

## Bridging the Gap between Citizen Expectations and Lawmakers' Performance

### Policy Issue

Citizens worldwide are dissatisfied with their lawmakers' performance, often eroding trust in government institutions and fostering democratic backsliding. However, citizens often misunderstand parliamentarians' roles and capacity, making demands that parliamentarians are neither tasked with nor capable of fulfilling. Democracy promotion initiatives need to focus more on the disconnect between citizen expectations and the lawmakers' capacity, going beyond conventional civic education campaigns to boost voter turnout or [parliamentary strengthening](#).

### The Context

Malawi has had free and contested elections since 1993. Malawians go to the polls in large numbers but are largely disappointed in the result. According to the recent [Afrobarometer survey](#), 61% of Malawians disapprove of the performance of their lawmakers; 36% think that most of them are involved in corruption. More than half of respondents indicate that parliamentarians never listen to their demands, while 80% think they need to do more to listen to the people and fulfill their expectations.

Missing in this analysis is the view of parliamentarians, particularly regarding the constraints they face as they navigate their work. In 2022, GLD surveyed 137 Malawian Members of Parliament (MPs) to gain insight into how they experience the electoral and policymaking process. The survey asked about the importance of different types of support, regional and party alliances,

the decision to run for office, and their campaign and policymaking challenges. In contrast to most surveys, which feature the voters' perspectives, this survey highlights the lawmakers' experiences.

### The Expectation-Capacity Disconnect: The Parliamentarians' Perspective

MPs, like citizens, indicate a disconnect with their constituents. While citizens complain that their MPs fail to listen to them, MPs argue their constituents do not understand MPs' roles and responsibilities. They believe constituents have unrealistic expectations and make demands beyond the MPs' purview. In addition, MPs do not have sufficient funds and resources to meet demands, even those within their mandates. When asked, "What are the biggest obstacles you face doing the work of a Parliamentarian?" 56% of those surveyed answered "too many public demands," while 62% answered "inadequate funds for constituency projects."

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**56%**

Of those surveyed answered "too many public demands."

**62%**

Of those surveyed answered "inadequate funds for constituency projects."



## About GLD

The Governance and Local Development Institute (GLD) is a research institute based at the University of Gothenburg, originally founded in 2013 at Yale University by Professor Ellen Lust. GLD focuses on the local factors driving governance and development. The institute is dedicated to international collaboration and scientifically rigorous, policy-relevant research in an effort to promote human welfare globally. Findings are made available to the international and domestic communities through academic publications, policy briefs, public presentations, and social media, as well as on-the-ground workshops in cooperation with local partners.



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## Contact

Department of Political Science,  
University of Gothenburg  
Box 711, 405 30 Gothenburg, Sweden  
Visiting address: Sprängkullsgatan 19,  
Gothenburg  
contact@gld.gu.se

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