

Evaluating the Performance of Parliamentary Committees

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Abstract

Assessing parliamentary committees' performance is important as it can ensure good governance. This has prompted various scholars and practitioners to devise several evaluation methods over the past two decades. Some of the methods include measuring the number of important bills that committees pass, measuring the number of important issues that committees address and measuring the number of unimportant bills, which committees block. While all these methods are important in advancing the knowledge of assessing committees' performance, they are not very useful to parliamentary actors such as parliamentarians as they lack the sense of contemporaneity in their measurements. It is in this context that using documentary review and data from reliable sources such as World Governance Indicators, this paper innovatively presents a rule of thumb proposing that parliamentary committees' performance should instantaneously, be measured by the extent to which actions of a particular committee are consistent with three E's namely, economy, effectiveness and efficiency.

Keywords: Committees; Parliaments; Performances; Economy; Effectiveness; Efficiency

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INTRODUCTION

The purpose of the present paper is to address the question pertaining to how parliamentary committee performance can be contemporaneously assessed. This is important as well performing parliamentary committees can trigger good governance, which in turn is crucial for attainment of sustainable socioeconomic development (Kinyondo, 2012; Kinyondo, 2013; Pelizzo & Kinyondo, 2014). Before proposing for a practical solution towards assessing how a specific committee performs at a specific point in time, we discuss some of the ways in which committee performance can be evaluated diachronically. In this respect, we note in literature that a good benchmark for assessing whether a committee in a given year, in a given session or in a given parliament performed well and whether it performed better or worse than it did at a different point in time is represented by its legislative effectiveness that can in turn be measured by computing the number of important bills that a committee was able to pass (Mayhew, 2005), by the number of important issues that a committee was able to address (Binder, 1999; Nunnari, 2021), or by the number of important bills that it passed and by the number of unimportant bills that it was able to block (Pasquino & Pelizzo, 2006).

While each of these solutions is extremely valuable in assessing committee performance diachronically and could help scholars interested in cross-temporal analyses of committee performance, we suggest that none of these three 'methods' can be applied to assess committee performance here and now. As we will argue later on in the paper, time is of essence when measuring committee performance for each of these three 'methods'.

Building on this discussion, and being aware of the fact that politicians and practitioners alike may need to know whether a committee is performing well

or not, we present what we regard a useful rule of thumb to evaluate policy proposals, bills, projects of law—the rule of the three E's (Economy, Effectiveness, and Efficiency). In its simplest form this rule states that bills (or, for that matter, any policy proposal) that respect the principles of economy, effectiveness and efficiency should be endorsed, while those which fail to do so, rejected. Having stated these three principles, we go on to argue that the extent to which a committee respects these three principles provides a very good indication of how well the committee is performing.

In the course of this paper, we will proceed as follows. In the first section, we discuss the three main functions that parliaments or legislatures perform. In this respect we note that all legislatures perform a representative (Sartori, 2016), a law-making or legislative (Tsebelis, 2022) and an oversight function (Loewenberg & Patterson, 1988; Rockman, 1984). We will also note Wiberg's arguments about the working standards of general parliamentary deliberation (Wiberg, 1995).

Building on this discussion, we present in the second section the methodology used in this study. In it, we explain how one can evaluate the quality of legislation and the performance of a committee here and now. Using the data from seven Eastern African Public Accounts Committees (PACS), the World Governance Indicators and the Pasquino-Pelizzo index, we show how our measure can be computed.

In the third section, we discuss results of the study. We begin the section by showing that while the three functions of parliaments overlap to some extent – a parliament can perform well its representative function by passing certain legislation or by preventing certain legislation from being passed – the relationship between these three functions is complex, non-exhaustive and non-dominant. We raise this point because while a parlia-

ment that performs well its legislative function performs well its law-making and representative function, a parliament that enacts a large amount of legislation does not necessarily perform well its representative function and is inadequately performing its oversight function. This is why we suggest that with regard to quantity, a lot of oversight, a lot of legislation and a lot of representation cannot be achieved simultaneously—which is why we treat them as if they were an impossible trinity. We address these issues to make a simple point, namely that if we are to evaluate the performance of a legislature, a proper evaluation cannot be based on quantity alone but should also and more importantly be based on quality.

We then move to discuss some of the solutions that have been proposed in the literature to evaluate the quality of legislation approved by a parliament or legislature. Thereafter we address the question of whether and to what extent solutions devised to assess parliaments' legislative performance can be used to evaluate committee performance. In this respect, we note that while the solutions discussed in the literature can be used to assess committees' performance in historical way, they are not practical if one is trying to evaluate the performance of a committee here and now hence the need for the rule of thumb, three E's.

In the fourth and final section, we draw some conclusions and discuss the possible implications of this paper. Specifically, we reiterate the fact that the three principles (E's) provide one with a practical way of evaluating parliamentary committees. The rule is straightforward as it proposes that the quality of a committee performance depends on the extent to which a committee passes legislation that deserves to be passed and on the extent to which a committee blocks legislation that should not be passed in the light of the three principles.

RESEARCH METHODS

The present paper uses document reviews and data from reliable international sources to make a case that using the rule of thumb hereby known as three Es (economy, effectiveness and efficiency) is the way forward for robust and instantaneous evaluation of parliamentary committees. Specifically, data from reliable sources including the World Governance Indicator, Pasquino-Pelizzo Index and data gathered by Pelizzo and Kinyondo for East Africa parliamentary committees were used to aid the analysis. Moreover, relevant literature was sourced and used to complement the analysis.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section presents and discusses results from analysing from various sources of data. It does so by, firstly, pinpointing the three functions of parliaments namely legislation, representation and oversight as deliberated in relevant literature. This is important since, one has to understand fully what parliaments do before measuring their performance.

It then moves to discuss the need for measuring the performance especially in the context of the parliamentary 'impossible trinity'. In here, a discussion on the near impossible scenario facing parliaments when it comes to simultaneously performing all three of its functions is presented. Specifically, the 'so what' subsection shows that parliaments can mostly perform two of the three functions at a time thereby potentially sacrificing the third one.

Armed with an understanding of the functions of parliament and the impossible trinity, the section then addresses the best way to measure the performance itself. It is in this subsection that the proposed rule of thumb that is three E's (economy, effectiveness and economy) is introduced.

What Parliaments do?

In democratic settings, parliaments or legislatures perform three distinct functions. These are representation, legislation and oversight (Coghill, Holland, Kinyondo, Lewis, & Steinack, 2012; Kinyondo, 2012, 2013; Kinyondo & Pelizzo, 2013; Pelizzo, 2018; Sartori, 2016). It should be noted that there is a unanimous agreement among legislative studies experts that the term ‘parliament’ and ‘legislature’ cover what Louis Hjelmslev called the same portion of the semantic field. Some scholars have however questioned the alleged synonymity of the two terms. It has been noted that while all parliaments are in fact legislatures or legislative assemblies, not all legislatures are parliaments. Pasquino & Pelizzo (2006) argued for example that legislatures can be called parliaments only in parliamentary systems, while they should not be referred in this way in presidential systems. The basic point that these authors advanced is that the term legislature covers a wider portion of the semantic field than the term parliament. A different interpretation for this politological *Babel linguarum* is provided by Olson (2015). According to Olson (2015) the reason why political science literature and legislative studies specialists have two words to denote what is ostensibly the same object is a basic problem of translation from English political science jargon into US political science jargon and vice versa.

The adjective ‘legislative’, without qualifying as what Connolly (1993) regarded as ‘contested terms’, is nonetheless a term with multiple and possibly ambiguous meanings. In other words, the adjective ‘legislative’ is polysemic as it carries or conveys two different meanings. On the one hand, the adjective ‘legislative’ can be used to denote anything that pertain to a legislature. For example, the sentence “with regards to the government decision, there was no legislative response” is equivalent to the sen-

tence “with regard to the government decision, there was no response of the legislature”. In other words, ‘legislative’ and ‘of the legislature’ are functionally equivalent, they cover the same portion of the semantic field, they have the same meaning.

However, and this represents a possible source of confusion, the adjective ‘legislative’ can also be used in reference to ‘law making’. In this second case, “legislative” is used interchangeably with “of law making”. For example, the expression “the legislative process” has exactly the same meaning as the expression “the law making process”. The adjective ‘legislative’ owes this second to his Latin origin. Legislative derives in fact from *legifero* which in its turn is made up of word *lex, legis*, which means law, and the verb *fero, fers, tuli, latum, ferre* which means to bring. *Legifero*, which literally means to bring the law or to make the law, means to legislate—which is why legislative can be used to describe anything that pertains to the lawmaking process. Beside, and to add further complication, in many political systems the parliament or legislature is regarded as the institution that is constitutionally mandated to legislate.

Parliaments represent society in three basic ways (Pasquino & Pelizzo, 2006; Sartori, 2016). They represent society because usually the distribution of social characteristics (gender, race, education, income, and so on) in the legislature resemble to a greater or a lesser extent that of society as a whole. Parliaments also represent society because parliamentarians (MPs) and parties receive, through the vote, a mandate to stand for and make decision on behalf of the population. Finally, parliaments represent society because the decisions that they take can promote the public good, society’s well-being and the national interest.

With regard to parliaments’ role in the law making process, there is a major

difference between presidential systems and parliamentary ones. In presidential systems, such as the US, for example, the executive branch of government usually does not have the right to initiate the legislative process and to introduce bills. Bills are introduced by members of the legislative branch of government, they are discussed by the legislature, where they are also amended and possibly approved. In contrast, in parliamentary systems the executive branch has the right to introduce legislation. In fact in parliamentary systems, more often than not the vast majority of bills tend to be government sponsored (Johnson, 2005). Only a small portion of the bills that are introduced on the floor is made up of bills that are introduced by individual MPs and only a very small portion of members' bills actually becomes law.

The role of parliament in the law-making process in parliamentary systems has been at the centre of some disagreement among legislative studies experts. Johnson (2005) believe that the role of parliament in the law-making process is mostly reactive. The government introduces a bill, the bill is assigned to the competent committees where it is discussed, debated, analysed and possibly modified. The bills then return to the floor where they are voted and possibly approved. Hence, according to these scholars, the government has the prerogative to initiate the law-making process and the prerogative of the parliament is to oversee these legislative initiatives. Parliaments and their committees may want to discuss whether such measures are really needed, whether they are going to solve the problems for which they are drafted, whether they have some negative consequences that the government has so failed to consider, and, last but not the least, how much will they cost? This idea that the parliament's role in the law-making process is reactive and not active is based on a proper understanding of the nature,

the structure and the mechanics of parliamentarism (Coghill et al., 2012; Coghill & Kinyondo, 2015; Kinyondo, 2012, 2013; Kinyondo & Pelizzo, 2013; Pasquino & Pelizzo, 2006; Pelizzo, 2018; Sartori, 2016).

In parliamentary systems, citizens elect the parliament, the party or the coalition that controls a majority of seats has the right to form the government, the government governs and the parliament oversees. And if the parliament is entirely unhappy with the functioning of the executive, the parliament has the power to dismiss the executive. Hence, parliaments are expected to be concerned with making and breaking governments, while governments should be concerned with policymaking. Scholars who espouse this line of thought believe that proliferation of private member bills amounts to a misunderstanding and a perversion of what parliament should do in the law-making process.

On the other hand, scholars such as Capano & Giuliani (2003) argue instead that as constitutional documents allow individual MPs to introduce bills, parliament and its members have a constitutional justification in playing both an active and a reactive role in the law-making process. Consequently, according to these scholars, it is inappropriate to regard the growth of private members' bills as a perversion of the legislative process.

With regard to oversight, parliaments oversee government actions and activities by utilizing a variety of resources or tools (Pelizzo & Stapenhurst, 2004, 2013). Some of these tools can be used by individual MPs (questions, written questions, urgent questions), some can be used by groups of parliamentarians (interpellations, urgent interpellations), some are institutional (committee hearings; committees and subcommittees of inquiry...), some can be used actively and some of them can be used re-actively.

In the US, congressional committees are mandated to perform a never-ending oversight function, to verify whether the legislation that was enacted is producing the expected results and whether or how it should be modified. Whenever a committee is asked to investigate or inquire on how legislation may have to be modified few years down the line, this activity should be regarded as a sort of foresight rather than over-sight. In this case, oversight (assessment on whether the policy packages enacted by the government were actually efficient and effective) occurs *ex post*. In other words, while in parliamentarism oversight is more reactive, it is more active in presidentialism (Kinyondo, 2012, 2013).

The reactive nature of legislative oversight should not be terribly surprising if one considers that, the role that parliaments play in the law making process is not that of initiating such process but evaluating government proposals. It is exactly because of the way in which executive-legislative relations are institutionalised in parliamentary settings that parliaments' behaviour is reactive, whereas the behaviour of legislatures in non-parliamentary settings is more active. This observation is valid only in times of normal politics, because we know that in times of exception, the Parliament, which is Sovereign in parliamentary systems, has the power to reassert its Sovereignty and dismiss the government. A final observation is at this point in order: empirical analyses conducted by Pelizzo & Staphurth (2004) revealed that legislatures in parliamentary systems have a wider arsenal of oversight tools to scrutinize the government actions than they have in non-parliamentary settings, while they are less equipped than their counterparts to perform *ex ante* oversight. This is particularly true with regard to the drafting and the examination of the budget.

Overall, regardless of the form of government, legislatures perform repre-

sentative, legislative and oversight functions. Besides, in parliamentary systems, the parliament performs a fourth unique function that is to form/support or dismiss the executive.

So What?

Parliamentary functions are related to one another in complex, sometimes conflicting, and non-dominant ways (Coghill et al., 2012). The parliament represents by approving certain bills and passing certain laws that may be beneficial to certain social groups or to society as a whole. It also represents by preventing certain bills (that are detrimental to society or certain social groups) from being enacted—which is a clear instance of *fore-over-sight*. The parliament finally represents by overseeing the implementation of government sponsored and enacted legislation. It also plays a major legislative role by overseeing government legislative proposals and conversely plays a major oversight role by amending, voting and approving government-sponsored bills.

Since the focus of our paper is on performance, we can go on to say a parliament performs its representative function better when it passes more legislation. We can say that a parliament represents better when it oversees more and prevents more suboptimal legislation from being approved. Nevertheless, a parliament cannot pass more legislation and simultaneously be a more effective overseer. This is because it is in the nature of proper oversight to block suboptimal or detrimental legislation.

This is at least what Madison had in mind when he drafted the US Constitution. According to Madison, the executive branch (the President) must be effective, may have the ability to act quickly and resolutely. The Legislature, the bicameral Congress, and especially the Senate, were seen as Houses in which members should take –especially in the Senate- as much as

they needed to deliberate. Because the function of the Senate was not that of passing as much legislation as possible, but its function was precisely of slowing down the deliberative process, to filter out inadequate legislative proposals, to block detrimental legislation from being approved, and to prevent the institutionalisation of the Tyranny of the majority. Hence, given the importance of slow deliberation for the preservation and the promotion of the good of the republic, quick performance or quantifiable performance were not the proper stick by which the Senate could or should be judged. A better indicator of whether the Senate was performing the task for which it had been designed and institutionalized was the number of inadequate legislative proposals it had been able to stop –an ability that the Senate has preserved, to some extent, to the present day (Sinclair, 2016).

Thus, three parliamentary functions represent an inconsistent trinity (see Figure 1). That said greater legislative output could go hand in hand with oversight that is more effective and better representation only if instead of looking at the total number of bills introduced, at the total number of laws enacted, we focus on the

quantity of important legislation. In here the assumption is that if a parliament passes more important legislation and less unimportant one, the quality of the overall legislative output is higher, the legislative function is performed more effectively, the oversight function is performed more effectively and last but not least the representative function is performed more effectively.

In this regard, Pasquino & Pelizzo (2006) constructed a very simple index to measure the legislative effectiveness of a government. If we have the total number of bills introduced by the government, and we know which bills are important, we measure them as a percentage of the overall legislative input (total number of bills introduced by the government). We then measure the percentage of important bills sponsored by the government, which have been approved by the parliament. By multiplying the first percentage with the second we obtain what Pasquino & Pelizzo (2006) called 'positive effectiveness' that is the ability to get important legislation through the parliament. In this, case the larger the number so obtained the higher the level of positive effectiveness.

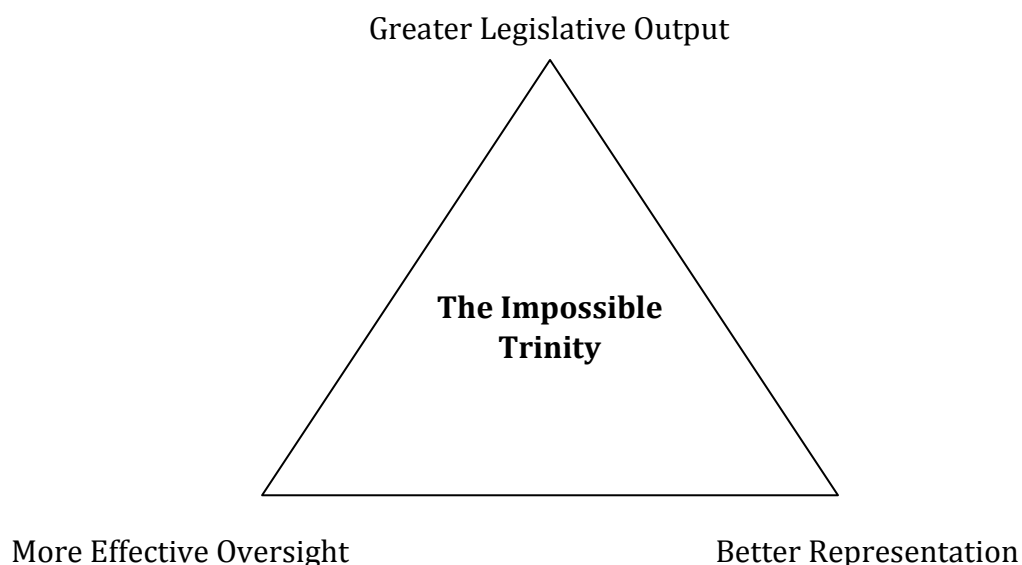


Figure 1. The Impossible Trinity
Source: Processed by the Authors (2021)

However, since the effectiveness has also to do with a parliament's ability to prevent unimportant legislation from being passed, Pasquino & Pelizzo (2006) also measured the percentage of unimportant bills introduced by the government that were approved by the parliaments. The result of this operation is what Pasquino & Pelizzo (2006) called 'negative effectiveness'. In this case, the higher the value of the number so obtained, the lower the parliament's 'negative effectiveness' that is its ability to stop unimportant legislation. By discounting the positive effectiveness by the negative one, we generate the Pasquino-Pelizzo index of legislative effectiveness. Visual inspection of table 1 clarifies how this index is computed.

Table 1 indicates that the British, the French, the German and the Italian governments introduced several labour bills between 1981 and 1991 as tracked by NATLEX. According to Döring (1995), the bills that appear both in the NATLEX and in the Encyclopedia are important. On the other hand, the bills are unimportant if they only appear in the NATLEX.

As we can see from table 1, the Italian government did not introduce any important bill on labour issues. The percentage of all the government-sponsored bills

on Labour that were important was of 9.5, 5.9, and 9.3 for France, Germany and the UK respectively. As all the important bills were approved (hence approval percentage is 100), we can multiply the number in the first column by 100 and we obtain, in column three, the positive effectiveness for the various countries. However, since the French parliament, in addition to passing all the important labour bills also passed all the unimportant ones, it receives a negative score of 100 and hence exceeding what we find for Germany, Italy and the UK (See table 1). By discounting, in column 5, the positive effectiveness by the negative, we find the Pasquino-Pelizzo index of legislative effectiveness. Importantly, with minor adjustments such index could be used to assess not only the government's legislative effectiveness, but also parliament's. The only problem is how can know we whether legislation is important?

Important Legislation?

The solution devised by Döring (1995) can be applied to assess the importance of labour legislation in the European Union. Nevertheless, how can one assess the importance of other types of legislation outside the European Union?

Mayhew (2005) suggested a two-

Table 1. Index of Legislative Effectiveness
 Source: Pasquino & Pelizzo (2006)

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
Country	Important Bills Introduced --% of the Total Legislation Introduced	Important bills Approved--Percentage	Positive Effectiveness	Unimportant Bills Approved --Percentage	Government Effectiveness (3/4)
Italy	0	0	0	70.6	0
Germany	5.9	100	590	68.8	8.57
France	9.5	100	950	100	9.5
United Kingdom	9.3	100	930	74.4	12.5

phase process to assess whether a particular bill was important in the US politics. First, one has to look at the “end-of-session wrap-up articles from *New York Times* and *Washington Post* to survey contemporary judgements about the significance of Congress’s work each session” (Binder, 1999). Then in the second step, one relies on the “policy specialists” retrospective judgement about the importance of legislation” (Binder, 1999). Having identified important legislation, one can use the total number of important laws as a proxy of legislative effectiveness or performance or one can use these data to measure the Pasquino-Pelizzo index or legislative effectiveness.

Alternatively, Binder suggests that one can assess the performance by measuring the amount of important legislation passed by the parliament. This is done by counting the number of important policy issues that the parliament and government should have addressed in the course of a certain period, which can be inferred from the editorials in the main daily papers and divide the number of important laws by the number of important issues. In this way, Binder argues, one is able to solve a mystery that had long puzzled Mayhew that is both the 89th Congress (under the presidency of Johnson) and the 93rd Congress (under Nixon) produced 22 important laws. Ironically, while the 89th Congress was remembered for its major legislative achievements, the 93rd Congress “failed to earn much of a reputation for legislative achievement” (Binder, 1999). According to Binder the solution for this puzzle is that the legislative agenda, the list of important issues under Nixon was 40% larger than it had been under Johnson and therefore once we divide the number of important laws passed in those two Congresses, we find that one was considerably more productive than the other.

Some numbers can illustrate what Binder had in mind. If we assume that from 1984 to 1987 there were 100 im-

portant issues and that between 1987 and 1990 there were 140 important issues, and if both parliaments passed 22 important laws, the legislative effectiveness of the first parliament becomes:

$$E = 22/100 = 0.22$$

While the effectiveness of the second is:

$$E = 22/140 = 0.16$$

Hence, the first parliament was more effective or had a better performance than the second one.

Are Committees Performing?

So far we have noted that parliaments perform three overlapping functions that relate to one another in a complex and yet non-dominant ways hence what we termed as an impossible trinity. We also said that this impossibility, especially the incompatibility of effective oversight with the production of large numbers of laws, can be solved, if instead of looking at the amount of legislation produced by a parliament, the focus must be placed on the amount of important legislation. In this respect, we summarized how important legislation can be recognized according to Mayhew (2005) and Binder (1999). So far, our discussion has been exclusively devoted to assessing the performance of parliaments or legislatures as a whole. However, how can we assess the performance of parliamentary or legislative committees? How do we know whether a committee has worked well or not? Can we measure the performance of a committee? And if so how?

In developing countries, where parliaments are weak or poorly institutionalised, committees’ performance can be measured based on relatively straightforward indicators: did the committees meet? How many times did a committee meet? Did committee members attend the meetings? How many times did the committee report to the assembly on the bills that had been referred to it? And so on.

However, these metrics do not work equally well in consolidated democracies.

Indeed, the fact that committees hold more meetings, write more and longer reports, consider a larger number of bills, call more witnesses may suggest that committees do more work, but this does not provide any clue as to whether they work better. Since performance involves a qualitative dimension, as we noted above, assessing committee performance exclusively based on quantity could lead to misleading conclusions.

So how can committee performance be assessed? Recall that if one wants to assess performance diachronically, one can look at the number of important bills that were passed by a committee (this represents Mayhew's solution applied at the committee level), one could see how many of the important issues were addressed by the bills examined and approved by a committee (this solution is an adjustment of Binder) or could assess how many important bills were passed and how many unimportant bills were blocked by a committee (this is the Pasquino-Pelizzo solution).

Alternatively, one could assess committee performance based on expert surveys. In this case one could identify what were the objectives that was supposed to achieve, and could ask the experts to indicate how often such goals were actually achieved.

The problem of either solution is that they can only work retrospectively and can only be used to assess performance historically. In other words these methods of assessments can only allow one to measure how a committee performed last session, last year, in the last legislature or under the last government. As a result, they are not very useful solutions when it comes to assessing committees' performance instantaneously.

For instance, Mayhew to assess the importance of legislation are asked whether a specific law remained important years after it had been enacted—hence such an approach cannot be used to

evaluate performance *hinc et nunc*—here and now. Similarly Binder's method cannot measure performance in a given instant because her way of estimating performance requires one to know a) the number of important issues and b) the number of important issues that were addressed by a bill/law. This means that Binder's method also has a major shortcoming to estimate instantaneous performance. The Pasquino-Pelizzo index of legislative effectiveness is also confronted with a similar problem and therefore it is not very useful in assessing performance other than in a historical manner.

The fact is, while academics may be satisfied with evaluating performance in historical terms, to argue which committee was most effective, when, what factors were responsible for the effective or ineffective performance of such a committee, politicians and practitioners need to have ways or rules of thumb to get a quick sense of how they are doing when they are performing their roles. In the first chapter of his *Essays in Positive Economics*, Friedman (1953) famously discussed the case of the billiard player. Friedman argued that an expert billiard player by taking a quick glance at the table, is able to make an accurate shot as if he had measured the distance between the balls and the holes and the angles and so on. In fact, Friedman argued, if the player were not able to deliver such precise shots he would not be regarded as an expert player in the first place. The case of a committee chair, a political advisor, or a practitioner is the same. Though he or she may not be performing all the complex calculations that would be necessary to adequately measure performance, he or she needs to have some rule of thumb to know how a committee is performing. If and insofar as an MP's chances to be re-elected depend on the performance of the committee that he or she is chairing, the MP needs to know whether the committee is performing well, whether the com-

mittee could perform better and, if so, how it could improve its performance. However, how can MPs, committee chairs assess committee performance? What rule of thumb can they employ to get a sense of how well they are doing?

The best rule of thumb provided by the anti-corruption and good governance literature is rule of the three E's. In here, each policy decision, bill and law is judged based on how it performs with regard to the three E's — economy, effectiveness and efficiency.

In other words, whenever an issue arises and a bill is referred to a committee, the first criterion that committee members should use to judge whether it is worth considering this bill or not is whether addressing this issue is economically viable or whether the costs of addressing (and possibly solving) a specific issue or problem are greater than the costs that one would have to face if the issue or problem were not addressed. Once, it is decided that it makes economic sense to address a certain issue, committee members and committee chairs should ask themselves (and their personal staff and the parliamentary staff members who are more likely to have some

technical knowledge of the issues under consideration) whether the solutions proposed in certain bills are likely to be effective or not. If it is economically viable to address a problem and if the proposed solution is believed to be effective, committee members and committee chairs should inquire whether the solution proposed in the bills under consideration is the most efficient way to fix the problem. In this respect, committee members should gather information (if any) for the issue under consideration, and should identify other solutions that may be equally effective in solving the problem and could do so at a lower costs. Bills that are consistent with the three E's that is bills that respect the principles of economy, effectiveness, and efficiency should be approved by parliamentary committees, while bills that violate one or more of these criteria should either be rejected or be dramatically modified.

These three criteria or principles allow one to assess not only whether a specific bill was worth considering but it also provides one with a good rule of thumb to assess the overall performance of a committee instantly. Whenever a committee approves legislative proposals

Table 2. Mandate of PACs in Eastern Africa

Source: Pelizzo & Kinyondo (2014)

Country	Efficiency, Economy and Effectiveness of Government Policy	Efficiency and Economy of policy Implementation (Value for Money)	Effectiveness of Policy Implementation (Delivery of Outcomes)	Performance Score
Ethiopia	-	Y	-	1
Malawi	N	Y	Y	2
Seychelles	N	Y	N	2
South Sudan	Y	N	-	1
Tanzania	Y	Y	Y	3
Uganda	Y	Y	Y	3
Zambia	Y	Y	Y	3

Legend: Y= Yes, N = No, '-' = No Answer

that violate the principles of economy, effectiveness and efficiency, the committee is not appropriately performing its representative function as it firstly is failing to act in the interests of the population, secondly, it is not adequately performing its law-making duties because it endorses legislation that should not be passed; and finally, it is not adequately performing its oversight function as it fails to block legislation that does not deserve to be enacted. Whenever a committee fails in its representative, law-making and oversight capacity, the performance of the committee should be evaluated quite negatively.

By employing the rule of thumb that we have just proposed we are now in the position of assessing the performance of Public Accounts Committees (PACs) in Eastern Africa (see table 2). Using the data presented by Pelizzo & Kinyondo (2014), we can check whether PACs are mandated to oversee the economy, effectiveness and efficiency of proposed policies as well as the economy, effectiveness

and efficiency of policy implementation.

The data presented by Pelizzo & Kinyondo (2014) in table 2, illustrate that only in 4 of the 7 cases for which information was collected (South Sudan, Tanzania, Uganda and Zambia) PACs have the mandate to assess the three E's of government policy. In two cases (Malawi and Seychelles), the PAC does not have the authority to evaluate the economy, effectiveness and efficiency of government policies, while no evidence was provided with regard to the PAC from Ethiopia.

The data also suggests that six of the seven PACs from Eastern Africa are mandated to evaluate the efficiency and the economy of the policy implementation that is to check the value for money of the policies designed and implemented by the government. The PAC from South Sudan represents the only exception to the general trend.

Finally, the data provide some evidence with regard to the delivery of outcomes that is of the fact that the imple-

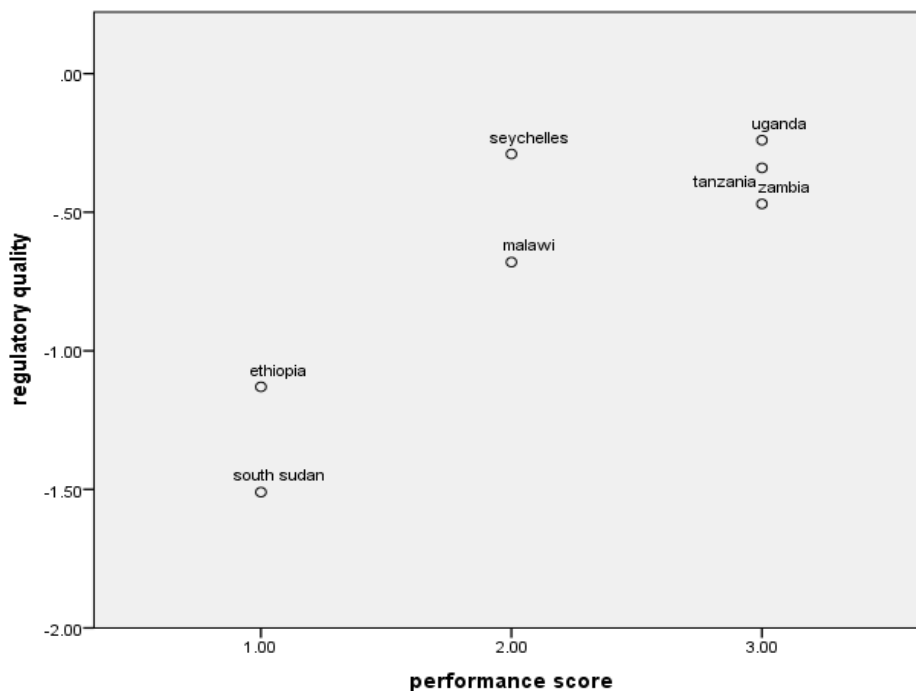


Figure 2. PAC Performance and Regulatory Quality
Source: World Governance Indicators (Various)

mented policy is effective in producing the results for which it had originally enacted and implemented. The evidence presented in table 2 shows that four of the seven Eastern African PACs (Malawi, Tanzania, Uganda and Zambia) are tasked with evaluating the effectiveness of policy implementation, that the PAC from Seychelles is not mandated to perform such tasks, while no evidence was provided by the Ethiopian and South Sudanese PACs as to whether they perform such task or not.

If we assign the value '1' to PACs that have a specific power, and a value of '0' (zero) if they do not, we can compute a performance score for Eastern African PACs. By doing so we find that all the Eastern African PACs have at least one of the three powers discussed in table 2, that on average they have 2.14 such powers. By computing the score we find that while Tanzania's, Uganda's and Zambia's PACs are the best performing ones, Ethiopia's and South Sudanese ones are the worst performing, with the performance of the PACs from Malawi and Seychelles are somewhere in between.

To cross-validate our measure of performance, we correlate our performance score with the indicator for regulatory quality as computed by the scholars working in the World Governance Indicator project. The correlation is strong, positive and statistically significant ($r = .866$, $\text{sig.} = .012$)—the strength of the correlation is clearly visible in the scatterplot presented in figure 2.

CONCLUSION

The purpose of this paper was quite simply to answer the question, how do we assess committee performance? In order to answer this question, we have noted that committee (and parliamentary) performance can be assessed either in a diachronic, historical fashion, or can be assessed in a synchronic, *hinc et nunc* fashion. We further noted that while cross-

temporal comparisons of committee performance may be of great interest for legislative studies specialists, are not particularly useful for all those actors such as practitioners, MPs, committee chairs and so on who need to have a clear sense of how a specific committee is performing in a specific moment. It is against this background that we suggest a practical-oriented rule of thumb to guide their judgement.

Subsequently, we suggest that a good way of assessing performance is represented by the rule of the three E's, which represent the principle of economy, effectiveness and efficiency. These three principles provide one with a fairly practical way of evaluating whether a specific bill should be supported or not: bills that respect these three principles should be supported while bills that violate one or more of these principles should be either amended or rejected. Building on this argument, we also suggested that once we have established a simple rule to assess the merit (or the lack thereof) of a specific bill, it is fairly easy to evaluate committee performance. In the end, the quality of a committee performance depends on the extent to which a committee passes legislation that deserves to be passed and on the extent to which a committee blocks legislation that should not be passed in the light of the three principles.

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