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# A STUDY OF CONSTITUENCY PRACTICES AND CITIZENS' ENGAGEMENT WITH PARLIAMENTARIANS IN UGANDA

*Holding Members of Parliament Accountable in  
a Democratic Dispensation*

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# **A STUDY OF CONSTITUENCY PRACTICES AND CITIZENS' ENGAGEMENT WITH PARLIAMENTARIANS IN UGANDA**

*Holding Members of Parliament Accountable in  
a Democratic Dispensation*

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## 1.0. Introduction

World over in democratic dispensations, it is believed that while voters cast their votes and elect their representatives to various offices, they retain both duty and rights to hold them accountable and thus the Africa leadership institute with funding from the Democratic Governance Facility (DGF) under the Parliamentary Performance Scorecard and Civic Engagement undertook a study in constituencies across Uganda to study the Constituency practices of elected Members of Parliament and the level of engagements between them and citizens by use of the Parliamentary Performance scorecard as tool. The Parliamentary Performance Scorecard is an innovative governance monitoring tool which provides citizens with easily digestible information on the performance of individual Members of Parliament and the institution of Parliament. It is based on the idea that “it is possible for citizens to work within the framework of representative democracy but remain engaged between the electoral cycles”.

Objective number one of the AFLI-DGF Scorecard Project 2018-2021 was to generate evidence on performance of Members of Parliament (MPs) and the Institution of Parliament for civic engagement. The key output of this project is the annual parliamentary scorecards in this case the target was three (2018-2019, 2019-2020, 2020-2021). This study however, focused on the 4th year of the 10th parliament of Uganda following the launch and dissemination of the parliamentary performance scorecard 2018-2019 (of the 3rd session of the 10th Parliament which was released at the end of July 2020). The field research on which these findings are based was conducted From October 10th 2020 to November 31st 2020 following the massive dissemination of the 3rd session parliamentary scorecard throughout Uganda by use of multiple channels that included television, newspapers radio stations ,online workshops and social media platforms.

Constituency practices in this case referred to accessibility of MPs by voters, oversight visits, channels of engagement between MPs and Constituents, use of the scorecard as a governance monitoring tool, consultations on bills, and feedback to voters inform of business conducted in the Parliament and decisions taken by Parliament. This is based on the fact that under the theory of social contract, it is presupposed that persons’ moral and/or political obligations are dependent upon a contract or agreement among them to form the society in which they live. This is therefore implied that even where no formal written contract exists, MPs are duty bound to give feedback to constituents and constituents should seek to know what MPs are obligated to do.

The main purpose of the study was to find out the nature of Constituency practices of MPs and the extent to which the Citizens used the scorecard as a civic engagement tool.

### **1.1. Specific Objectives:**

The Study was intended to find out the following:

- (i) Ascertain whether members of parliament (MPs) consult on Bills in Parliament either before, during and after the debate.
- (ii) Find out what channels members of parliament (MPs) often used to consult or give feedback to the citizens/ voters.
- (iii) Find out what proportion of the citizens from the sample have heard about or seen the parliamentary performance scorecard
- (iv) Find out whether the citizens had seen or heard their MPs conduct oversight over government programs in their constituencies and through what channels and;
- (v) To find out whether the parliamentary performance scorecard was used during the internal Political party primaries in 2020 and how it was used.
- (vi) Finally, the study sought to ascertain whether citizens consider the Parliamentary Performance scorecard relevant in evaluating the performance of members of parliament.

### **1.2. Significance of the study**

This study is significant in the following ways:

- (i) It will help the authors and AFLI understand the project context in relation to MPs engagement with citizens in constituencies,
- (ii) Help AFLI understand whether citizens are accessing easily digestible information on performance of MPs using current scorecard dissemination channels and strategies of civic engagement
- (iii) It will help AFLI in designing the successor project by integrating lessons learned from this study on whether measures used in the scoring MPs are relevant.
- (iv) It will help other researchers who may be interested in conducting similar research in future.

## **2.0. LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **2.1. The Parliamentary Performance Scorecard and Citizens Participation in Democracy**

The Parliamentary Performance Scorecard (PPPSC) is founded on provisions of the 1995 constitution of the Republic of Uganda specifically Article 1 which states that; All power belongs to the people who shall exercise their sovereignty in accordance with this Constitution and that without limiting the effect of clause (I) of the same article, all authority in the State emanates from the people of Uganda; and the people shall be governed through their will and consent. It adds that All power and authority of Government and its organs derive from this Constitution, which in turn derives its authority from the people who consent to be governed in accordance with this Constitution. It further adds that people shall express their will and consent on who shall govern them and how they should be governed, through regular, free and fair elections of their representatives or through referenda. Through critical observation, the article empowers citizens on whose behalf the leaders execute their mandate. Citizens as bosses are therefore supposed to ensure that they monitor actions of their leaders and ensure that checks and balances on the powers of elected representatives and institutions within the law to are functional.

In article 38(1) every Ugandan has the right to participate in the affairs of the state of government, individually or through his or her representatives in accordance with law, while 38(2) observes that every Ugandan has a right to participate in peaceful activities to influence the policies of government through civic organisations and therefore the Parliamentary Performance Scorecard on which this study is anchored is one of the attempts to operationalize these civic rights observed by the national constitution. Through engagement by use of tools like the parliamentary scorecard, citizens participation in democratic processes is enhanced hence leading to stronger democracy.

The mandate of elected leaders and monitoring their actions by citizens is conducted in the spirit of the age-old Social Contract theory advanced by Jean Claude Rosseau (1762) in the advent of democratic principles. Contemporary scholars D'Agustino (1996), Muldoon, Ryan (2017), Dubnick, M, J. and George, H. (2015) and Thrasher (2015) among others, have reviewed the Social Contract theory maintaining its key assertion that occupiers of elective office are subject to scrutiny by voters who determine whether or not their leadership is legitimate and worthy of



loyalty. This study therefore is founded in the universal principle of accountable governance (Dubnick, M, J. and George, H. 2015), the 1995 Constitution of the Republic of Uganda and the Social Contract theory (Jean Claude Rosseau 1762; D'Agostino, F. 1996, Muldoon, R. 2017), Dubnick, M, J. and George, H. 2015; Thrasher, J. 2015) that consign the public to hold political leaders to account, focusing on the promises that informed their election to political office, also known as the citizens' manifesto (UGMP 2016).

Additionally, the Parliamentary Performance scorecard produced by AFLI and which is mentioned in this study has the contribution of Parliament as an institution which is a critical institution to achievement of Sustainable Development Goals specified in global agenda and National Development Plan 111 of Uganda. It is also critical for achievement of citizens aspirations based on the promises that informed their election to political office, also known as the citizens' manifesto (UGMP 2016).

The role of the Parliament of the Republic of Uganda is enshrined in Article 77 of the 1995 Constitution (as amended) that specifies its primary functions as Legislative, Representative and Oversight and but citizens ought to exercise their right under Article 38(2)3 of the 1995 to participate in peaceful activities to influence policies of Government through their civic organizations and associations and the Access to information Act becomes the one of the enablers of this right.

## **2.2. Legality of consultation by Members of Parliament in a democracy**

In the ruling of constitutional court petition No. 49/2017 (Age limit petition) in Uganda, one of the grounds on which part of the law was nullified was that there was no consultation and participation of the common man. The court decreed that "... consultation and public participation is a mandatory requirement of all legislative process especially if a constitution is concerned..." The court went further to define what consultation and participation means in this context. Having discussion, meetings and constructive talks as process of sharing information in a free environment". Therefore, Participation as is looked at as a process of involvements, contributing and having input of the most ordinary voter. By this ruling, in representative democracy leaders are obligated to be transparent in execution of their mandate while giving feedback to the voters which is the bedrock upon which this study is anchored.



### **3.0. STUDY SCOPE, METHODOLOGY AND LIMITATIONS**

#### **3.1. Scope**

44(Male and female) constituency researchers were recruited through a competitive process and trained on understanding the mandate of MPs, the Parliamentary Performance Scorecard, the political context, the research tools and how to administer them as well as research ethics and presentation of reports. Data was collected from 417 constituencies throughout Uganda and data collected focused on directly elected MPs and District Women Representatives (DWR).

#### **3.2. Methodology.**

A combination of closed ended and open-ended questionnaires were used although most of the questions were closed ended. Each researcher administered ten questionnaires for each constituency and respondents were picked randomly from various areas in the constituency. The sample size of the citizens interviewed was therefore 4,170 interviewees. The collected data was there after cleaned, and processed by the data team at Africa leadership institute (AFLI).

Following the data cleaning, 3,932 responses were captured and analysed in excel and findings presented in pie chart form as it will be presented in the next chapter.

#### **3.3. Limitations**

One of the limitations was the resource constrain which led to the limiting of respondents to only ten per constituency, and researchers spending only one day in each constituency. Secondly, the resource constraints limited the lead investigators' ability to conduct field supervision which was only limited to two districts. Lastly, the Corona Virus Disease and the Standard Operating Procedures on public transport largely increased transport costs which affected the initial planning of the exercise and also caused delays in training, field research and report writing. The challenge of resource constrain was overcome by making budget adjustments . However, in the future, some of these challenges may be overcome by conducting research electronically.

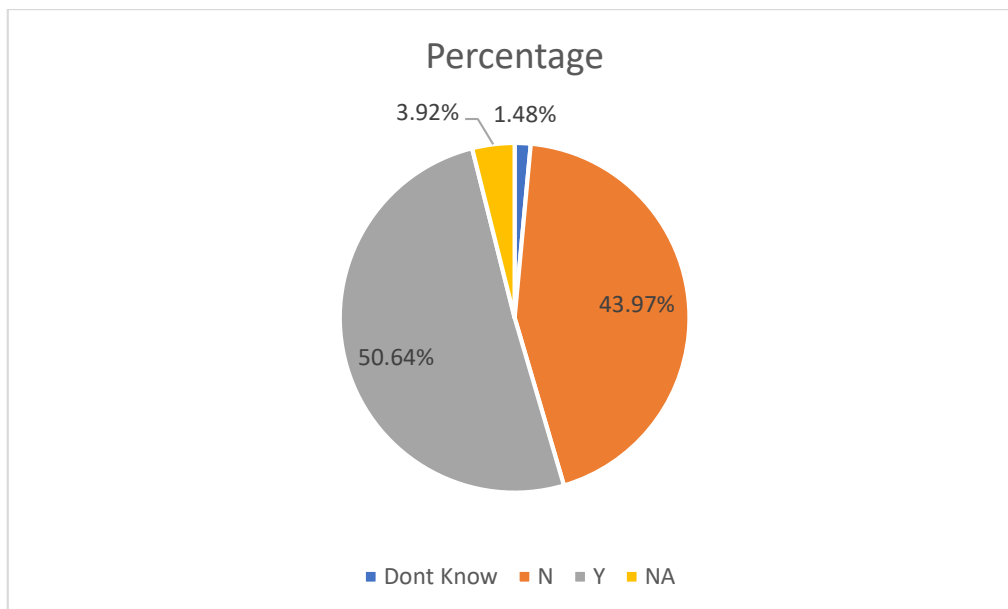
## 4.0. PRESENTATION, INTERPRETATION AND DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

This chapter presents findings on research questions that guided this study. The findings are presented in pie chart form in the most simplified manner for easy of understanding.

### 4.1. Whether MPs consult on Bills in parliament

The finding on this question is presented in the pie chart below:

**Figure 1:** *Whether MPs consult on bills*



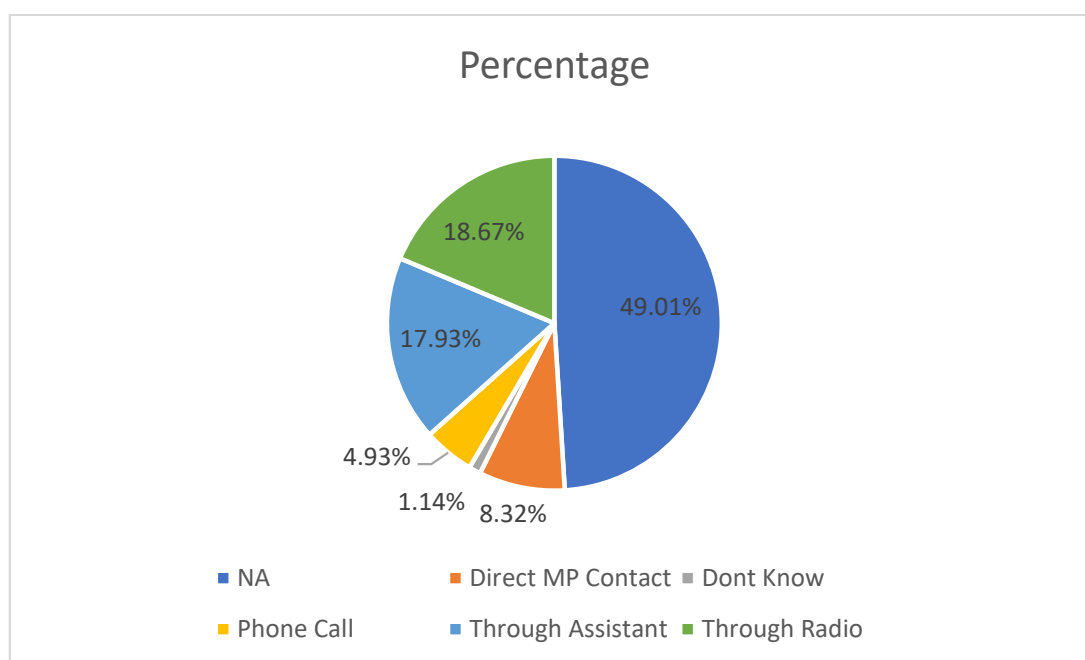
When asked whether their MPs consulted on bills, 3.92% of the respondents did not respond, 1.48% stated that they did not know, 43.97% stated that MPs don't consult while 50% stated that MPs consulted them. Although 50% were consulted, there still exist a big gap where 50% of the citizens are not consulted and therefore are left unaware on the laws to be enacted and decisions of parliament taken and yet they affect them which weakens Uganda's democracy.

### 4.2. To find out what channels members of parliament (MPs) use to consult or give feedback to citizens /voters.

On this issue, 49.01% of respondents did not respond, 8.32% said MPs consulted them directly through meetings or individually, 1.14% did not know while 4.93% stated that they had con-

sultations by telephone. 17.93% stated that they engaged with MPs through Political Assistants (PAs) while 18.67% said that they heard from their MPs through radio. This implies that radio remains the most effective way of reaching out to voters by MPs and therefore investment in radioprograms for engagement with citizens may be prioritized. It further implies that existence of MPs' Political Assistants in constituencies is critical for MPs citizens interaction. The findings are graphically illustrated below:

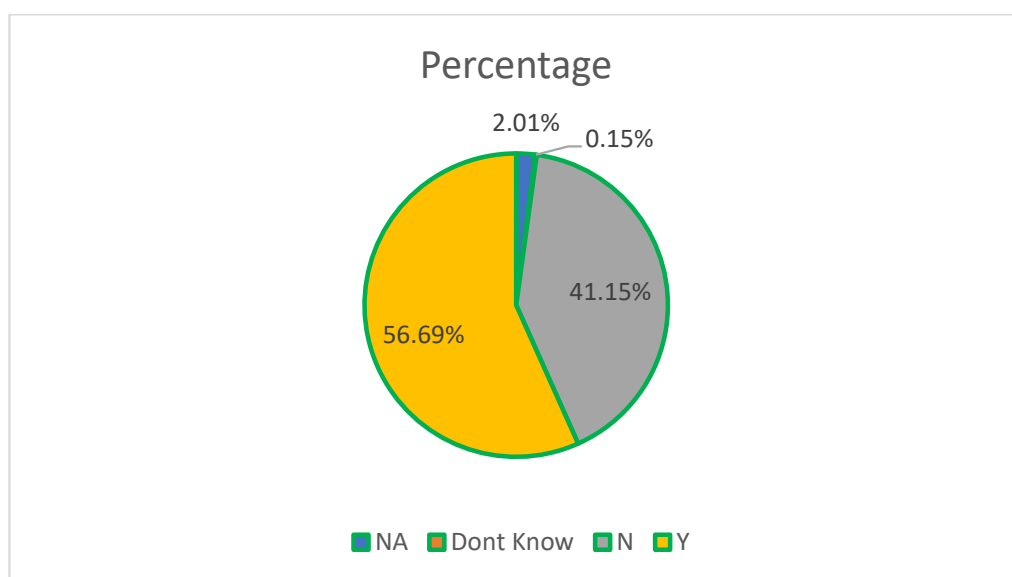
**Figure 2:** *MPs engagement channels with constituents.*



#### **4.3. Whether citizens have heard of, or seen the parliamentary performance scorecard**

Constituents were asked whether they have ever heard of or seen the Parliamentary Performance Scorecard and through what channels. 56.69% of respondents confirmed to have seen or heard about the Parliamentary Performance Scorecard, 2.01% did not answer, while 0.15% did not know. 41.15% had never heard about or seen the Parliamentary Scorecard. This is presented in the pie chart below:

**Figure 3:** *Percentage of citizens who have seen or heard about the Parliamentary Scorecard.*

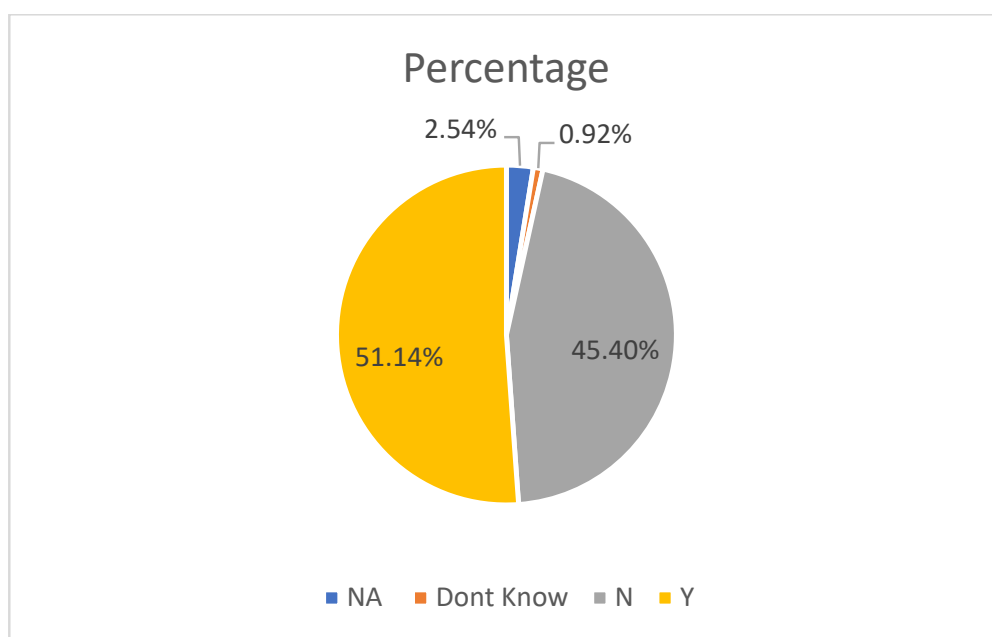


The 56.69% majority of respondents who have seen or heard about the scorecard implies that AFLI has invested in effective channels of engagement that should be sustained since this was achieved only after dissemination of one 3rd session scorecard. On the other hand, there is 41.15% who have never heard about or seen the scorecard, it implies that whereas as dissemination channels appear effective, there is need for more innovation in engagement to reach out to the unreached, and the need by AFLI to regularly release more scorecards to reach out to that fraction of the population.

#### **4.4. Whether citizens have heard or seen their members of parliament (MPs) conduct oversight over government programs.**

The findings on this issue are presented below:

**Figure 4:** *Whether Citizens have heard about or seen their MPs conduct oversight in constituencies.*

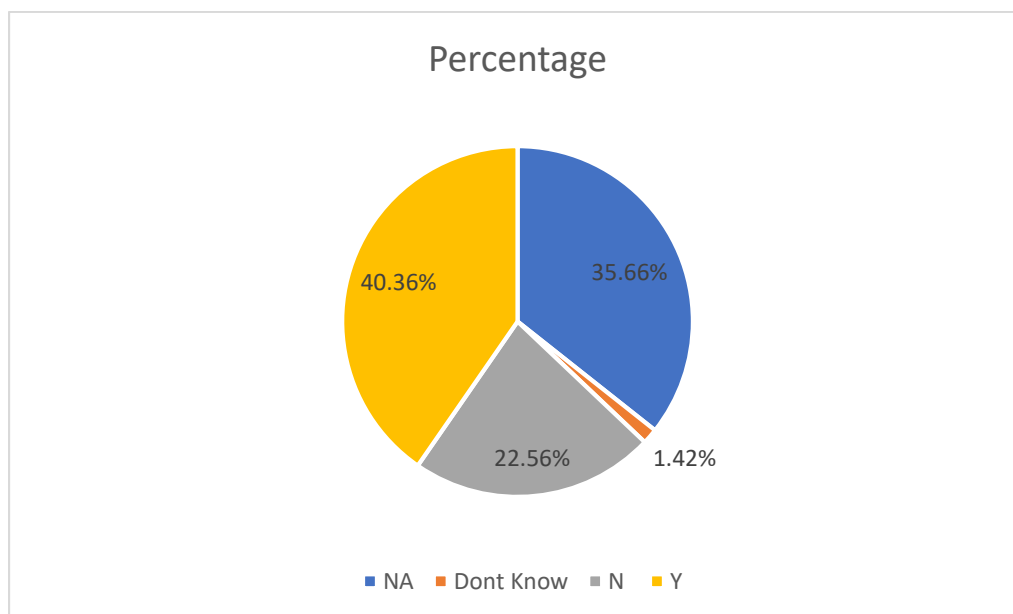


From the pie chart, 2.54% did not respond, 0.92% did not know, 45.40% did not see or hear about MPs doing oversight in the constituency, while 51.14% saw or heard about the MPs' oversight activities during the period. The finding implies that MPs do conduct oversight visits and a slight majority of constituents are aware. There is however need to bring more citizens on board by raising awareness about roles and responsibilities of MPs and enhance their ability to monitor MPs in execution of their mandate in constituencies.

#### **4.5. Whether the scorecard was used during internal party elections and how the scorecard was used**

On this issue, 35.66% did not respond, 1.42% did not know whether it was used in elections while 22.56% said it was not used. 40.36% answered that the scorecard was used by various players in internal party elections. This shows that whereas a significant proportion of the population used the scorecard as an accountability tool there is need to increase its usage in order to realise its full impact. This is illustrated below:

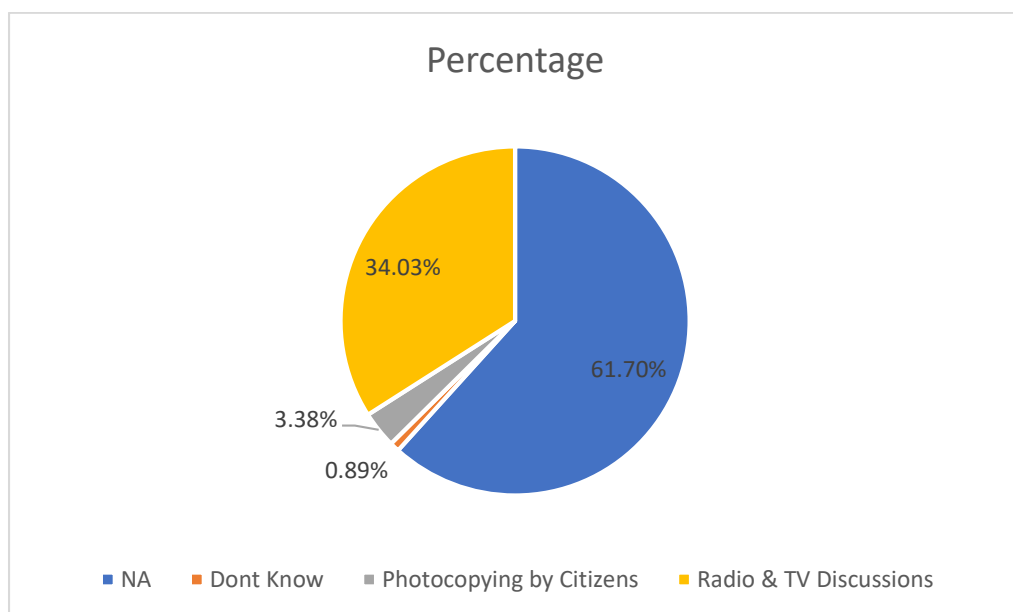
**Figure 5:** *Whether the Scorecard was used in internal party elections*



#### 4.5.1. How the scorecard was used during the internal party elections

On how the scorecard was used, 61.70% did not answer, 0.89% did not know how it was used while 3.38% said it was photocopied by citizens and copies shared. 34.03% said the scorecard was used on radio and television discussions. This implies that radio and television were the most effective platforms for dissemination of the scorecard. There is however need to increase engagement to bring the greater majority on board. The findings are presented graphically below:

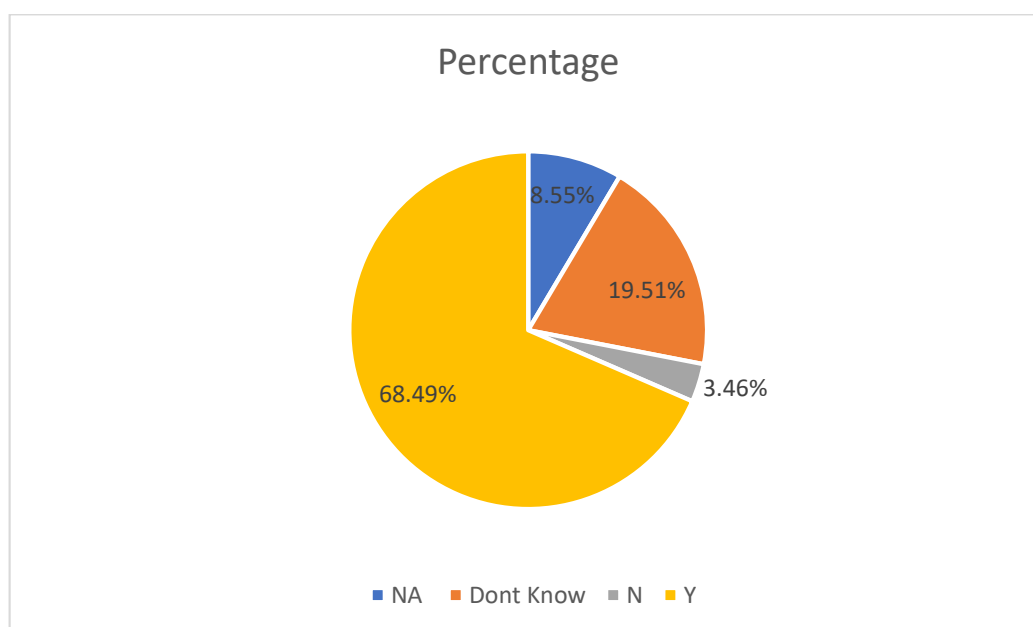
**Figure 6:** *How the scorecard was used during the internal party elections*



#### **4.6. Whether citizens consider the parliamentary performance scorecard relevant in evaluating the performance of MPs**

On relevance of the scorecard as a good parliament evaluation tool, 68.49% of respondents answered to the affirmative (Yes), 8.55% did not respond, 3.46% said it's not relevant while 19.51% did not know. The large majority who answered yes implies that citizens appreciate the scorecard as a governance monitoring tool relevant to empowering them to hold MPs accountable.

**Figure 7:** *Relevance of the Parliamentary Scorecard.*





## 5.0. Conclusion and recommendations

The study was quite informative whose major objective was to find out the level of citizens engagements with MPs on the issues pertaining to execution of their constitutional mandate. The findings were intended to guide design of appropriate strategies for AFLI's intervention through the Parliamentary Performance Scorecard Project which is aimed at realising active and informed citizenry and accountable and responsive leadership. Generally, findings revealed that AFLI is on course to achieve the intended purpose of the project.

The following recommendations are made:

- Design strategies for increasing radio and Television presence in dissemination programs of the Parliamentary scorecards since it was found to be the most used by citizens in accessing the scorecard. This however should be complimented with other channels such as internet-based channels and print media.
- Refine the scorecard methodology/assessment criteria to ensure that the scorecard is relevant to the 30% who do not see its relevancy.
- Embed civic education on roles and responsibilities of MPs in the Parliamentary Scorecard Project to make citizens appreciate the scorecard more and lastly,
- Raise funding to continue producing more scorecards and also invest in more studies to anchor the scorecard to the ever-changing context.

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