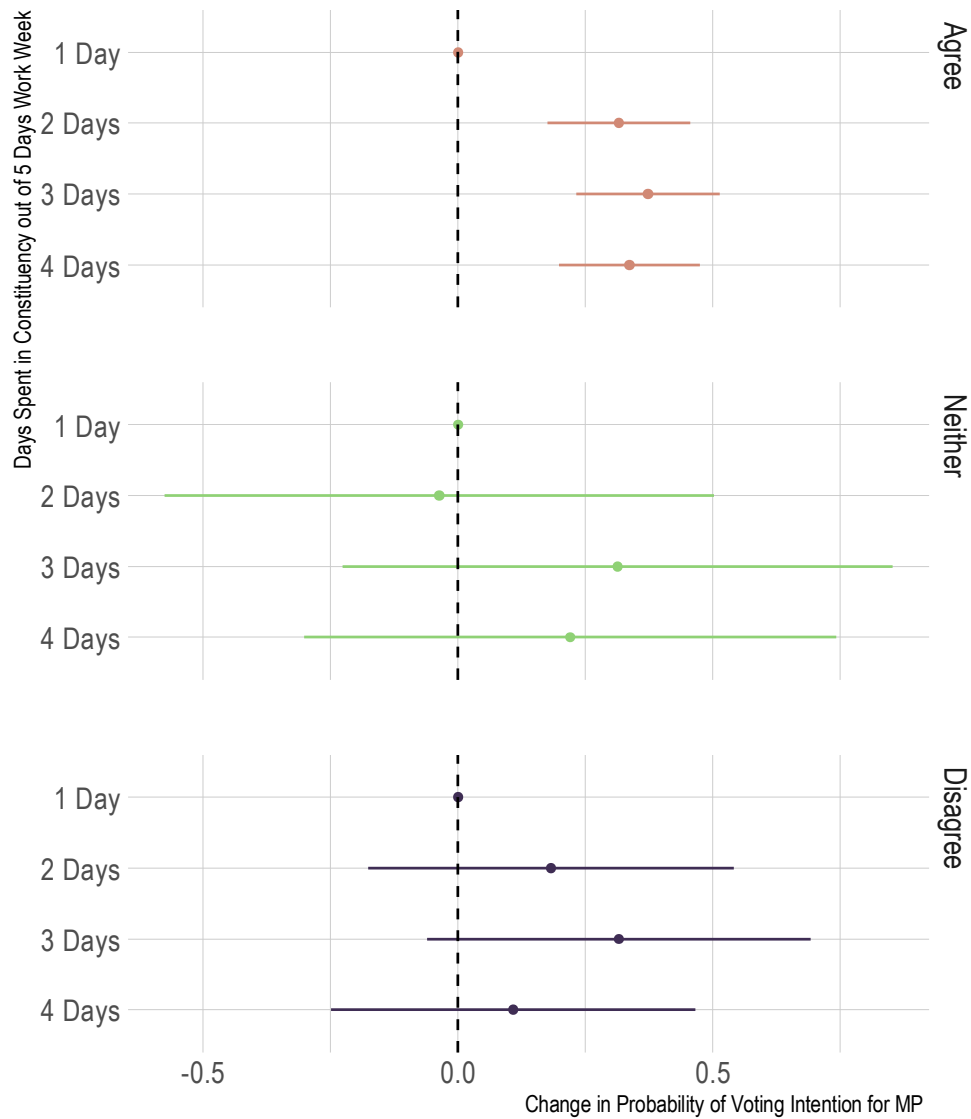
Relative to Baseline of Spending 1 Day in the Constituency



**Figure A4: Heterogeneous Treatment Effect – Self-Interest 2**

## Effects of MP Attention on MP Approval Rating By Perception of MP Impact

Relative to Baseline of Spending 1 Day in the Constituency

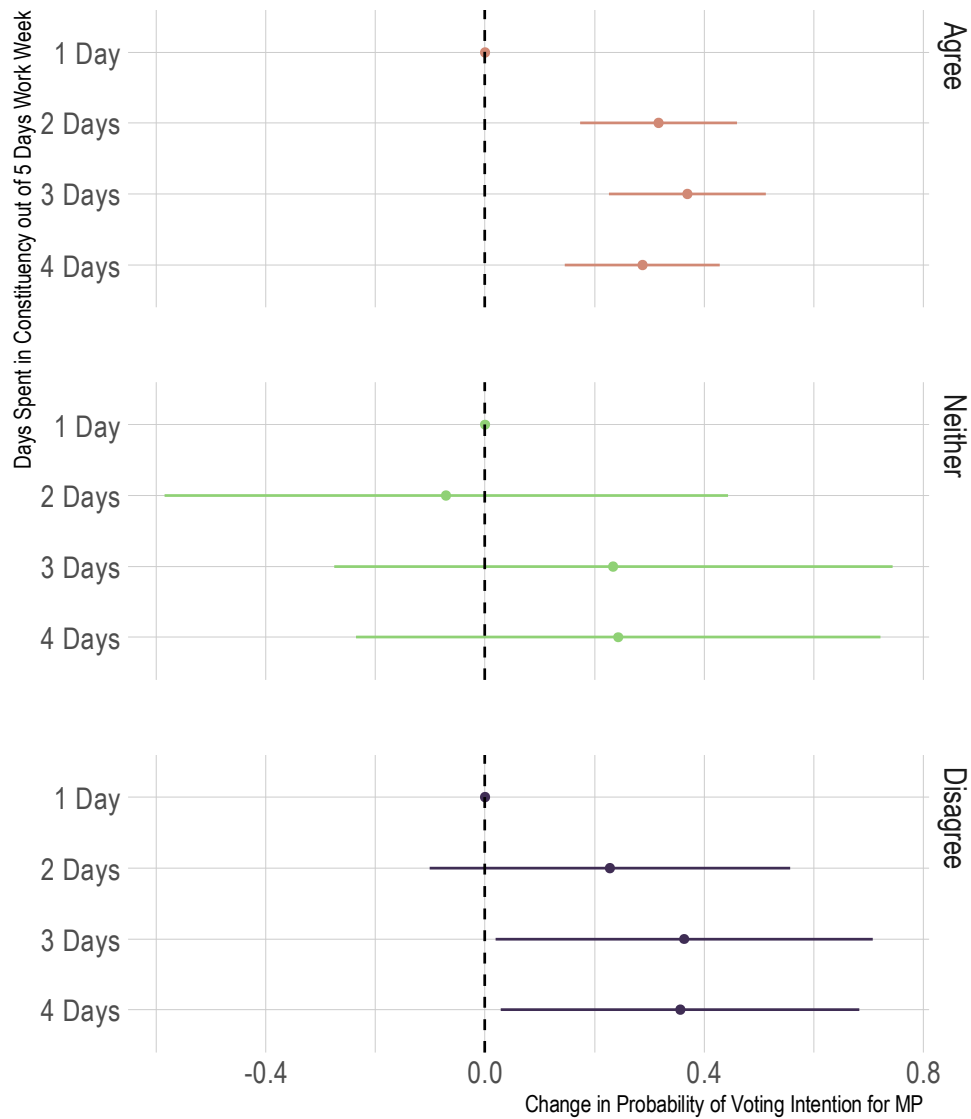


Statement: An MP has an important influence on local issues.

**Figure A5: Heterogeneous Treatment Effect – MP Influence**

## Effects of MP Attention on MP Approval Rating By Perception of MP Impact

Relative to Baseline of Spending 1 Day in the Constituency

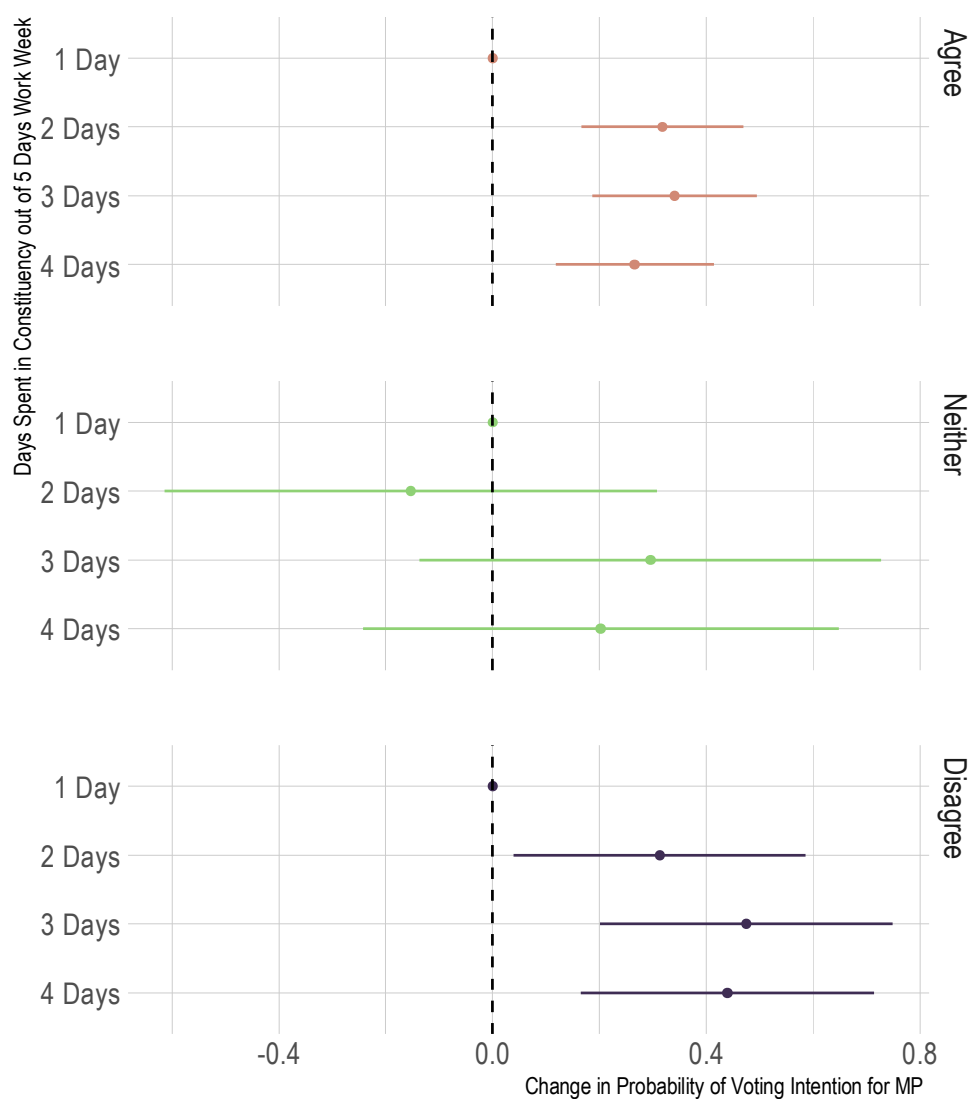


Statement: Individual MPs have an important influence on national policy in Parliament

**Figure A6: Heterogeneous Treatment Effect – MP Influence**

## Effects of MP Attention on MP Approval Rating By Local-National Orientation

Relative to Baseline of Spending 1 Day in the Constituency



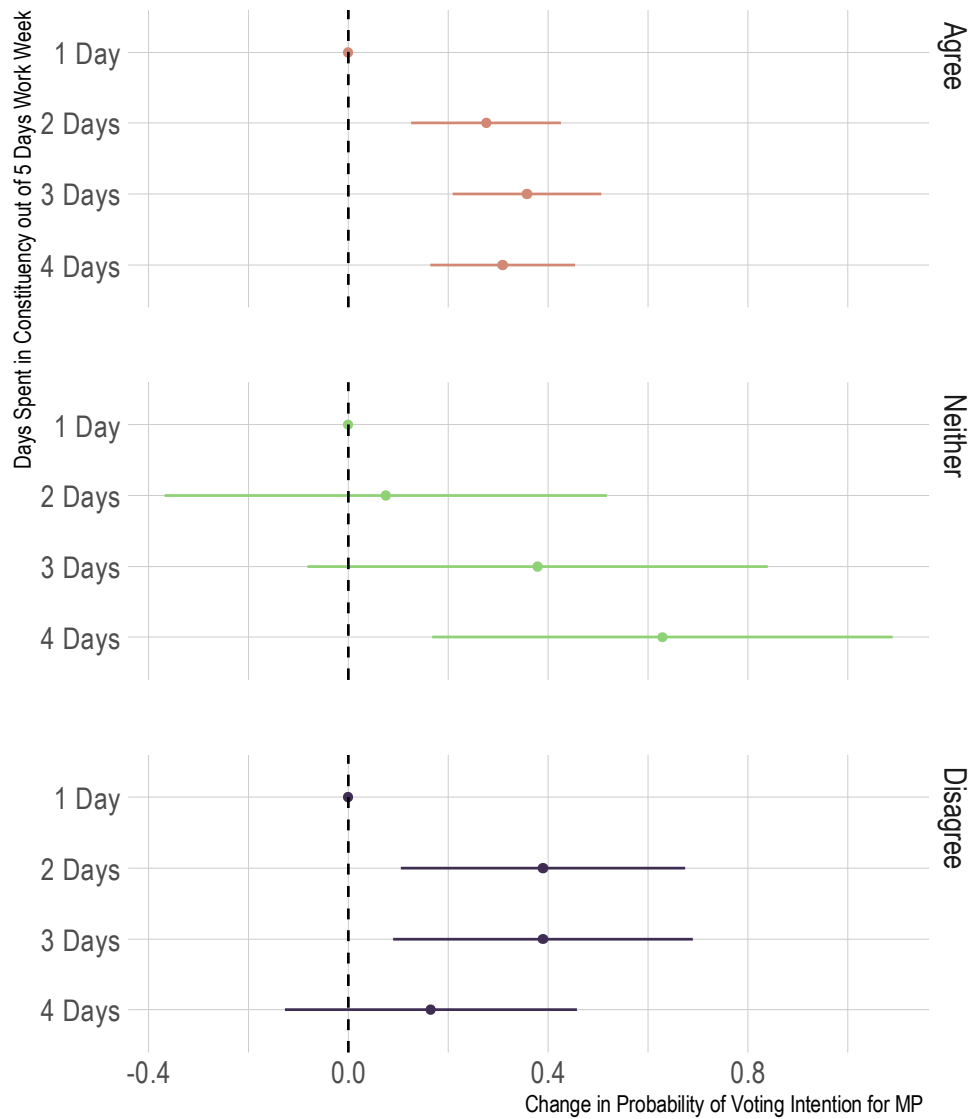
Statement: You care more about how things are going in your local area than about how things are going in Kenya as a whole.

**Figure A7: Heterogeneous Treatment Effect – Local v. National Disposition 1**



## Effects of MP Attention on MP Approval Rating By Local-National Orientation

Relative to Baseline of Spending 1 Day in the Constituency

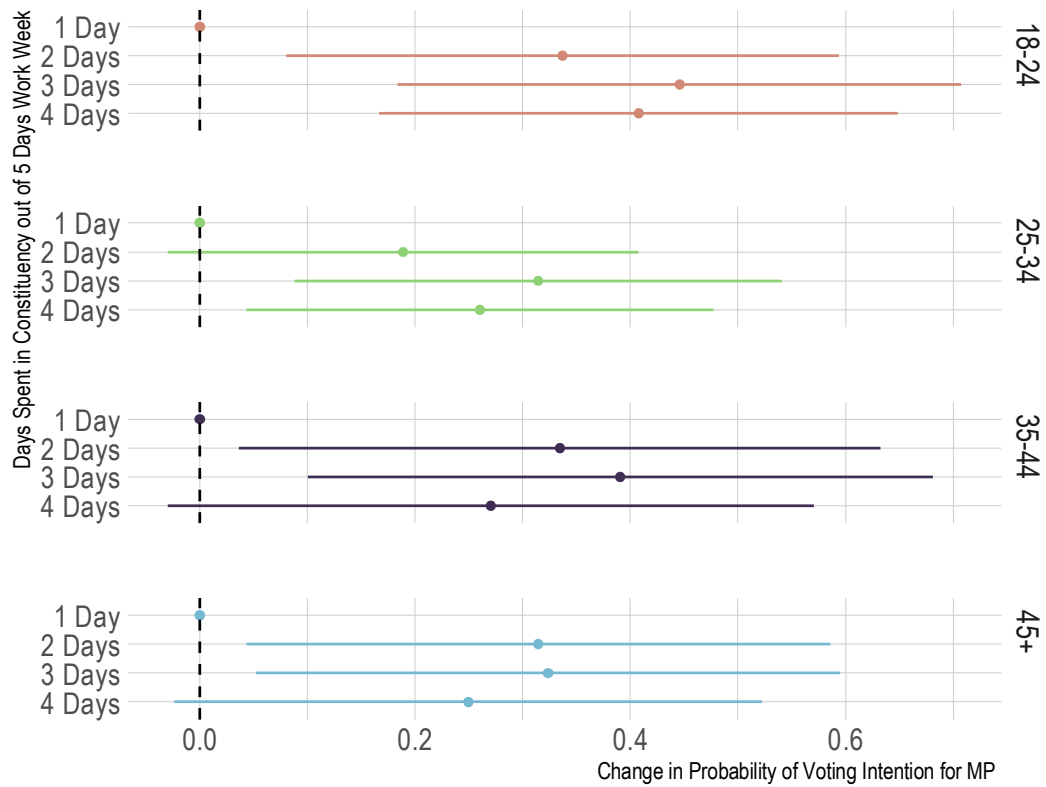


Statement: You pay more attention to national Kenyan politics than to politics in your local area.

**Figure A8: Heterogeneous Treatment Effect – Local v. National Disposition 2**

## Effects of MP Attention on MP Approval Rating By Age

Relative to Baseline of Spending 1 Day in the Constituency

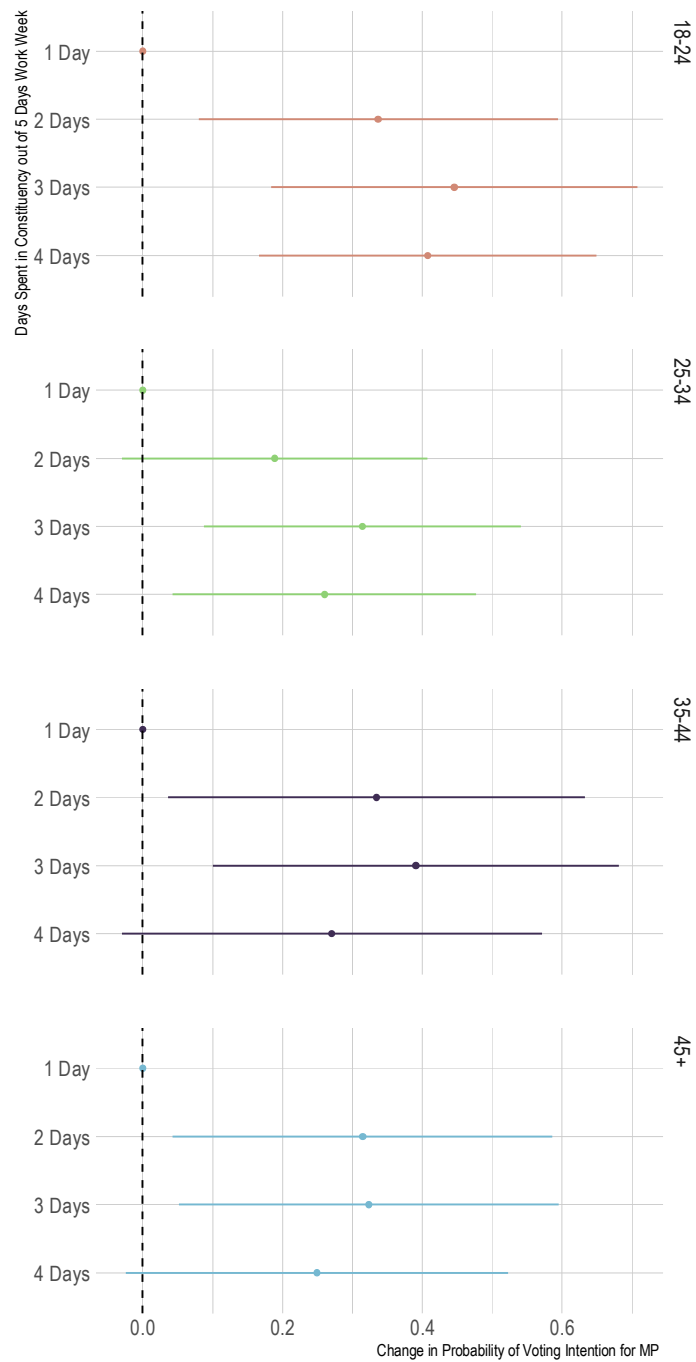


Question: Which political party or coalition do you feel closest to, if any?

**Figure A9: Heterogeneous Treatment Effect – Age 1**

## Effects of MP Attention on MP Approval Rating By Age

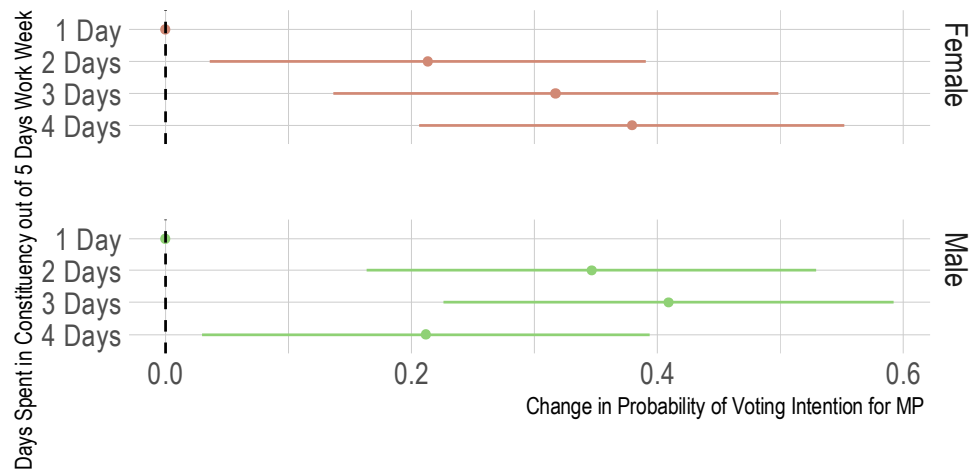
Relative to Baseline of Spending 1 Day in the Constituency



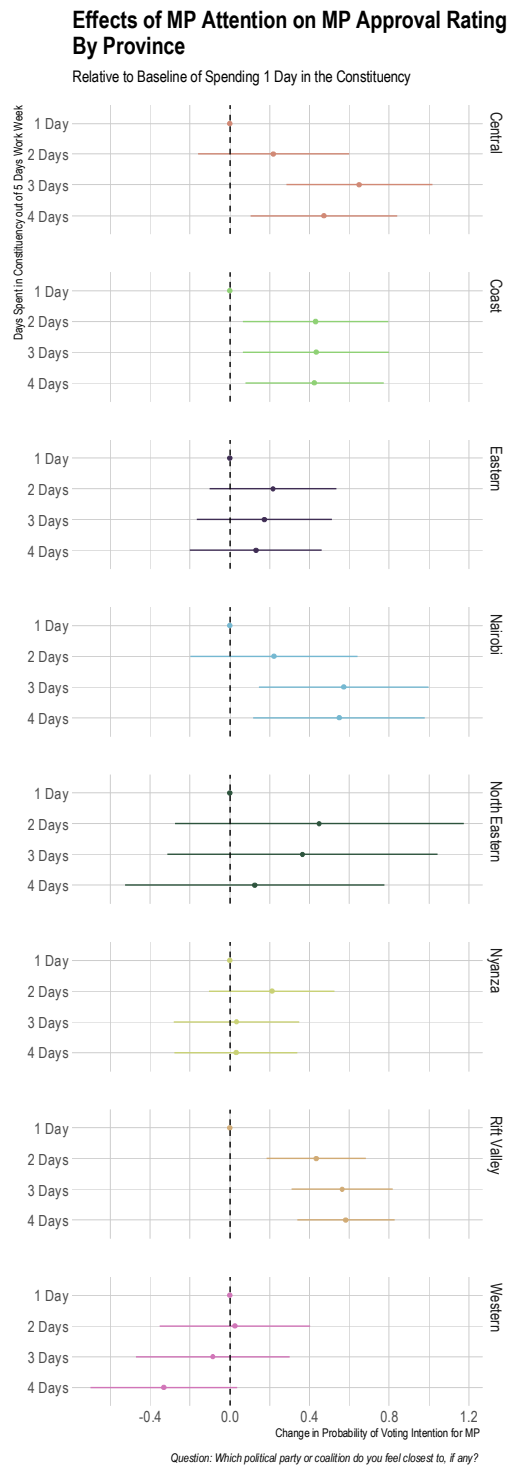
**Figure A10: Heterogeneous Treatment Effect – Age 2**

## Effects of MP Attention on MP Approval Rating By Gender

Relative to Baseline of Spending 1 Day in the Constituency



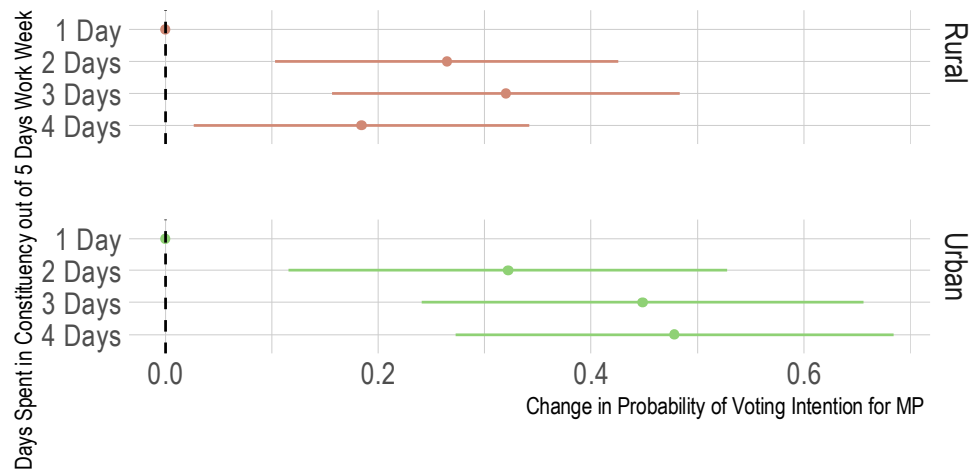
**Figure A11: Heterogeneous Treatment Effect – Gender**



**Figure A13: Heterogeneous Treatment Effect – Region**

## Effects of MP Attention on MP Approval Rating By Urban/Rural

Relative to Baseline of Spending 1 Day in the Constituency



**Figure A14: Heterogeneous Treatment Effect – Urban/Rural Residency**

## **Expectations based on Institutional Variations**

There is a large body of theoretical literature that suggests that the answer to the question of voter demand for legislator attention depends on political institutions and whether they favor programmatic policy or the provision of pork (e.g. André et al. 2015; Cain et al. 1987; Carey and Shugart 1995; Heitshusen et al. 2005). In particular, proportional representation (PR) electoral systems are expected to generate more programmatic approaches—and a corresponding focus on the national level—while single member district (SMD) majority or plurality systems favor constituency service and pork. A growing body of empirical work has also examined voter preference for legislator attention in advanced democracy contexts (e.g. Bengtsson and Wass 2010; Carman 2007; Grant and Rudolph 2004; Griffin and Flavin 2011; Lapinski et al. 2016; Sulkin et al. 2015; Vivyan and Wagner 2015; 2016; Wolak 2017).

Yet we know little about the nature of voters' expectations and how they matter in the African context. Existing work on voters' expectation about legislator attention in Africa often describes African voters as unidimensional actors who are easily swayed by particularistic goods or ethnic appeals. Yet we actually have little research on how African voters expect their representatives to allocate their time between national and local level activities. Survey data, such as those from Afrobarometer Round 4 (2007-2008), for instance, shows that more than one-third of the survey respondents believe that their members of parliament (MPs) never spend time in their constituencies despite the belief that they are focused on the provision of local goods. However, we do not even know whether this is due to the MPs allocating more of their time to national level work, simply shirking on their constituency responsibilities, or both.

Figure A15 provides data on the preferences of voters in twenty African countries from the Afrobarometer Round 4 over how they think politicians should allocate their time between

national and constituency level service. Voters were asked to choose the most important responsibilities of their elected MPs from the list of four core responsibilities – namely, representation, constituency service, legislating, and oversight.<sup>14</sup> For visualization purposes, I collapse the preferences for legislation and oversight as indications of preference for national level services, while constituency and representation were treated as favoring more attention to local issues. From the figure, the first point to note is that while majorities in each country favored local over national attention, there was substantial heterogeneity. Moreover, in a number of countries—nearly half—at least a quarter of voters favored national attention.

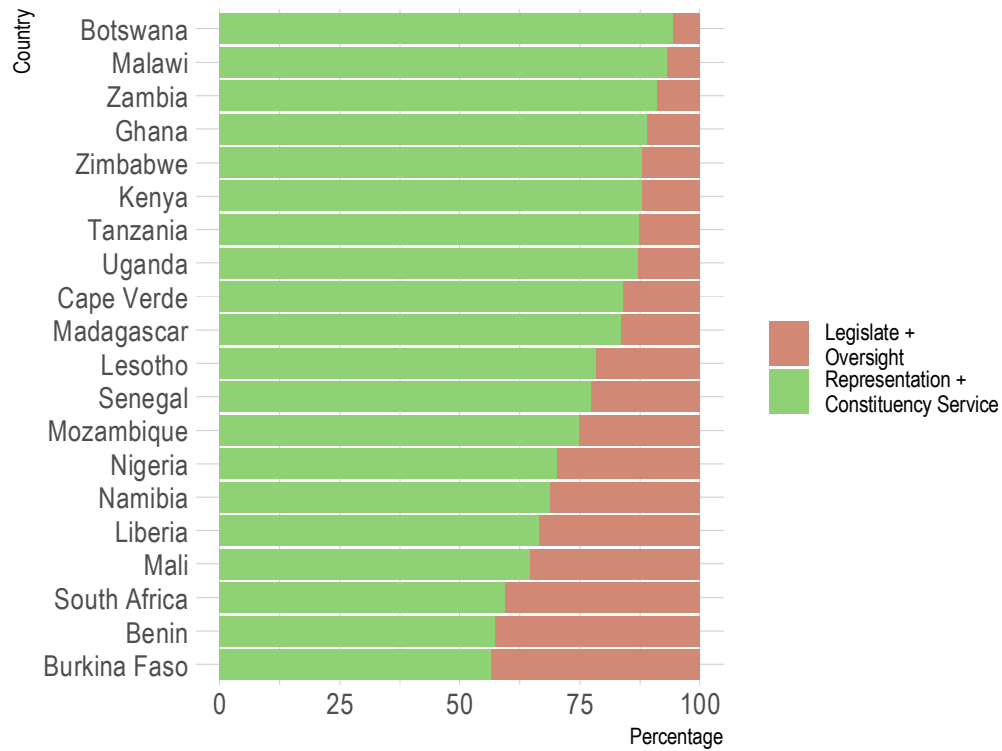
Second, it is not clear that there is a clear relationship between the electoral system and these preferences – an expectation most prominently featured and discussed when discussing legislator attention (Figure A16). Figure A16 divides these systems into three types: SMD, mixed and PR. While the mixed systems employ various electoral institutions, they can be considered as some combination of SMD and PR rules. For example, during the time period corresponding to Round 4 of the Afrobarometer survey, Kenya had 210 seats elected by SMD and 12 additional seats elected by PR. Moreover, even if such a macro-level relationship between electoral systems and voter preference for legislator attention were clearer, we do not ultimately know anything about the determinants of individual-level preferences within any given system: who are the voters who prefer one type of attention vs. another?

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<sup>14</sup> The exact wording of the question and the choices were as follows: “Members of Parliament have different responsibilities. Which of the following do you think is the most important responsibility of your Member of Parliament? 1=Listen to constituents and represent their needs; 2=Deliver jobs and development; 3=Make laws for the good of the country; 4=Monitor the president and his government”

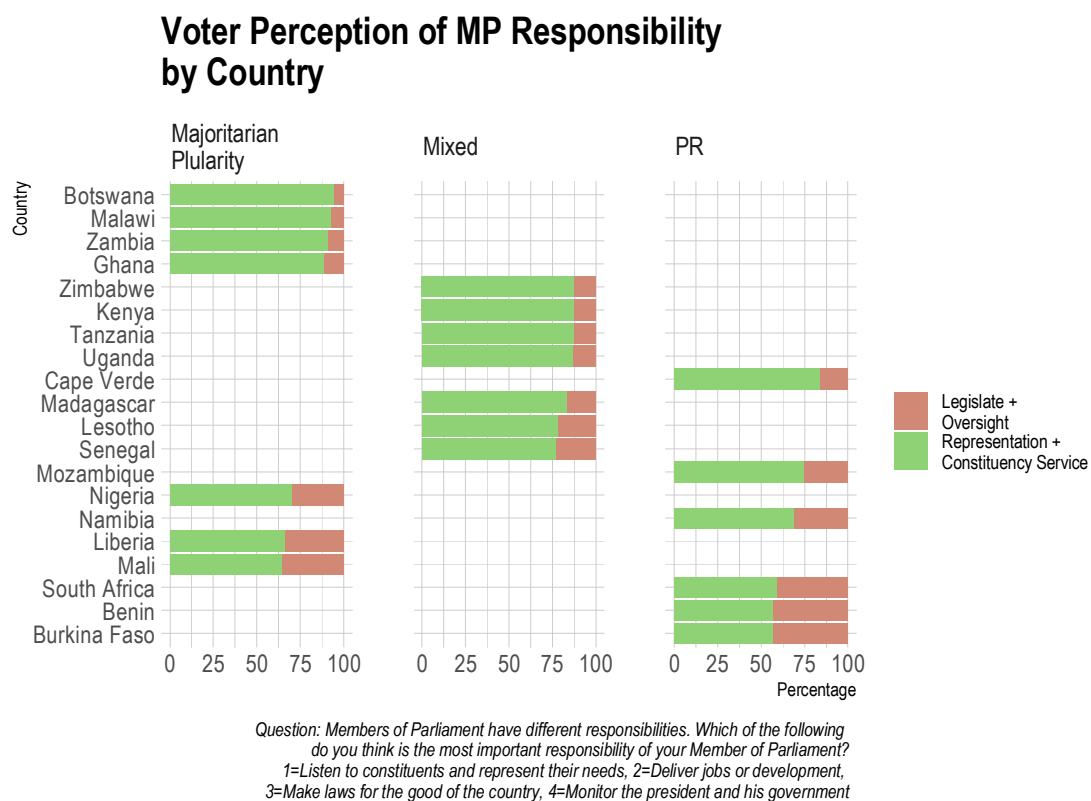


## Voter Perception of MP Responsibility by Country



Question: Members of Parliament have different responsibilities. Which of the following do you think is the most important responsibility of your Member of Parliament?  
 1=Listen to constituents and represent their needs, 2=Deliver jobs or development, 3=Make laws for the good of the country, 4=Monitor the president and his government

**Figure 15: Variations in Voter Preference for MP Responsibility**



**Figure A16: Variations in Voter Preference for MP Responsibility by Electoral Systems**

Instead, I turn to examine the individual level factors that may affect voter preference over national versus local attention. Long-standing literature following Cain et al. (1987) argue that voters in general care more about local attention in the form of constituency service. In turn, legislators – especially those whose seats are electorally less secure – invests more on local rather than national attention. More recently, scholars are starting to look at the logic of different preferences over national and local level attention, including self-interest, broader heuristics and value identifications as discussed in the main text.

In order to investigate these institutional and personal level determinants of constituency preferences, I undertook a cross-national test, drawing on data from Round 4 of the Afrobarometer. Round 4 was conducted in 2008-2009 in twenty countries, allowing me to capture national level characteristics through fixed-effects design.<sup>15</sup> This survey provides an ideal setting to capture individual-level variations in voter preference for attention allocation since it contained specific questions on the respondent's perception of the representative's roles.

In order to test the expectations discussed above, I employ a country-level fixed effects regression. As a primary measure of voters' preference for MPs' attention allocation between the national versus local, I consider the response to the question, "*Which of the following statements is closest to your view? Choose Statement 1 or Statement 2. Statement 1: In electing a Member of Parliament, I prefer to vote for a candidate who can deliver goods and services to people in this community. Statement 2: In electing a Member of Parliament, I prefer to vote for a candidate who can make policies that benefit everyone in our country.*"<sup>16</sup> Those who refused to answer or have told the interviewer that they either don't know or said none of the four responsibilities are the most important were coded as missing.<sup>17</sup> To test for the individual-level determinants of voter preference, I recoded the variable to range between 0 and 1 for ease of interpretation where 0 corresponds with "*strongly agree with statement 1*" and 1 corresponds with "*strongly agree with statement 2*".

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<sup>15</sup> These are: Benin, Botswana, Burkina Faso, Cape Verde, Ghana, Kenya, Lesotho, Liberia, Madagascar, Malawi, Mali, Mozambique, Namibia, Nigeria, Senegal, South Africa, Tanzania, Uganda, Zambia, and Zimbabwe

<sup>16</sup> Similar results (in the appendix) hold when an alternative dichotomous DV is used where the response is coded as 0 if the respondent prefers local focus, i.e. constituency service or representation, and is coded as 1 if the respondent prefers national attention, i.e. legislating and oversight, based on the following question: "*Representatives to the National Assembly have different responsibilities. Which of the following do you think is the most important responsibility of your representative to the National Assembly?*" The respondents were asked to choose from five options: "*Listen to constituents and represent their needs*", "*Deliver jobs or development*", "*Make laws for the good of the country*", and "*Monitor the president and his government*".

<sup>17</sup> These responses were very small in proportions: missing (0.06%), agree with neither (1.2%), and don't know (2.8%).

Round 4 of the Afrobarometer survey poses questions that allow me to test each of the three expectations outlined above.

- *Self-interest.* To capture self-interest, I consider two different proxies. First, I consider the response to the question about whether the respondents have had any personal contact with MPs.<sup>18</sup> Self-interest literature tests whether people who contact MPs more regularly are more likely to expect local attention, on the presumption that such contact is likely to be about either community or personal service provision. Second, I construct an experiential index measure of lived poverty following Bratton et al. (2005).<sup>19</sup> These two measures are included to test the presumption from the clientelism literature that those living under greater poverty will have greater incentives to seek personal service provisions and thus local, rather than national attention.
- *Local-national attention:* to capture local versus national attention I utilize the response to the survey question on whether the respondent identifies more with one's ethnic community versus the nation.<sup>20</sup>
- *Learning about democracy:* to capture learning about democracy, I include a categorical measure of respondents' educational attainment, as well as access to media.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> The specific question and response wordings used were as follows: "During the past year, how often have you contacted any of the following persons about some important problem or to give them your views: A Member of Parliament? 0=Never, 1=Only once, 2=A few times, 3=Often".

<sup>19</sup> To construct the lived poverty measure, I create an additive measure combining responses to five poverty-related questions. The specific question and response wordings used were as follows: "Over the past year, how often, if ever, have you or anyone in your family gone without: Enough food to eat? / Enough clean water for home use? / Medicines or medical treatment? / Enough fuel to cook your food? / A cash income? 0=Never, 1=Just once or twice, 2=Several times, 3=Many times, 4=Always".

<sup>20</sup> The specific question and response wordings used were as follows: "Let us suppose that you had to choose between being a [Ghanaian/Kenyan/etc.] and being a \_\_\_\_\_ [R's Ethnic Group]. Which of the following best expresses your feelings? 1=I feel only (R's ethnic group), 2=I feel more (R's ethnic group) than [Ghanaian/Kenyan/etc.], 3=I feel equally [Ghanaian/Kenyan/etc.] and (R's ethnic group), 4=I feel more [Ghanaian/Kenyan/etc.] than (R's ethnic group), 5=I feel only [Ghanaian/Kenyan/etc.]"

<sup>21</sup> To construct the access to media measure, I create an additive measure combining responses to three media-related questions. The specific question and response wordings used were as follows: "How often do you get news

In addition, I consider a range of factors that constitute respondents' socioeconomic status (SES), such as one's age, gender, employment status, or urban-rural residency, as well as coethnicity and copartisanship with the executive as additional covariates.

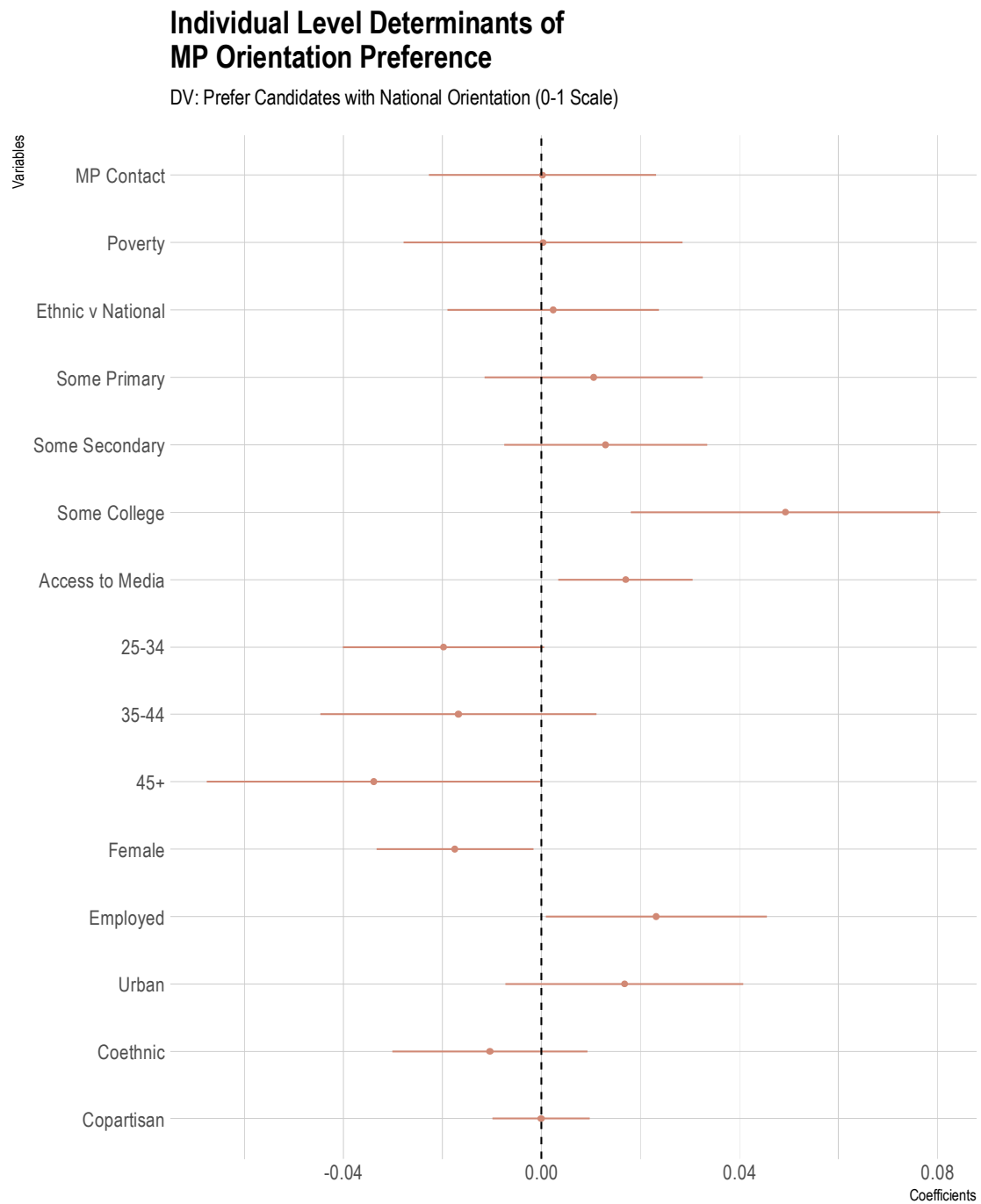
Figure A17 presents the main results. As noted earlier, the dependent variable captures respondents' support for MP's local or national attention. Here we consider the associations of each of the theoretical expectations – i.e. self-interest, local-national attention, and learning about democracy. The first thing to note is that neither the self-interest or the local-national attention variables highlighted in the literature were significant. As Figure A17 shows, the coefficients for MP contact, lived poverty index, and ethnic versus national identifications have wide confidence intervals around zero. This null finding itself might be interesting given expectations about the African voter. Even those predisposed toward constituency level service—by their instrumental view of politics or their national vs. local value attention—still did not seem to have stronger preferences for more constituent activity.

Instead, the overall results lend support for learning about democracy thesis. First, the effects of education as well as access to media is clear, positive, and statistically significant at the 95% level. This is consistent with our expectation that the more educated or the more access to information one has, the more likely one is to develop a more sophisticated understanding about democracy in general and the appropriate role of legislators. Likewise, we observe that greater access to media is positively associated with the likelihood of preferring national over local attention. Interestingly, among the SES variables, we also notice that respondents aged over 45 are less likely to prefer national attention by their legislators. While this may be due to the fact that they were socialized under a non-democratic rule for a longer period of time (e.g. Pop-

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*from the following sources: Radio? Television? Newspaper? 0 = Never, 1 = Less Than Once a Month, 2 = A Few Times a Month, 3 = A Few Times a Week, 4 = Every Day)*".

Eleches and Tucker 2017) and are more used to the expectations of local patronage provision from their representatives (e.g. Barkan 1979; Widner 1993). Likewise, even after controlling for poverty, access to media, and education, the coefficient on employment is positive and significant. This may be due to the possibility that those employed may care more about specific policies decisions relating to their sectors (e.g. tea farmers about agricultural policies or miners about mining policies) made at the national level. Finally, we also observe female respondents being less likely to prefer national attention controlling other observable covariates. While, again, speculative in nature, this may be due to the fact that women traditionally are expected to play the role of homemaker and thus may be more likely to be concerned with local service and goods compared to national policy debates.



Question: Which of the following statements is closest to your view?  
 Statements: In electing a Member of Parliament, I prefer to vote for a candidate who  
 1. can deliver goods and services to people in this community.  
 2. can make policies that benefit everyone in our country.

**Figure A17: Voter Preference for MP Attention at the Individual Level**