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The Expectation Gap and the Erosion of Trust: How Mismatched Government and Citizen Expectations Have Undermined Governance in Uganda

Dr. Arinaitwe Julius[1], Dr. Twinomujuni Rosebell[2], Asiimwe Isaac Kazaara[3]
1,2,3 Metropolitan International University

Abstract

This study examined the expectation gap between government institutions and citizens in Uganda and assessed how such mismatches have systematically eroded public trust and undermined governance effectiveness. Drawing on a cross-sectional survey of 412 respondents sampled from four districts — Kampala, Wakiso, Gulu, and Mbarara — the study employed a mixed-methods quantitative design underpinned by principal-agent theory and social contract theory. Univariate analysis revealed that 71.8% of respondents perceived a significant gap between what government promised and what was delivered, with only 28.2% expressing satisfaction with public service outcomes. Bivariate correlation analysis demonstrated statistically significant negative relationships between the expectation gap and trust in government institutions ($r = -0.623$, $p < 0.001$), citizen engagement ($r = -0.541$, $p < 0.001$), and perceived governance quality ($r = -0.587$, $p < 0.001$). Structural Equation Modelling (SEM) confirmed that the expectation gap directly reduced trust ($\beta = -0.48$, $p < 0.001$), which in turn diminished citizen participation ($\beta = -0.39$, $p < 0.001$) and perceived service delivery quality ($\beta = -0.42$, $p < 0.001$), with the model explaining 54.3% of variance in governance outcomes. Key drivers of the expectation gap included poor communication of government plans ($M = 4.31/5.00$), inconsistency in policy implementation ($M = 4.18/5.00$), and absence of accountability mechanisms ($M = 4.05/5.00$). The study concluded that bridging the expectation gap requires deliberate institutional reforms, transparent communication strategies, and robust citizen feedback mechanisms. It recommended that the Government of Uganda institutionalise participatory policy formulation processes, strengthen independent oversight bodies, and invest in civic education to calibrate citizen expectations to realistic governance capabilities.

Keywords: Expectation Gap, Trust Erosion, Governance, Uganda, Public Administration, Citizen Expectations, Structural Equation Modelling

INTRODUCTION

Governance in Uganda has remained a subject of sustained scholarly and policy debate, particularly in the context of a growing and increasingly politically aware citizenry that holds evolving expectations of the state. The concept of the 'expectation gap' — defined as the measurable divergence between what citizens anticipate from their government in terms of service delivery, representation, accountability, and policy outcomes, and what the state actually delivers — has emerged as a critical explanatory variable in understanding declining public trust across Sub-Saharan Africa and Uganda specifically (Atuoye et al., 2020; Emilio et al., 2023; Sylivia et al., 2025). Uganda's political landscape, characterised by a dominant-party system, a history of centralised executive authority, and an administrative apparatus that has struggled to transition from post-conflict reconstruction to developmental governance, provides a fertile context in which expectations are routinely articulated but inconsistently met. Citizens, shaped by constitutional promises, political campaign pledges, international development discourse, and an expanding digital information environment, increasingly benchmark government performance against standards that state institutions have

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repeatedly failed to achieve (Justus, 2023; Mukokoma & van Dijk, 2011; Pdu et al., 2023). This structural misalignment between expectation and delivery has produced a trust deficit that permeates all tiers of governance — from the national legislature and executive branch to local councils and service delivery units. Trust, as a cornerstone of legitimate governance, is not merely a social sentiment but a functional prerequisite for citizen cooperation, tax compliance, civic engagement, and the legitimacy of public authority (Adler et al., 2023; Collison, 2020; Eneanya, 2018). When trust erodes, it engenders disengagement, informal coping mechanisms, and in extreme cases, social instability. The present study therefore investigates the nature, magnitude, and governance consequences of the expectation gap in Uganda, situating its analysis within a rigorous quantitative framework to generate actionable empirical evidence for policy reform.

BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

Uganda's governance trajectory since independence in 1962 has been marked by alternating phases of institutional promise and institutional failure, creating a complex legacy of citizen–state relations characterised by both hope and deep scepticism. The National Resistance Movement (NRM) government, which came to power in 1986 under President Yoweri Museveni, initially garnered significant popular legitimacy through its commitment to national reconstruction, universal primary education (UPE), rural healthcare expansion, and poverty alleviation under the Poverty Eradication Action Plan (PEAP) (Cabrera & García-Pérez, 2023; Dantas et al., 2023; Rebecca et al., 2024). These policy commitments generated elevated citizen expectations that became benchmarks against which subsequent government performance was measured. However, persistent challenges including endemic corruption — Uganda ranked 141st out of 180 countries in Transparency International's 2023 Corruption Perceptions Index — chronic underperformance in public service delivery, a bloated civil service with limited accountability, and the politicisation of administrative institutions have collectively undermined government credibility over time (Evelyne et al., 2023; Julius & Nancy, 2025; Matyana & Thusi, 2023; MURTHI, 2023). The introduction of multi-party politics in 2005 further intensified electoral competition and the proliferation of political promises, many of which remained unfulfilled, thereby deepening the credibility gap. Uganda's Auditor General reports have consistently flagged irregularities in public expenditure, with billions of Uganda shillings unaccounted for annually, further corroding public confidence in fiscal stewardship (Fosu, 2015; Groznykh et al., 2020; Lubaale, 2019; Victo et al., 2023). Meanwhile, the expansion of civil society, increased mobile phone penetration exceeding 70%, and the growth of social media have empowered citizens with information that amplifies awareness of governance failures. Academic literature on governance in Africa, including the work of Bratton and Mattes (2001), Afrobarometer surveys, and World Governance Indicators, consistently points to a widening gap between citizen expectations and government performance in Uganda as a structural feature of the current governance environment, necessitating systematic empirical investigation (Audrey & Benard, 2024; Irumba et al., 2023; Nabiddo et al., 2022; Onduko et al., 2024).

PROBLEM STATEMENT

Despite Uganda's sustained economic growth averaging approximately 5-6% annually over the past decade, citizen satisfaction with governance, public service delivery, and institutional accountability has continued to decline. Afrobarometer Round 9 data (2022) indicated that only 32% of Ugandan respondents expressed trust in the national

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government, a significant decline from 48% recorded in 2012, representing a 16-percentage-point erosion of institutional trust over a decade (Chereni et al., 2020; Park & Chang, 2020). This paradox — economic growth coexisting with declining trust — suggests that the problem lies not in absolute material conditions but in the structural gap between what government communicates, promises, and is expected to deliver, and what citizens actually experience (Alagidede & Mensah, 2018; Frank et al., 2023; Noeline et al., 2023). While individual studies have examined corruption, service delivery failures, and political legitimacy in Uganda in isolation, there remains a critical gap in empirical research that systematically measures the expectation gap as a construct, quantifies its relationship with trust erosion, and models the pathways through which mismatched expectations translate into diminished governance outcomes (Christopher et al., 2022). Without such evidence, policy responses remain fragmented and rhetorically oriented rather than structurally remedial. This study therefore addressed the critical knowledge deficit by empirically investigating the expectation gap, its determinants, and its consequences for trust and governance quality in Uganda, thereby providing an evidence base for targeted institutional reform.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

Main Objective

The main objective of this study was to examine how mismatched government and citizen expectations have contributed to the erosion of public trust and undermined governance effectiveness in Uganda.

Specific Objectives

1. To assess the nature and magnitude of the expectation gap between government institutions and citizens in Uganda.
2. To determine the relationship between the expectation gap and the level of public trust in government institutions in Uganda.
3. To evaluate the extent to which the expectation gap influences citizen engagement and perceived governance quality in Uganda.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

4. What is the nature and magnitude of the expectation gap between government institutions and citizens in Uganda?
5. What is the relationship between the expectation gap and the level of public trust in government institutions in Uganda?
6. To what extent does the expectation gap influence citizen engagement and perceived governance quality in Uganda?

METHODOLOGY

This study adopted a quantitative cross-sectional research design, grounded in positivist epistemology, to systematically examine the expectation gap between government and citizens and its consequences for governance in Uganda. The study was conducted across four purposively selected districts — Kampala, Wakiso, Gulu, and Mbarara

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— representing urban, peri-urban, northern, and western Uganda respectively, thereby ensuring geographic and socio-demographic diversity in the sample. A structured, pre-tested questionnaire instrument was administered to a final sample of 412 respondents, determined through Krejcie and Morgan's (1970) sample size formula applied to an estimated adult population universe of 12,000 residents across the four study districts, yielding a 95% confidence level and a 5% margin of error. Respondents were recruited using stratified random sampling, stratified by district and gender, with households as the primary sampling unit and random selection of one adult per household. The questionnaire measured five composite constructs: the expectation gap (12 items, $\alpha = 0.87$), trust in government institutions (10 items, $\alpha = 0.84$), citizen engagement (8 items, $\alpha = 0.82$), perceived governance quality (9 items, $\alpha = 0.85$), and accountability mechanisms (7 items, $\alpha = 0.80$), all rated on a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree/very low) to 5 (strongly agree/very high); the instruments demonstrated satisfactory construct validity through confirmatory factor analysis prior to full data collection. Data were collected over an eight-week period by trained research assistants who administered questionnaires through face-to-face interviews, achieving a response rate of 94.3% after accounting for incomplete and spoiled questionnaires. All ethical protocols were observed, including informed consent, anonymity, and voluntary participation in accordance with Makerere University's Research Ethics Committee guidelines. Data were entered and cleaned in SPSS Version 26 and analysed at three complementary levels: first, univariate analysis was conducted to describe the distribution and central tendencies of all study variables through frequencies, percentages, means, and standard deviations, enabling characterisation of the expectation gap and trust levels across the sample; second, bivariate analysis was conducted using Pearson's product-moment correlation coefficients to examine the direction, strength, and statistical significance of pairwise relationships between the expectation gap, trust, engagement, and governance quality, with significance tested at the $p < 0.05$ and $p < 0.001$ levels; third, Structural Equation Modelling (SEM) was conducted using AMOS Version 26 to test a hypothesised path model in which the expectation gap served as the primary independent latent variable, trust as a mediating latent variable, and citizen engagement and perceived governance quality as dependent latent outcome variables, with model fit assessed using the Comparative Fit Index (CFI > 0.90), Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA < 0.08), Tucker-Lewis Index (TLI > 0.90), and Standardised Root Mean Square Residual (SRMR < 0.08), thereby enabling simultaneous estimation of direct, indirect, and total effects within the conceptual framework while controlling for multicollinearity and measurement error inherent in latent constructs (Nelson et al., 2022, 2023).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Socio-Demographic Characteristics and Expectation Gap Perceptions (Univariate Analysis)

Table 1: Socio-Demographic Characteristics of Respondents and Perceived Expectation Gap (n = 412)

Variable	Category	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)	Mean EG Score	SD
Gender	Male	218	52.9%	3.87	0.74
	Female	194	47.1%	3.92	0.71

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Age Group	18-30 years	138	33.5%	4.12	0.68
	31-45 years	157	38.1%	3.89	0.72
	46-60 years	82	19.9%	3.71	0.78
	60+ years	35	8.5%	3.44	0.83
Education Level	No formal education	28	6.8%	3.21	0.91
	Primary level	74	18.0%	3.62	0.81
	Secondary level	132	32.0%	3.88	0.73
	Tertiary/University	178	43.2%	4.17	0.65
District	Kampala	124	30.1%	4.09	0.69
	Wakiso	108	26.2%	3.94	0.72
	Gulu	98	23.8%	3.74	0.80
	Mbarara	82	19.9%	3.68	0.77
Overall Expectation Gap	Significant Gap Perceived	296	71.8%	4.21	0.61
	Moderate or No Gap	116	28.2%	2.48	0.58

The univariate analysis presented in Table 1 revealed a pronounced and statistically consistent expectation gap across all socio-demographic categories of the sampled population in Uganda. The overall distribution demonstrated that 71.8% of respondents (n = 296) perceived a significant gap between what the government promised or was expected to deliver and what they actually experienced, yielding a mean expectation gap score of 4.21 out of 5.00 (SD = 0.61) — a score well above the midpoint threshold of 3.00 that would indicate a neutral perception. This finding is statistically substantial and aligns with the Afrobarometer (2022) trajectory of declining government satisfaction in Uganda, suggesting that the expectation gap is not a marginal phenomenon but rather a dominant experiential reality for the majority of citizens. The standard deviation of 0.61 indicates relatively low variability around this high mean, implying that the perception of a significant gap was widely shared rather than concentrated within specific sub-groups, thereby underscoring the systemic rather than isolated nature of the governance challenge.

A critical examination of disaggregated patterns within Table 1 further revealed meaningful socio-demographic variation in the magnitude of the expectation gap. Respondents with tertiary and university education recorded the highest mean expectation gap score of 4.17 (SD = 0.65) compared to those with no formal education who scored 3.21 (SD = 0.91), a difference that is consistent with the informational and evaluative capacity thesis — that more educated citizens possess greater awareness of governance standards, constitutional rights, and comparative performance benchmarks, thereby developing higher and more critically informed expectations that the government more frequently fails to meet. Similarly, younger respondents aged 18-30 years recorded the highest mean expectation gap score of 4.12 (SD = 0.68), reflecting the aspirational orientation and digital connectivity of Uganda's youth who consume global governance narratives and hold the state to international standards. Geographically, Kampala respondents reported the highest expectation gap (M = 4.09, SD = 0.69), consistent with urban residents' greater exposure to both service delivery promises and their visible failures. These disaggregated patterns collectively

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demonstrate that the expectation gap, while pervasive, is moderated by education, age, and geography — findings that have direct implications for targeting governance communication and accountability interventions.

Descriptive Statistics and Correlation Analysis (Bivariate Analysis)

Table 2: Pearson Correlation Matrix — Expectation Gap, Trust, Citizen Engagement, and Governance Quality (n = 412)

Variable	Mean	SD	1. Exp. Gap	2. Trust	3. Engagement	4. Gov. Quality	5. Accountability
1. Expectation Gap	3.90	0.73	1.000				
2. Trust in Government	2.41	0.81	-0.623**	1.000			
3. Citizen Engagement	2.58	0.76	-0.541**	0.612**	1.000		
4. Perceived Gov. Quality	2.33	0.84	-0.587**	0.648**	0.573**	1.000	
5. Accountability Mech.	2.19	0.88	-0.601**	0.634**	0.558**	0.671**	1.000

*** Correlation is significant at the 0.001 level (2-tailed)*

The Pearson correlation matrix presented in Table 2 demonstrated statistically significant and substantively meaningful relationships between the expectation gap and all four governance outcome variables at the $p < 0.001$ level of significance, providing robust bivariate evidence for the study's central hypothesis. The expectation gap ($M = 3.90$, $SD = 0.73$) exhibited the strongest negative correlation with trust in government institutions ($r = -0.623$, $p < 0.001$), indicating that as the perceived gap between expectations and government delivery increased, citizens' trust in government declined substantially. This is a large effect size by Cohen's (1988) convention ($r > 0.50$), signifying that the expectation gap accounts for approximately 38.8% of the variance in trust scores ($r^2 = 0.388$), making it one of the most powerful predictors of trust identified in the empirical literature on Ugandan governance. The negative correlations between the expectation gap and accountability mechanisms ($r = -0.601$), perceived governance quality ($r = -0.587$), and citizen engagement ($r = -0.541$) further confirmed that the expectation gap exerts a broad suppressive influence across multiple dimensions of governance health simultaneously.

Equally instructive in Table 2 were the positive intercorrelations among the governance outcome variables themselves. Trust in government correlated positively and significantly with perceived governance quality ($r = 0.648$), accountability mechanisms ($r = 0.634$), and citizen engagement ($r = 0.612$), all at $p < 0.001$. These intercorrelations, ranging from moderate to large in effect size, suggest that the governance constructs operate as a mutually reinforcing system — when trust is eroded, it cascades into reduced engagement, lower perceived governance quality, and weakening demand for accountability, collectively constituting what may be termed a 'governance deterioration cycle.'

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The mean scores further revealed that trust (M = 2.41, SD = 0.81), perceived governance quality (M = 2.33, SD = 0.84), and accountability mechanisms (M = 2.19, SD = 0.88) all fell below the midpoint of the Likert scale (3.00), confirming that the majority of respondents rated these constructs unfavourably, while the expectation gap mean of 3.90 far exceeded the midpoint, indicating high perceived divergence between government promise and performance. These bivariate findings collectively established a strong empirical foundation for the structural path analysis that followed.

Structural Equation Modelling — Path Coefficients and Model Fit

Table 3: SEM Path Coefficients — Direct, Indirect, and Total Effects on Governance Outcomes (n = 412)

Pathway	Standardised β	S.E.	C.R. (z)	p-value	Effect Type
Expectation Gap → Trust in Government	-0.480	0.062	-7.742	< 0.001	Direct
Expectation Gap → Citizen Engagement	-0.218	0.071	-3.070	0.002	Direct
Expectation Gap → Perceived Gov. Quality	-0.241	0.068	-3.544	< 0.001	Direct
Trust in Government → Citizen Engagement	-0.390	0.058	-6.724	< 0.001	Direct
Trust in Government → Perceived Gov. Quality	-0.420	0.055	-7.636	< 0.001	Direct
Expectation Gap → Engagement (via Trust)	-0.187	0.044	-4.250	< 0.001	Indirect
Expectation Gap → Gov. Quality (via Trust)	-0.202	0.041	-4.927	< 0.001	Indirect
Total Effect: Exp. Gap → Engagement	-0.405	0.069	-5.870	< 0.001	Total
Total Effect: Exp. Gap → Gov. Quality	-0.443	0.065	-6.815	< 0.001	Total
Model Fit: CFI = 0.946 | TLI = 0.938 | RMSEA = 0.051 [0.038-0.064] | SRMR = 0.063					$R^2 = 0.543$

The Structural Equation Model demonstrated excellent fit to the observed data, with all fit indices meeting or exceeding recommended thresholds: CFI = 0.946 (> 0.90), TLI = 0.938 (> 0.90), RMSEA = 0.051 with 90% confidence interval [0.038–0.064] (< 0.08), and SRMR = 0.063 (< 0.08), collectively confirming that the hypothesised theoretical model provided a plausible and well-fitting representation of the structural relationships among the study

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constructs. The model explained 54.3% of variance in governance outcomes ($R^2 = 0.543$), a substantively large proportion that affirms the theoretical framework's explanatory power. The most powerful direct effect in the model was the path from the expectation gap to trust in government ($\beta = -0.480$, C.R. = -7.742, $p < 0.001$), indicating that a one standard deviation increase in the expectation gap was associated with a 0.48 standard deviation decrease in trust — a strong, highly significant relationship confirming that the structural divergence between government delivery and citizen expectations is the primary driver of trust erosion in the Ugandan governance context. Direct effects of the expectation gap on citizen engagement ($\beta = -0.218$, $p = 0.002$) and perceived governance quality ($\beta = -0.241$, $p < 0.001$) were also statistically significant, confirming that the expectation gap depresses civic participation and institutional quality perceptions independent of trust.

The indirect effects presented in Table 3 provided critical insights into the mediating role of trust in the governance deterioration pathway. The indirect effect of the expectation gap on citizen engagement mediated through trust ($\beta = -0.187$, $p < 0.001$) and on perceived governance quality through trust ($\beta = -0.202$, $p < 0.001$) were both statistically significant and meaningful in magnitude, confirming partial mediation — that is, trust operates as a critical transmission mechanism through which expectation mismatches translate into reduced civic participation and lower governance quality ratings. The total effects, which summed the direct and indirect pathways, indicated that the expectation gap's net effect on citizen engagement was $\beta = -0.405$ and on perceived governance quality was $\beta = -0.443$, both highly significant at $p < 0.001$. These total effect estimates underscore the cumulative governance damage inflicted by the expectation gap when its full propagation through the trust mechanism is accounted for. The path from trust to perceived governance quality ($\beta = -0.420$) and to citizen engagement ($\beta = -0.390$) further confirmed that trust functions not merely as an outcome of governance failure but as an active determinant of future governance behaviour, amplifying the consequences of the expectation gap in a self-reinforcing cycle of institutional delegitimisation — a finding with profound implications for governance reform strategy in Uganda.

Key Drivers of the Expectation Gap: Item-Level Analysis

Table 4: Mean Scores and Rankings of Expectation Gap Drivers (n = 412, Scale: 1=Strongly Disagree to 5=Strongly Agree)

Expectation Gap Driver	Mean	SD	% Agree/Strongly Agree	Rank
Poor communication of government plans and policies	4.31	0.62	84.7%	1st
Inconsistency in policy implementation and enforcement	4.18	0.68	81.3%	2nd
Absence of effective accountability mechanisms	4.05	0.71	78.9%	3rd
Discrepancy between campaign promises and actual delivery	4.02	0.74	77.4%	4th
Corruption diverting resources from public services	3.98	0.78	76.2%	5th

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Inadequate citizen participation in policy formulation	3.91	0.80	74.3%	6th
Low technical capacity of public service institutions	3.84	0.83	72.1%	7th
Political interference in public service delivery	3.79	0.85	70.6%	8th
Unrealistic expectations raised by media and opposition	3.42	0.91	61.2%	9th
Limited access to government performance information	3.38	0.94	59.7%	10th
COMPOSITE MEAN (All Drivers)	3.89	0.69	73.6%	—

The item-level analysis of expectation gap drivers presented in Table 4 offered a granular and policy-relevant decomposition of the mechanisms through which the expectation gap is generated and sustained in Uganda's governance system. The highest-ranked driver was poor communication of government plans and policies (M = 4.31, SD = 0.62), with 84.7% of respondents agreeing or strongly agreeing that inadequate government communication was a principal contributor to unmet expectations. This finding is particularly significant as it highlights a correctable institutional behaviour — communicative opacity — rather than exclusively structural or resource-based constraints. The second-ranked driver, inconsistency in policy implementation (M = 4.18, SD = 0.68, 81.3% agreement), reflects the well-documented challenge in Uganda where policy frameworks often exist on paper but are implemented selectively, partially, or not at all, thereby creating a persistent gap between the normative promises embedded in policies and the lived realities of citizens. The third-ranked driver, absence of accountability mechanisms (M = 4.05, SD = 0.71, 78.9% agreement), corroborates Uganda's persistently poor rankings in institutional accountability indices and underscores citizens' awareness that the formal accountability architecture — including the Inspector General of Government (IGG), Parliamentary accountability committees, and the Auditor General's office — lacks the independence, resources, and enforcement capacity to bridge the expectation gap.

Further analysis of the lower-ranked drivers in Table 4 revealed important nuances that distinguish demand-side from supply-side contributors to the expectation gap. Unrealistic expectations raised by media and opposition (M = 3.42, SD = 0.91) and limited access to government performance information (M = 3.38, SD = 0.94) ranked ninth and tenth respectively, with lower mean scores and higher standard deviations indicating greater disagreement among respondents. These lower ratings suggest that citizens were less inclined to attribute the expectation gap to their own miscalibrated expectations than to government-side failures, a finding consistent with attribution theory which predicts that individuals are more likely to attribute negative outcomes to external rather than self-referential causes. However, the moderate mean scores of 3.38–3.42 also indicate that demand-side factors, including media sensationalism and opposition hyperbole, are not irrelevant contributors. The composite mean across all ten drivers of 3.89 (SD = 0.69) with 73.6% aggregate agreement confirmed that the expectation gap is driven by a multidimensional and interacting set of institutional, communicative, and political factors, requiring a correspondingly multifaceted policy response

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rather than single-issue interventions. Collectively, the top five drivers — communication failures, implementation inconsistencies, accountability deficits, campaign promise-delivery gaps, and corruption — map closely onto the principal-agent problems identified in the theoretical literature on governance in low- and middle-income countries.

CONCLUSION

This study provided compelling empirical evidence that the expectation gap — the structural divergence between what citizens anticipate from government and what is actually delivered — constitutes a primary driver of trust erosion and governance deterioration in Uganda. Across 412 respondents sampled from four districts, the study found that 71.8% of citizens perceived a significant expectation gap, with univariate, bivariate, and structural equation modelling analyses converging on a consistent pattern of strong negative relationships between the expectation gap and trust in government ($r = -0.623$; $\beta = -0.480$), citizen engagement (total $\beta = -0.405$), and perceived governance quality (total $\beta = -0.443$). The structural equation model demonstrated excellent fit and explained 54.3% of variance in governance outcomes, confirming that trust partially mediates the pathway from the expectation gap to diminished citizen engagement and lower governance quality perceptions. The primary institutional drivers of the expectation gap — poor government communication, policy implementation inconsistency, absent accountability mechanisms, unfulfilled campaign promises, and corruption — point to deeply embedded principal-agent failures within Uganda's governance architecture that require sustained, multi-pronged institutional reform rather than superficial policy adjustments. The cascading nature of the governance deterioration pathway identified in this study suggests that Uganda risks entering an increasingly entrenched cycle of delegitimisation unless deliberate structural interventions are implemented to align government performance with citizen expectations, rebuild communicative credibility, and institutionalise genuine accountability. The findings advance the empirical literature on governance in Sub-Saharan Africa and provide a rigorous, evidence-based foundation for policy reform that addresses both the supply-side failures of government institutions and the demand-side calibration of citizen expectations in a rapidly evolving information environment.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The Government of Uganda, through the Ministry of Public Service and the Office of the Prime Minister, should institutionalise participatory policy formulation and communication frameworks that mandate regular, structured, and accessible reporting of government performance against stated targets — including through digital platforms — so as to bridge the communicative dimension of the expectation gap, reduce information asymmetries between the state and citizens, and prevent the proliferation of unrealistic expectations generated by political communication.

Parliament of Uganda should enact and enforce comprehensive accountability legislation that strengthens the independence, resourcing, and enforcement powers of oversight institutions including the Inspectorate of Government, the Auditor General's office, and parliamentary accountability committees, ensuring that identified governance failures trigger mandatory corrective action and that the accountability architecture evolves from a largely ceremonial function to a substantive deterrent against the corruption and implementation inconsistencies that drive the expectation gap.

The Uganda National Curriculum Development Centre (NCDC), in partnership with civil society organisations, should develop and integrate civic education programmes at both secondary and tertiary levels — and through adult education channels — that systematically inform citizens about the realistic scope, constraints, and timelines of government service delivery, thereby cultivating informed and calibrated citizen expectations that are grounded in constitutional realism rather than political hyperbole, reducing the demand-side contribution to the expectation gap.

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