



# Malawians support a strong Parliament despite disappointment with representatives

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## Afrobarometer Dispatch No. 2 | Joseph J. Chunga

### Summary

Malawians value Parliament's legislative and oversight role but are highly critical of the performance of parliamentarians, according to the latest Afrobarometer survey.

Most citizens disapprove of how their Members of Parliament (MPs) have been doing their work and believe that their MPs do not listen to them. A significant proportion of MPs are perceived to be corrupt, and public trust in the National Assembly as an institution has waned.

Malawians assert that it is the responsibility of voters to make sure that elected officials, including their MPs, do the work they are elected for, although they are divided as to whether elections enable them to fire non-performers.

The findings clearly show that Malawians strongly support the institution of Parliament in the country's political set-up but are calling on their MPs to serve them better.

### The survey

As part of its series of surveys on democracy and governance in 35 African countries, Afrobarometer conducted face-to-face interviews with 2,400 adult Malawians in March and April 2014. The sample, selected to represent all citizens of voting age, yields a margin of sampling error of +/-2% at a 95% confidence level. Previous Afrobarometer surveys have been conducted in Malawi in 1999, 2003, 2005, 2008, and 2012.

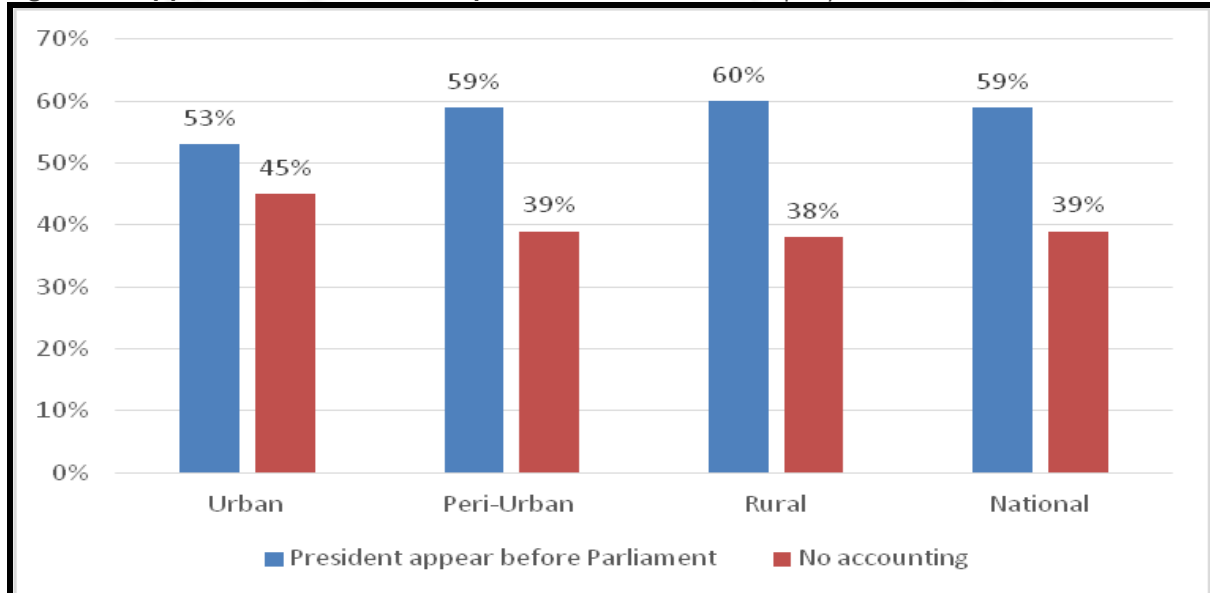
### Key findings

- Support for parliamentary powers is strong: More than eight in 10 Malawians (84%) want Parliament to vet the president's Cabinet appointments. About 60% say the president should regularly appear before Parliament to explain his actions. And three-fourths (73%) say Parliament should have the power to make laws even if they go against the wishes of the president.
- Approval ratings of MPs are low. Only three of 10 Malawians approve of the way their MPs perform their duties. Only 15% had contact with their MPs in the previous year to share their views or register some important problem. A majority (60%) feels that MPs never listen to what ordinary people have to say.
- Three-quarters of Malawians (74%) say at least some parliamentarians are involved in corruption. Only half of Malawians trust the National Assembly, compared to 64% who trusted it in 2012. About half (48%) say that elections afford them a chance to punish officials who do not deliver on what the people want.

### Malawians support a strong Parliament

A majority (60%) of Malawians expect the president to regularly appear and account for his actions before Parliament. This sentiment is stronger in rural areas than in urban areas (Figure 1).

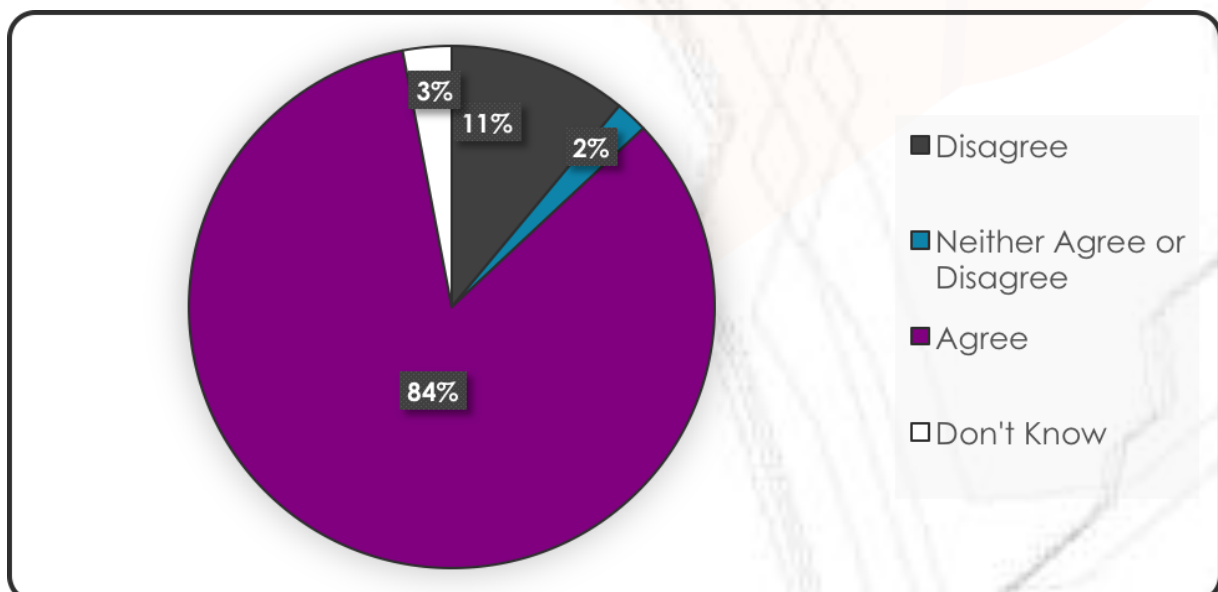
**Figure 1: Support for MPs to hold the president accountable | by residence**



**Participants were asked:** Which of the following statements is closest to your view? "Parliament should ensure that the president explains to it on a regular basis how her government spends taxpayers' money" or "The President should be able to devote her full attention to developing the country rather than wasting time justifying her actions."

Malawians want Parliament to play a role in the appointment of Cabinet ministers. An overwhelming majority (84%) says Parliament should have the power to "scrutinize all presidential nominees for Cabinet appointment and reject those deemed to be unqualified" (Figure 2).

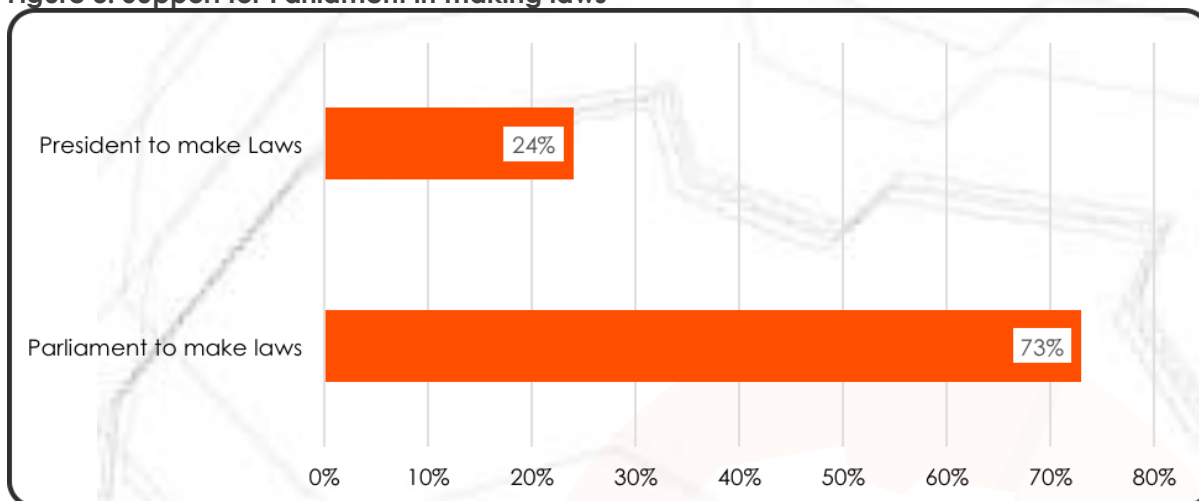
**Figure 2: Support for Parliament vetting of Cabinet ministers**



**Participants were asked:** Please tell me whether you agree or disagree with the following statements ... "Parliament should scrutinize all presidential nominees for Cabinet appointment and reject those deemed to be unqualified."

Malawians oppose the executive taking over the legislative powers of Parliament. Almost three quarters (73%) of respondents want Parliament to make laws even if they go against the will of the president (Figure 3).

**Figure 3: Support for Parliament in making laws**

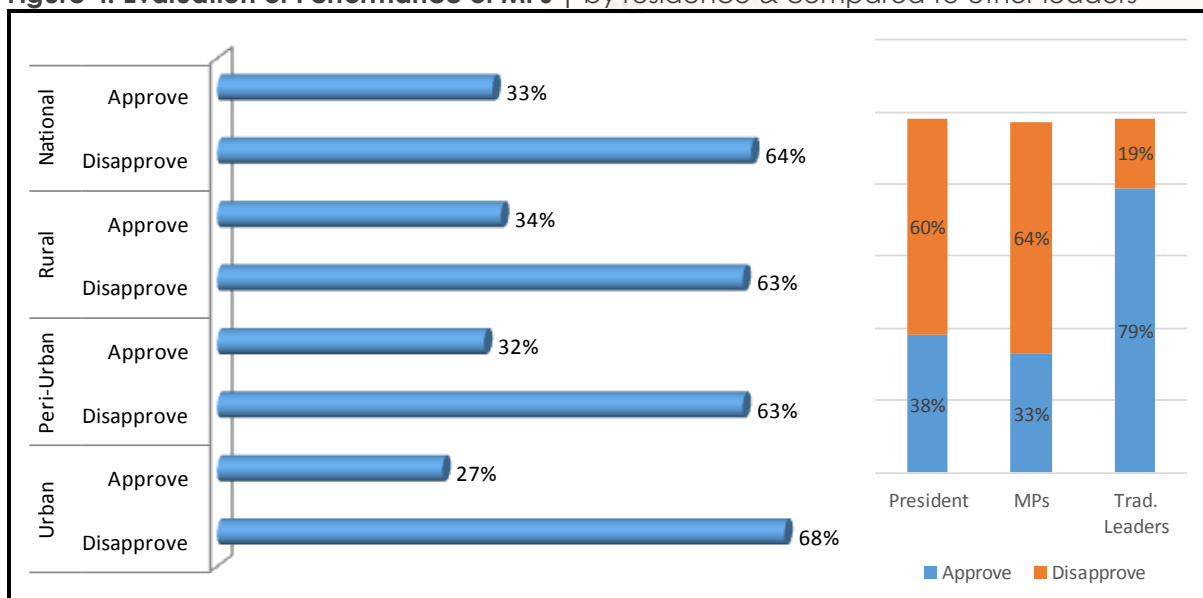


**Participants were asked:** Which of the following statements is closest to your view? "Members of Parliament represent the people; therefore they should make laws for this country, even if the president does not agree" or "Since the president represents all of us, she should pass laws without worrying about what Parliament thinks."

### Malawians critical of MP performance and responsiveness

Only one-third (33%) of Malawians are satisfied with the way their MPs perform their work. The approval rating is low regardless of whether the MP represents an urban or a rural area (Figure 4). Moreover, most of those expressing disapproval said they "strongly disapproved" of MP performance. Approval ratings were similarly low for the president (38%) but were much higher for traditional leaders (79%) (Figure 4).

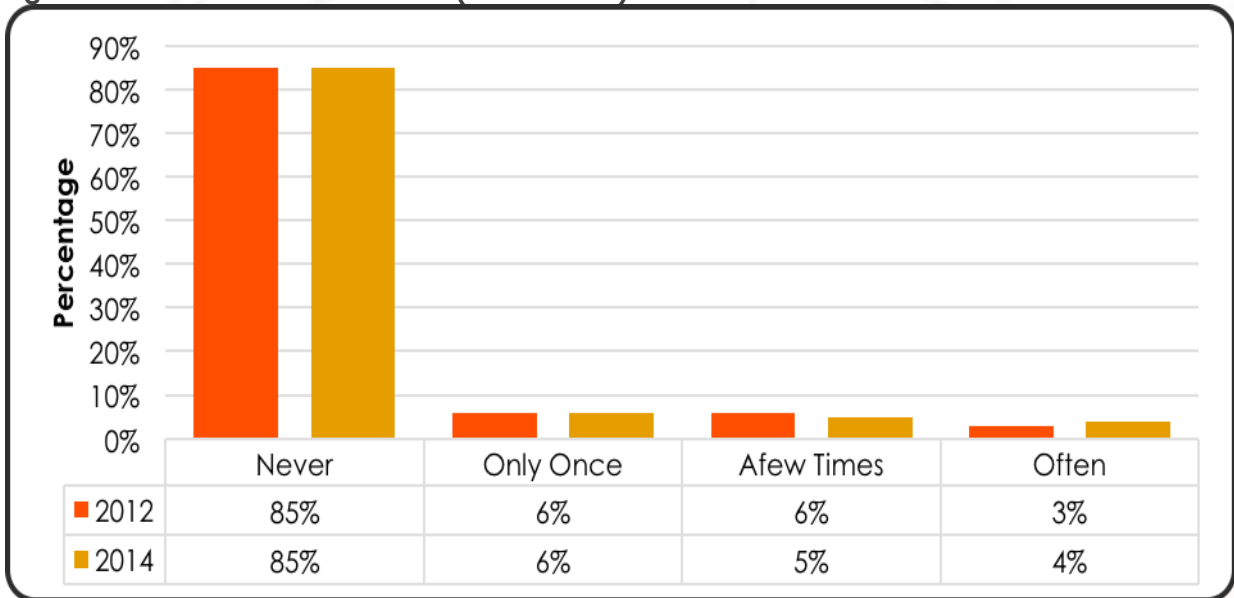
**Figure 4: Evaluation of Performance of MPs | by residence & compared to other leaders**



**Participants were asked:** Do you approve or disapprove of the way that the following people have performed their jobs over the past twelve months, or haven't you heard enough about them to say? A) President Joyce Banda, B) Your Member of Parliament, D) Your traditional leader

Malawians complain that their MPs seem to be missing in action over the inter-elections period. Just as during the 2012 Afrobarometer, only 15% of respondents in 2014 report having contact with their MPs during the previous year to tell them their views or seek a solution to some important problem.

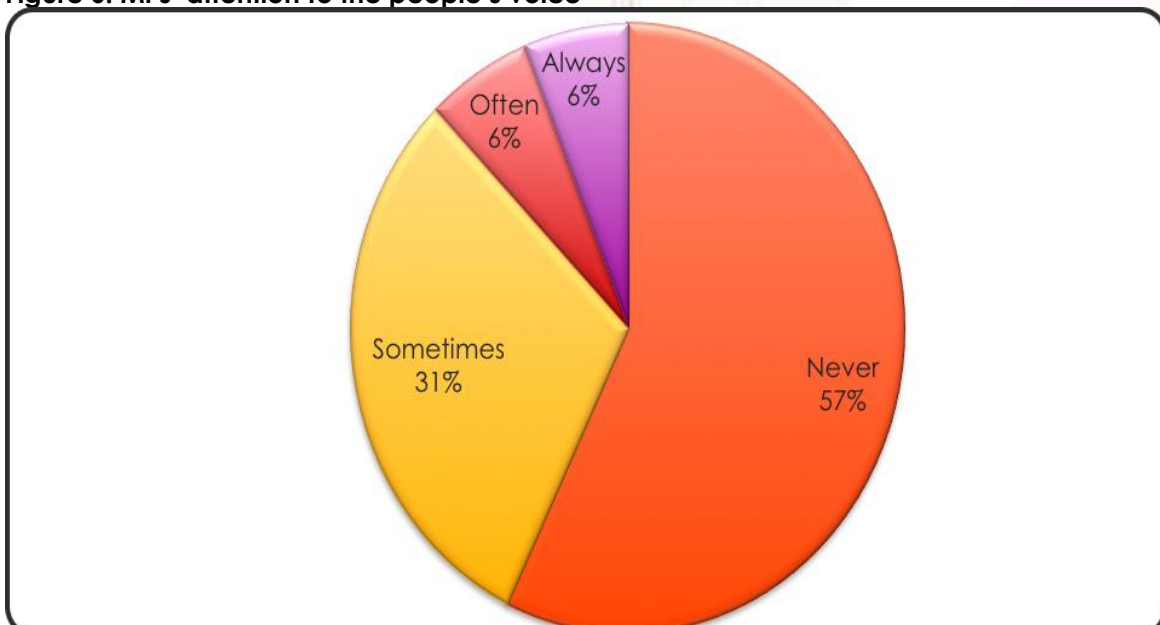
**Figure 5: Citizens Contact with MPs (2012 & 2014)**



**Participants were asked:** During the past year, how often have you contacted any of the following persons about some important problem or to give them your views...Member of Parliament?

In terms of being receptive to the people they represent, the conduct of MPs does not meet the expectation of their electorate. Three in five respondents say MPs never try to listen to their views (Figure 6).

**Figure 6: MPs' attention to the people's voice**

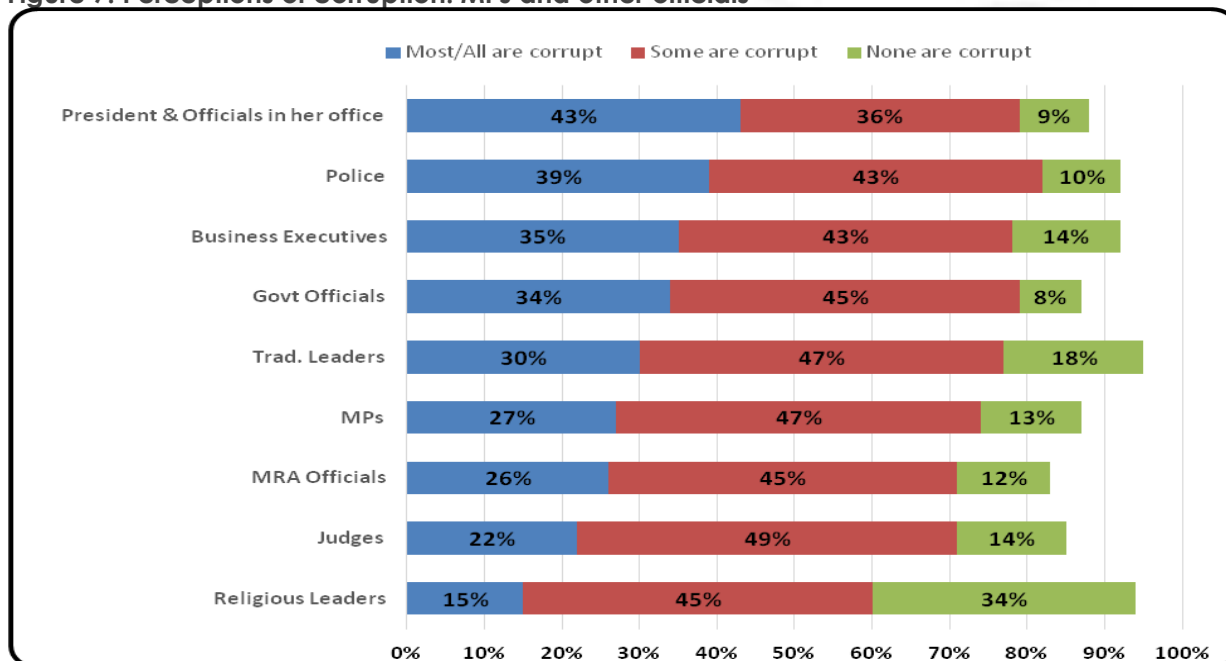


**Participants were asked:** How much of the time do you think the following try their best to listen to what people like you have to say... Members of Parliament?

**Malawians doubt the integrity of parliamentarians**

Generally Malawians perceive extensive corruption among MPs. Only 13% of respondents say “none” of the MPs are involved in corruption, while 27% believe that all most MPs are corrupt (Figure 7). Even so, MPs fared better than “the president officials in her office,” the police, “government officials,” and MRA officials in public perceptions of corruption.

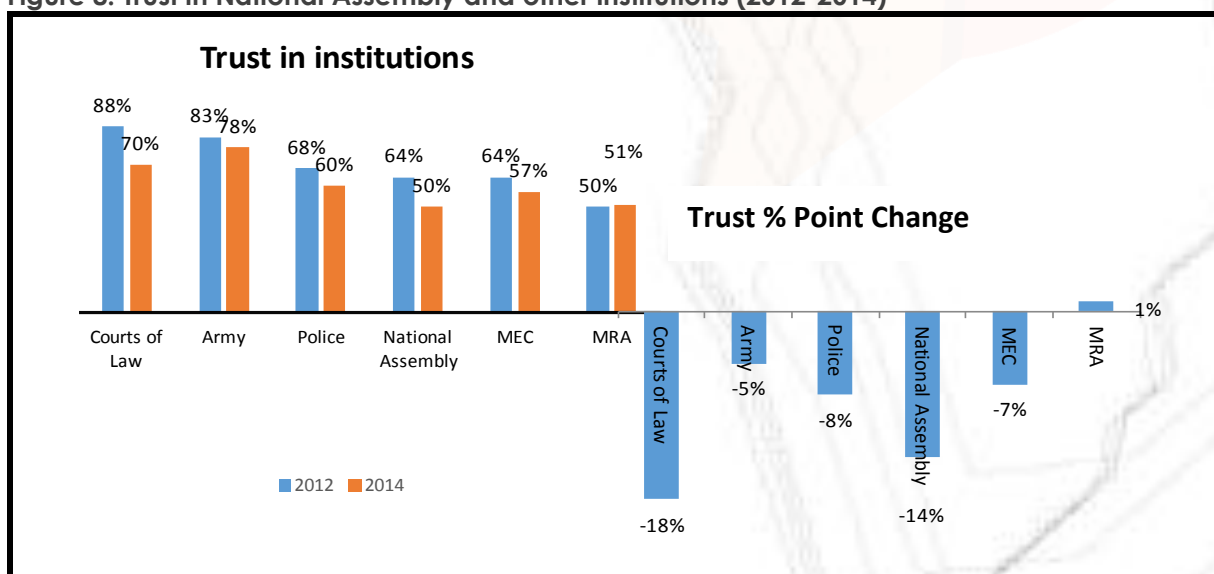
**Figure 7: Perceptions of corruption: MPs and other officials**



**Participants were asked:** How many of the following people do you think are involved in corruption, or haven't you heard enough about them to say?

Trust in the Malawi National Assembly has declined significantly over time. While 64% of respondents in 2012 said they trusted the National Assembly “a lot” or “somewhat,” only half hold this view in 2014 (Figure 7). This is part of a general decline in expressed trust, with trust also decreasing in courts of law, the police, the army, and the Malawi Electoral Commission (MEC), though not in the Malawi Revenue Authority.

**Figure 8: Trust in National Assembly and other institutions (2012-2014)**

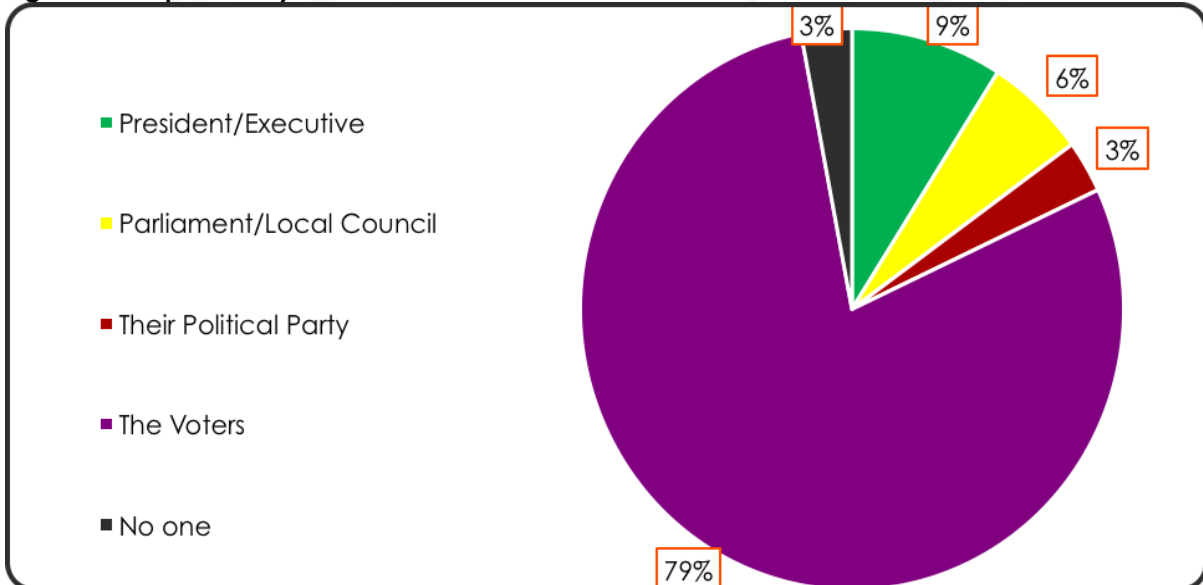


**Respondents were asked:** “How much do you trust each of the following, or haven't you heard enough about them to say?” The figure shows percentages of those who said “somewhat” or “a lot.”

**Voters' role in holding officials accountable**

Eight of ten Malawians (79%) hold that it is the responsibility of voters to make sure that MPs do their job once elected, compared to only 18% who believe this is the responsibility of local councils, political parties, or the president (Figure 8).

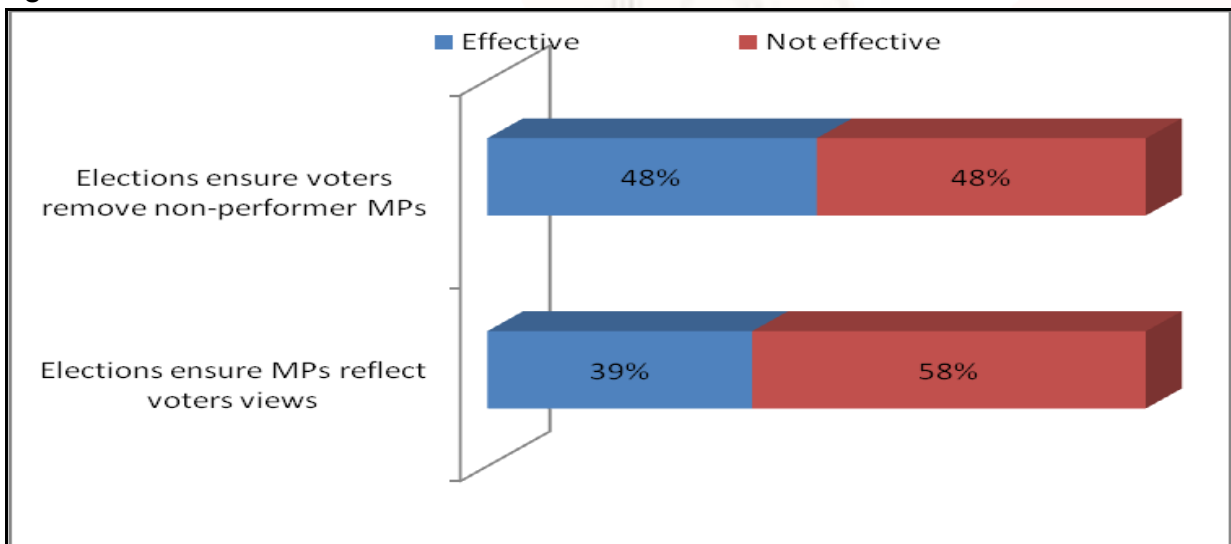
**Figure 9: Responsibility to ensure that MPs do their work**



**Participants were asked:** Who should be responsible for making sure that, once elected, Members of Parliament do their jobs?

However, elections do not manage to ensure that MPs reflect the views of the voters, according to 58% of respondents. Respondents are evenly divided as whether elections enable them to fire leaders who do not do what they want (Figure 9).

**Figure 10: Elections as a means to hold MPs accountable**



**Participants were asked:** Think about how elections work in practice in this country. How well do elections A) Enable voters to remove from office leaders who do not do what the people want? B) Ensure that Members of Parliament reflect the views of voters. (In this figure, "effective" represents those who said "very well" or "well," while "not effective" represents those who responded "not very well" or "not at all well.")

## **Afrobarometer**

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Afrobarometer is produced collaboratively by social scientists from more than 30 African countries. Coordination is provided by the Center for Democratic Development in Ghana, the Institute for Justice and Reconciliation in South Africa, the Institute for Development Studies at the University of Nairobi in Kenya, and the Institute for Empirical Research in Political Economy in Benin. Fieldwork in Malawi is conducted by the Centre for Social Research at the University of Malawi ([www.csr.unima.mw](http://www.csr.unima.mw)). We gratefully acknowledge generous support from the UK's Department for International Development (DfID), Mo Ibrahim Foundation, Swedish International Development Agency (SIDA), United States Agency for International Development (USAID), and the World Bank. Publications are the responsibility of Afrobarometer and do not necessarily reflect the views of donors. For more information, please visit [www.afrobarometer.org](http://www.afrobarometer.org).

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