

2025 Malawi Pre-election Survey II

Findings Report

Prepared by:

Institute of Public Opinion and Research

Plot No. ZA 6165

Good Vision Camp Road, Mulunguzi,

P.O. Box 624

Zomba, Malawi

Phone : +265 (1) 528 571 / +265 (0) 999 958 923

E-mail : admin@ipormw.org

www.ipormw.org

September 2025

Table of Contents

Table of Contents	i
List of Figures.....	iii
List of Tables.....	iv
Acknowledgement.....	v
Acronyms and Abbreviations	vi
Executive Summary	vii
1 Introduction.....	10
1.1 About IPOR	10
1.2 Background	11
2 Methodology	12
2.1 Data collection method	12
2.2 Sample size and design	12
2.3 Questionnaire development and Translation	14
2.4 Questionnaire programming.....	14
2.5 Fieldwork and quality control.....	14
2.6 Data Cleaning and Analysis.....	15
2.7 Ethical clearance	15
2.9 Limitations of the survey.....	15
3 Findings and discussion.....	16
3.1 Demographic and socio-economic profile of the sample	16
3.1.1 Gender, Age, Location and Region.....	16
3.1.2 Education levels of respondents	17
3.1.3 Economic status	18
3.1.4 Religious composition of the sample	19
3.1.5 Ethnic Composition	20
3.2 Civic Engagement and Political Participation.....	21
3.2.1 Political Rally Attendance	21
3.2.2 Interest in political campaigns	22
3.2.3 Sources of News or Information about the 2025 elections	23
3.2.4 Fear of Political Intimidation and Violence	25
3.2.5 Receipt of Voter Education Information	26

3.3	Confidence in Electoral Integrity and Processes.....	28
3.3.1	Expectations of election integrity	28
3.3.2	Role of election observers	31
3.4	Voter Priorities and Influences of voting choice	33
3.4.1	Key influences on voting choices	36
3.4.2	Views on campaign handouts.....	36
3.4.3	Awareness and Importance of election manifestos	38
3.4.4	Views on age limit for presidential candidates.....	40
3.5	Assessment of presidential candidates and their running mates	42
3.5.1	Recognizability of various presidential candidates.....	42
3.5.2	Recognizability and favorability of presidential running mates	44
3.6	Voter Intentions ahead of 2025 general elections	47
3.6.1	Enthusiasm to vote in the upcoming 2025 general elections.....	47
3.6.2	Voters' choice of local government councilor.....	48
3.6.3	Voters' choice for party's parliamentary candidate ahead of 2025 elections 49	
3.6.4	Voters' choice of presidential candidates.....	50
3.6.5	Voting intentions in case of a run-off.....	55
4	Conclusion	57
	Bibliography.....	58
	Closing statement.....	59

List of Figures

Figure 1: Demographic characteristics of sample	17
Figure 2: Education qualifications of respondents	17
Figure 3: Occupational status.....	18
Figure 4: Religious composition of the sample	19
Figure 5: Sample distribution by ethnic group.....	21
Figure 6: Political Rally Attendance by gender, age	22
Figure 7: Interest in political campaigns by gender, age	23
Figure 8: Sources of news or information about the 2025 elections	24
Figure 9: Sources of news or information about the 2025 elections by age.....	25
Figure 10: Fear of Political Intimidation and Violence	26
Figure 11: Receipt of voter education information by age, region, gender, location ...	27
Figure 12: Main sources of voter education information.....	28
Figure 13: Confidence in elections integrity by location, education, and region.....	29
Figure 14: Confidence in the secrecy of the vote by rural-urban residency	30
Figure 15: Trust in the validity of Presidential election results by location, region, education.....	30
Figure 16: Public confidence in electoral outcomes due to presence of observers	31
Figure 17: Trust in election observer organizations (CSOs & international)	32
Figure 18: Impact of independent CSO verification on confidence in MEC results	33
Figure 19: Popular priorities for government to address after the elections	34
Figure 20: Popular priorities by urban-rural residency.....	35
Figure 21: Popular priorities by age.....	35
Figure 22 Perceived influences of voting choice.....	36
Figure 23: Citizens' opinion about campaign handouts	37
Figure 24: Personal and neighbor's acceptance of a campaign handout	38
Figure 25: Access to election manifestos by demographic group	39
Figure 26: Most accessible campaign manifesto	39
Figure 27: The most realistic manifesto.....	40
Figure 28: Views on maximum age limit for presidential candidate (% who said yes to maximum age limit).....	41

Figure 29: Concerns over former president, Peter Mutharika's age by demographic group	42
Figure 30: Awareness of presidential candidates for various parties	43
Figure 31: Awareness of presidential candidates for various parties by urban-rural residency	43
Figure 32: Popular recognition of some running mates.....	44
Figure 33: Recognition of running mates by rural-urban residency	45
Figure 34: Recognition of running mates by region.....	45
Figure 35: Favorability of various running mates	46
Figure 36: Likelihood of changing vote if respondent disapproves of choice of running mate	47
Figure 37: Likelihood of voting in 2025 elections by location, education	48
Figure 38: Voters' choice of party's local government councilor	49
Figure 39: Voters' choice for party's parliamentary candidate	49
Figure 40: Voters' choice of presidential candidates.....	50
Figure 41: Changes in Voter's choice of presidential candidates before and after campaign launch.....	51
Figure 42: Voters' choice of presidential candidate by region.....	52
Figure 43: Changes in Voter's choice of presidential candidates by region.....	52
Figure 44: voters' choice of presidential candidates by age.....	53
Figure 45: Changes in voters' choice of presidential candidates by age	54
Figure 46: Voters' choice of presidential candidate by rural-urban location.....	55
Figure 47: Voters' choice of presidential candidate in case of a run-off election	56

List of Tables

Table 1: Malawi 2024 projected adult population by region, urban and rural	12
Table 2: Sample stratification by region and rural-urban location.....	13
Table 3: Geographical distribution of sample clusters	13

Acknowledgement

The Institute of Public Opinion and Research would like to sincerely thank the Consortium of funders for entrusting us with the responsibility of undertaking this study. We are also grateful for the support that was received from all district commissioners, district and city councils and Traditional Authorities throughout the country. IPOR would like to also thank survey field teams that worked on this assignment with dedication to travelling across the country to gather data that has created a foundation for this report. Lastly, many thanks to all citizens that voluntarily participated in the interviews by providing their experiences and insights.

Acronyms and Abbreviations

AU	African Union
CAPI	Computer-Assisted Personal Interviews
CCJP	Catholic Commission for Justice and Peace
CSO(s)	Civil Society Organization(s)
DPP	Democratic Progressive Party
EU	European Union
GPS	Global Positioning System
IPOR	Institute of Public Opinion and Research
MEC	Malawi Electoral Commission
MCP	Malawi Congress Party
NDI	National Democratic Institute
NCST	National Commission for Science and Technology
NDP	National Development Party
NICE	National Initiative for Civic Education
NSO	National Statistical Office (Malawi)
PAC	Public Affairs Committee
PAPI	Pen-and-Paper Interviewing
PCP	Patriotic Citizens Party
PDP	People's Development Party
PP	People's Party
SADC	Southern Africa Development Community
SPSS	Statistical Package for the Social Sciences
UNIMAREC	University of Malawi Ethical Research Committee
UDF	United Democratic Front
UTM	United Transformation Movement

Executive Summary

Introduction

The Institute of Public Opinion and Research (IPOR) conducted a second nationally representative pre-election survey ahead of Malawi's general elections to inform voters, promote transparency, and provide insights for policymakers and candidates. This survey builds on an earlier one conducted in July, before the launch of election campaigns, submission of nomination papers, and announcement of running mates. The second-round captures citizens' views, expectations, and voting intentions following these key developments. It provides voters with reliable information to guide their choices, while offering political parties, candidates, and other stakeholders valuable feedback to refine their strategies.

Methodology

A nationally representative survey of 2,400 adult Malawians was conducted between 14 and 27 August 2025, covering 27 of the country's 28 districts, excluding Likoma. Respondents were randomly drawn from both rural and urban areas using a multistage stratified sampling design. Enumeration areas (EAs) were randomly selected from the National Statistical Office's 2018 census list and stratified to reflect the adult population distribution across regions: North (13%), Central (44%), and South (43%). Within each region, 87% of respondents were sampled from rural areas and 13% from urban areas, mirroring Malawi's population structure. In each EA, enumerators systematically selected households using a 5/10 count interval, and one adult member per household was randomly chosen for interview. This rigorous randomization process ensured that the survey closely reflected Malawi's demographics and regional distribution, making the findings both reliable and nationally representative within a margin of error of $\pm 2\%$.

Key findings

Civic Engagement and Political Participation

Overall, most Malawians are informed and active in the campaign and electoral process. More than half of Malawians (54%) reported attending a political rally or event in the past 12 months. Attendance levels varied slightly by gender and age. A larger share (69%) said they follow political campaigns either fairly closely or very closely.

Nearly two-thirds (64%) of Malawians reported receiving information or taking part in voter registration and civic education activities. The main source of voter education messages was the Malawi Electoral Commission (MEC), followed by political parties and candidates. Traditional media, especially radio and television, also played an important role in spreading voter education.

Confidence in Electoral Integrity and Processes

A significant majority of Malawians (70%) are confident that their votes will remain secret, and 80% believe that the results announced by the Malawi Electoral Commission (MEC) will accurately reflect their votes.

Additionally, most Malawians express trust in election observers, stating that their presence enhances confidence in electoral outcomes. There is slightly more trust in local Malawian observers (64%) compared to international observers (60%).

Voter priorities and influences of voting choice

When considering policy priorities, Malawians identify food shortages (29%) and economic management (29%) as the top priorities for the next government to address following the 2025 general elections. Urban residents prioritize tackling economic challenges, while rural residents emphasize resolving food security and agricultural issues. Similarly, younger Malawians focus more on economic management, whereas older generations prioritize agriculture.

Voters will primarily base their choices on candidates' commitment to ending government corruption (51%) and party policy promises or manifestos (40%). While party affiliation (33%) and the choice of running mates (30%) are also significant, they are secondary to anti-corruption efforts and policy commitments.

Awareness of presidential candidates

President Lazarus Chakwera (85%) is the most recognized presidential candidate for the 2025 Malawi general elections, followed closely by former President Peter Mutharika (79%). Other well-known candidates include Atupele Muluzi of the United Democratic Front, UDF (50%); Joyce Banda (People's Party, PP) (48%), Michael Usi (Odyza Zake Alibe Mulandu (45%) and Dalitso Kabambe of the UTM Party (30%).

Recognizability of presidential running mates

Since IPOR's last poll in July 2025, presidential candidates announced their respective running mates. At the national level, Jane Ansah of the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) (30%) emerges as the most recognized running mate for the 2025 Malawi general elections. She is followed by Vitumbiko Mumba of Malawi Congress Party (MCP) (19%), Matthews Mtumbuka of UTM party (6%), Khumbo Kachali of People's Party (PP) (5%), and Rex Kalolo of United Democratic Front (UDF) (1%).

Among those aware of the different running mates, favorability and influence vary. Jane Ansah, though the most recognized, attracts more divided opinions and comparatively lower support for her ticket. By contrast, Vitumbiko Mumba (MCP) and Matthews Mtumbuka (UTM) both enjoy stronger positive perceptions and greater influence on potential voter support, despite being less widely known. These patterns should, however,

be interpreted with caution since they reflect only respondents familiar with each running mate, which may introduce sampling bias.

It is important to note that 64% of Malawians say they would not change their vote even if the presidential candidate chose a running mate they do not agree with.

Voting intentions

Enthusiasm to vote is very high, with 96% of registered voters indicating they will definitely cast their ballot.

With three to four weeks before the elections, 41% of registered voters say they would vote for Peter Mutharika (DPP) as President, followed by incumbent Lazarus Chakwera (MCP) at 31%. Dalitso Kabambe (UTM) stood at 6%, Atupele Muluzi (UDF) at 3%, and Joyce Banda (PP) at 2%, while other candidates attracted less than 1%. Notably, 11% of registered voters remained undecided and 5% refused to reveal their choice.

When compared to IPOR's previous poll that was fielded during the pre-campaign period in July 2025, Chakwera's support has grown by 5 percentage points (from 26%), while Mutharika's has decreased by 2 points (from 43%). With 11% undecided, there still remains an opportunity for all parties and candidates to attract voters and reshape the race in the run up to September 16th.

1 Introduction

This report presents findings from a pre-election survey conducted by the Institute of Public Opinion and Research (IPOR) between August 14 and 27, 2025, ahead of Malawi's 2025 general elections. The survey's primary objectives were to inform the electorate, promote transparency and trust in the democratic process, and provide actionable insights for policymakers and candidates. By offering data-driven perspectives on the level of support for various candidates, political parties, and policy positions, the survey empowers Malawian voters to make informed decisions, enriching public discourse. Consistent and credible polling also fosters trust in democracy by ensuring transparency. For candidates and policymakers, the findings provide valuable feedback to align strategies with public needs and refine campaign approaches.

The nationally representative survey included 2,400 randomly selected adult (18 years and above) Malawians, adhering to international sampling standards. Covering 27 of Malawi's 28 districts, this study builds on a prior IPOR survey conducted before the campaign period. The results are generalizable at the national level, with a margin of error of $\pm 2\%$ at a 95% confidence level, offering critical insights into citizens' perceptions, expectations, and voting intentions for the upcoming elections.

1.1 About IPOR

IPOR is a Zomba-based research organisation registered in 2014. It specialises in independent social science research, with a focus on governance, development, and public policy. IPOR has previously conducted public opinion research in advance of the 2019 and 2020 elections to feed into the public discourse. Because nationally representative polls of this nature are very expensive, IPOR solicits funding from multiple funding sources to run the surveys whose results are then shared with the wider public as our contribution to the advancement of democratic values in the country. However, IPOR maintains strict independence in all aspects of its work.

Our research process is guided by scientific standards, transparent methodologies, and peer-reviewed practices that safeguard the integrity of the findings. Funders have no role in the sampling process, data collection, or analysis. To further guarantee independence, IPOR makes its survey instruments, methodology, and datasets publicly available, except for commissioned surveys whose results are not shared publicly, allowing for external scrutiny and replication.

It is important to note that, while surveys gauge the mood of the electorate at a specific moment in time in the election campaign, they serve as an estimation, rather than a prediction, of results.

1.2 Background

Elections are a cornerstone of democracy, enabling citizens to choose representatives who reflect their needs and hold leaders accountable (Powell, 2000). Since adopting multiparty elections in 1994, Malawi has held general elections every five years, with the seventh scheduled for 2025 to elect the president, members of parliament, and local government councillors. Pre-election surveys are vital for understanding voter sentiment, identifying key issues, and shaping campaign strategies.

These surveys gauge support for candidates, parties, and policies, helping campaigns assess their standing and refine their platforms to align with voter priorities (Jones, 2018; Brown, 2016). By identifying critical issues like the economy or healthcare, campaigns can tailor messaging to address voter concerns and highlight popular policies (Garcia, 2019; Davies, 2021). Surveys also reveal public sentiment on government performance, allowing candidates to challenge incumbents' weaknesses or propose alternative solutions (Anderson, 2017; Clark, 2019).

Additionally, pre-election surveys assess voter enthusiasm and turnout likelihood, enabling campaigns to mobilize supporters effectively (Lewis, 2018). They also identify key voter blocs by demographics, such as age or education, helping campaigns target swing voters with tailored outreach (Anderson, 2017; Roberts, 2021). By providing data-driven insights, pre-election surveys enhance transparency, inform voters, and strengthen democratic engagement in Malawi's 2025 elections.

2 Methodology

2.1 Data collection method

In August 2025, the Institute of Public Opinion and Research (IPOR) conducted a second nationally representative survey of 2,400 adult Malawians across 27 of Malawi's 28 districts. The timing coincided with the end of the official campaign period for the 2025 general elections. Using a stratified, random probability sampling method, face-to-face interviews were conducted in respondents' preferred languages, with translations available in Chichewa and Chitumbuka. The sample size, larger than required for national representativeness, yielded a margin of error of $\pm 2\%$ at a 95% confidence level. This robust sample enabled IPOR to provide precise national findings and reliable regional-level insights with enhanced confidence.

2.2 Sample size and design

The survey employed a **multistage stratified cluster sampling design** to select respondents. This approach is consistent with other scientifically rigorous, and globally recognized surveys in Africa and the globe. In simple terms, this method involves selecting respondents in several stages to ensure every Malawian has an equal and known chance of being included, while also making the sample representative of the entire country. In summary, our methodology followed the following stages:

Stratification (dividing into groups): We first divided the Malawian population into subgroups (strata) based on region (North, Central, South) and location type (urban vs. rural). The stratification is on probabilities proportional to population size of the region, district and urban-rural adult population. According to the 2024 population projections from the National Statistical office of Malawi (NSO) presented in Table 1, 13% of adult Malawians live in the North, 44% in the Central, and 43% in the South. Similarly, 87% live in rural areas and 13% live in urban areas.

Table 1: Malawi 2024 projected adult population by region, urban and rural

Regions	Urban	Rural	Total
Northern region	150,423	1,221,201	1,371,624
Central region	686,236	3,984,786	4,671,022
Southern region	613,868	3,956,193	4,570,061
Total	1,450,527	9,162,180	10,612,707

Source: National Statistical Office of Malawi, 2024

The sample of 2,400 respondents was stratified by region and rural-urban location to reflect the geographical distribution of Malawi's population. This approach not only ensures geographical representation but also enhances efficiency by reducing the margin of error. Table 2 displays the geographical distribution of the sample.

Table 2: Sample stratification by region and rural-urban location

Regions	urban	Rural	Total
Northern Region	32	280	312 (13%)
Central Region	152	905	1057 (44%)
Southern Region	136	895	1031 (43%)
Total	320 (13%)	2080 (87%)	2400 (100%)

Clustering (enumeration areas):

Visiting 2,400 respondents randomly drawn from across Malawi would be prohibitively expensive. To reduce travel costs, we instead randomly selected enumeration areas (EAs) within each stratum. EAs are the smallest census units defined by the National Statistical Office (NSO), each with clear boundaries and designed to correspond to the workload of one enumerator during the 2018 population and housing census. The number of EAs chosen in each region and location type was proportional to that group's share of the national population. EAs were systematically selected using Probability Proportional to Size (PPS) from the geographically ordered list provided by the NSO's 2018 census sampling frame. The size of each EA was determined by the total number of households in the 2018 Malawi Census frame. To achieve our sample size, we randomly selected 300 EAs from NSO's list, and within each EA, we conducted 8 interviews.

Table 3: Geographical distribution of sample clusters

Regions	Urban	Rural	Total
Northern	4	35	39 (13%)
Central	19	113	132 (44%)
Southern	17	112	129 (43%)
Total	40 (13%)	260 (86%)	300 (100%)

Household selection: From each selected EA, we randomly choose households using a systematic interval (every 5th or 10th household). Supervisors identified a random starting point on a map (e.g., a school, church, or road junction) and enumerators counted households along assigned directions, covering both sides of the road.

Respondent selection: Within each selected household, one adult was randomly chosen for the interview. This ensures that every adult has equal chance of being selected. However, to ensure gender balance we alternative interviews by gender. If a man was interviewed in the first household, a woman should be interviewed in the next household.

This careful randomization process guarantees that the survey mirrors Malawi's population in terms of demographics and regional distribution, making the findings reliable and representative of the views of all Malawians.

2.3 Questionnaire development and Translation

With input and guidance from the client, IPOR developed the survey questionnaire. Once approved, the questionnaire was translated into two local languages: Chichewa, which is widely spoken in the central and southern regions, and Chitumbuka, which is predominantly spoken in the northern region

2.4 Questionnaire programming

The survey employed Computer-Assisted Personal Interviews (CAPI) due to its numerous advantages over traditional Pen-and-Paper Interviewing (PAPI). CAPI ensures cost-efficiency and reasonable survey duration, while also facilitating easy and secure data transfer. It significantly enhances data quality through automated routing, skip patterns, and logic checks integrated into the survey questionnaire programming. Additionally, CAPI offers advanced features enabled by modern technology, such as image and video capture, audio recording, and GPS plotting, which aid in verifying data quality. Once the translations were finalized and approved, the survey questionnaires were scripted using Survey CTO, and data collection was conducted using tablets.

2.5 Fieldwork and quality control

IPOR trained and deployed 12 teams across Malawi's regions, with each team comprising one supervisor, four enumerators, and a driver. Teams adhered to rigorous protocols, securing approvals from district officials and village chiefs before sampling households and selecting respondents for face-to-face interviews.

To ensure high-quality data, comprehensive quality control measures were implemented. The survey questionnaire featured built-in data validation checks for accuracy, consistency, and completeness, including logic checks to maintain data integrity and completeness checks to verify all required fields were addressed. IPOR's data team conducted real-time monitoring of submissions, promptly identifying and resolving irregularities.

Supervisors were instrumental in upholding data quality, enforcing ethical procedures and protocols among enumerators. They performed back-checks on interviews to confirm accuracy and completeness, reporting any inconsistencies to the field manager for immediate resolution. This meticulous oversight safeguarded the integrity of the entire data collection process.

2.6 Data Cleaning and Analysis

After completing the fieldwork, the data was cleaned using SPSS and STATA, supported by built-in data quality checks and monitoring tools. The cleaning process aimed to correct any incorrect, incomplete, duplicate, or erroneous entries, ensuring the dataset was accurate, consistent, and reliable for analysis. Once data cleaning was completed, data analysis for this report was conducted using STATA and Microsoft Excel.

2.7 Ethical clearance

IPOR obtained ethical approval and clearance for the study from the University of Malawi Ethical Research Committee (UNIMAREC), operating under the authority of the National Commission for Science and Technology (NCST). We prioritize ethical clearance not only for legal compliance but also to ensure the safety of survey participants and the integrity of the survey process and outcomes. Our surveys adhere to rigorous ethical standards, supported by our safeguarding policy and robust data protection systems

2.9 Limitations of the survey

This study acknowledges its limitations. First, the Likoma District was excluded from the sample due to logistical challenges. While the opinions of the island's residents are important and may differ from those on the mainland, its small population means that including it would likely not significantly alter national-level results or inferences.

Second, as a primarily quantitative study relying on closed-ended questions, it could not explore the reasons behind respondents' answers. To gain deeper insights, future research could incorporate qualitative methods to supplement these findings and investigate the motivations underlying the quantitative responses.

3 Findings and discussion

3.1 Demographic and socio-economic profile of the sample

3.1.1 Gender, Age, Location and Region

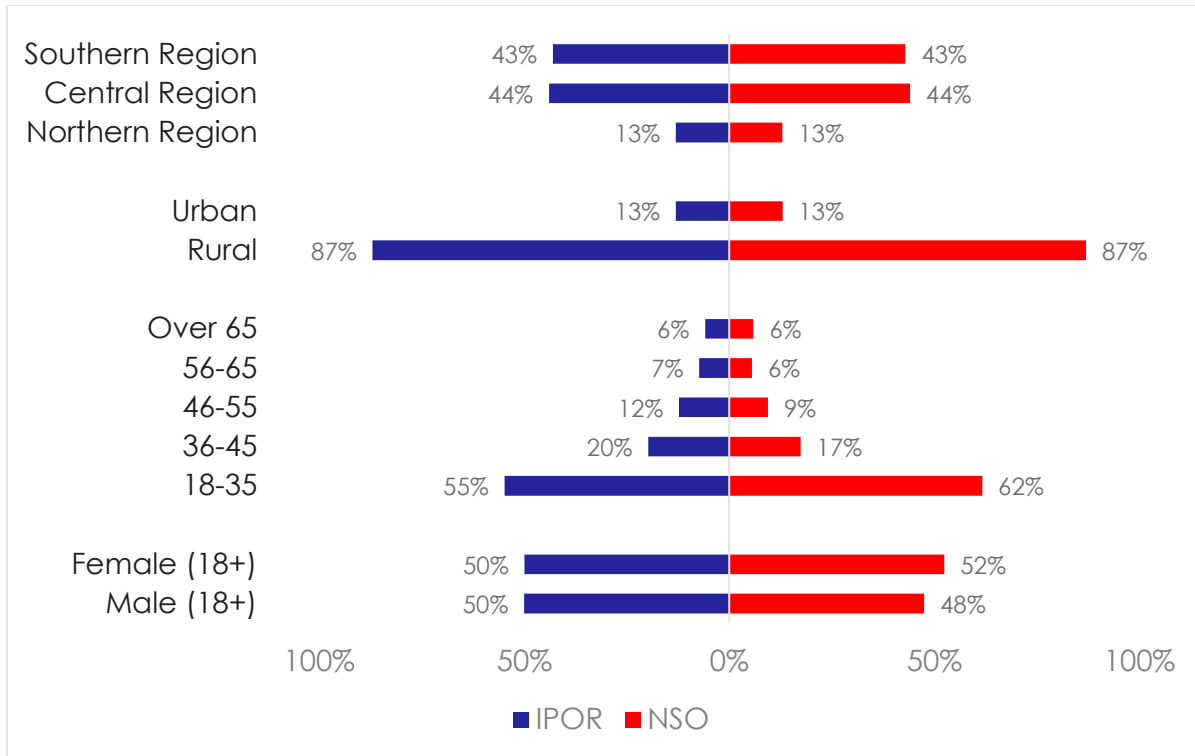
This subsection provides an overview of the demographic characteristics of the survey sample, focusing on gender, region of residence, location, and age distribution. Understanding these characteristics is important as they provide context for interpreting the study's findings and help identify which groups of Malawians were more represented in the survey.

Figure 1 shows that the sample was evenly distributed by gender, with females and males each constituting 50% of the respondents. This equal distribution ensures that perspectives from both men and women are adequately represented, minimizing gender bias in the study results. In comparison, statistics from the National Statistics Office (NSO) indicate that among Malawians aged 18 years and above, 52% are female and 48% are male. Regarding regional distribution, the central region accounted for the largest share of respondents at 44%, closely followed by the southern region at 43%. The northern region made up 13% of the sample. This distribution mirrors the country statistics from the NSO and broadly reflects Malawi's population structure by region.

A significant proportion of the respondents (87%) were from rural areas, while 13% were from urban settings. This aligns with the 2025 national census projections published by the NSO, which indicate that Malawi remains predominantly rural. Analyzing the age structure of the sample, over half of the respondents (55%) were youth aged 18 to 35, reflecting Malawi's youthful population. About 20% were aged between 36 and 45 years, 12% between 46 and 55 years, 7% between 56 and 65 years, and 6% were over 65 years.

The age distribution of the sample also aligns with the national age distribution. The slight differences observed are mainly due to variations in the categorization of age groups. The NSO classifies age into the groups 15–34, 35–44, 45–54, 55–64, and 65+, whereas this survey used slightly different cut-offs. This indicates that the sample randomization was effective, as the sample outcomes match the official national statistics.

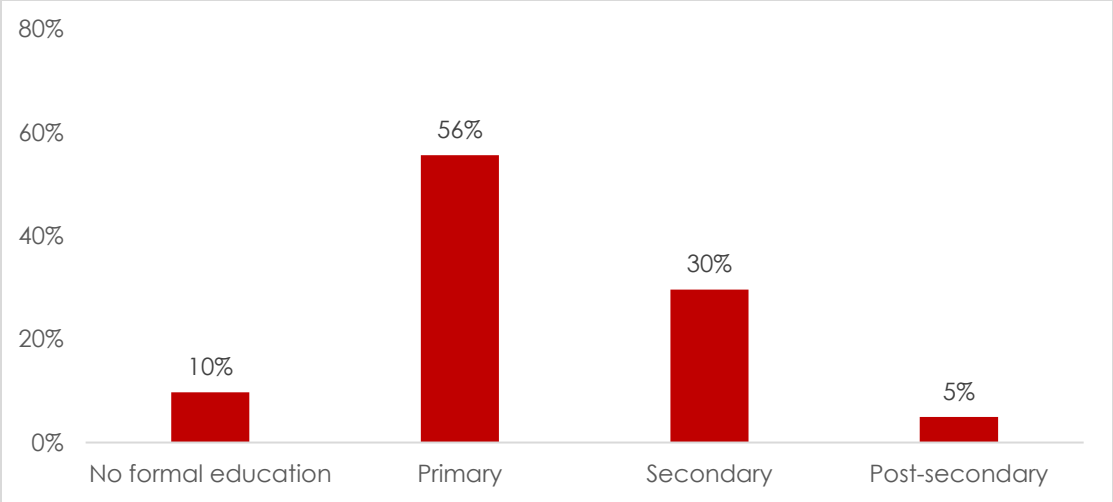
Figure 1: Demographic characteristics of sample



3.1.2 Education levels of respondents

Examining the respondents' education levels, the majority (56%) attained primary education. Thirty percent completed secondary education, while only 5% pursued post-secondary education. Notably, 10% of respondents did not attend any formal education. This mirrors the national education statistics, where most adult Malawians attended primary education (54%) and only a small percentage (4%) have attended college or university (NSO, 2020).

Figure 2: Education qualifications of respondents

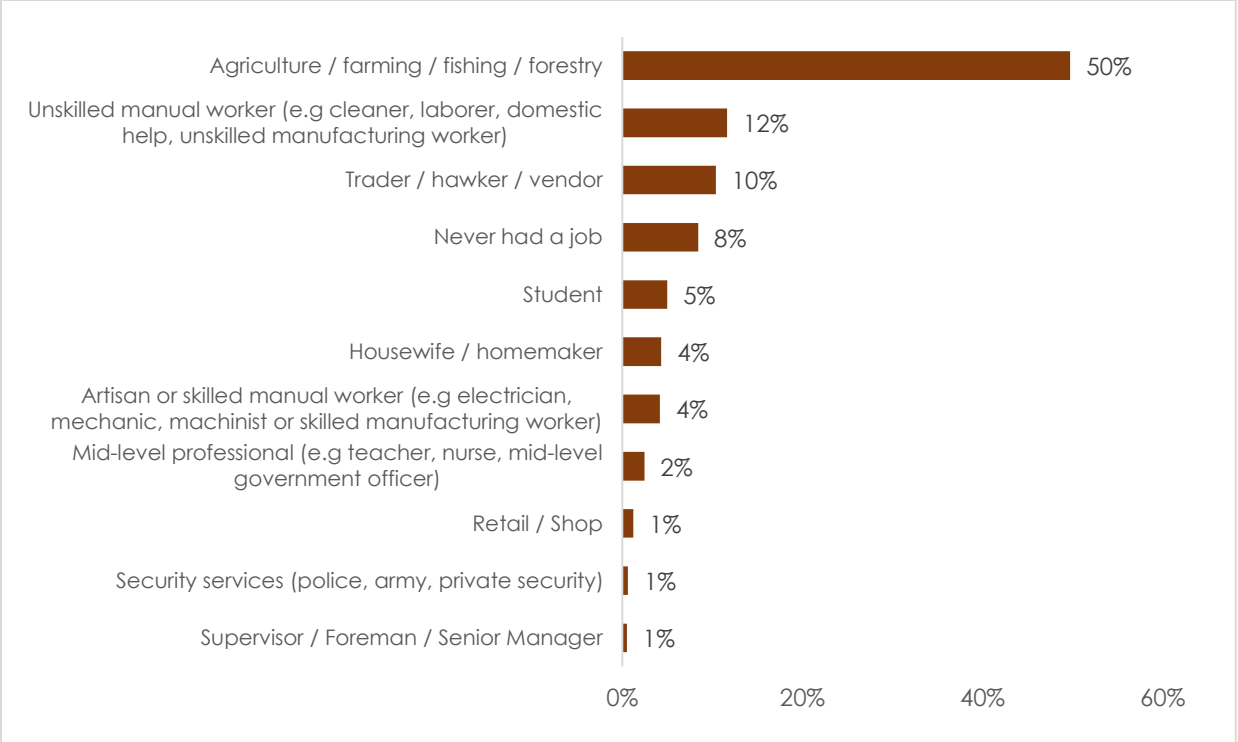


Respondents were asked: *What is your highest level of education?*

3.1.3 Economic status

Figure 3 illustrates the occupational status of survey respondents. Half (50%) of the respondents are employed in agriculture, farming, fishing, or forestry, indicating that Malawi's economy is predominantly agricultural, with this sector employing over half of the country's population. Approximately 12% are unskilled manual workers, while 10% are traders, hawkers, or vendors. Eight percent are unemployed, and 5% were students. Housewives/homemakers and artisans or skilled manual workers each constitute 4% of the sample. Mid-level professionals account for 2%, while supervisors/foremen, senior managers, security service workers, retail/shop workers, and others each represent 1%.

Figure 3: Occupational status

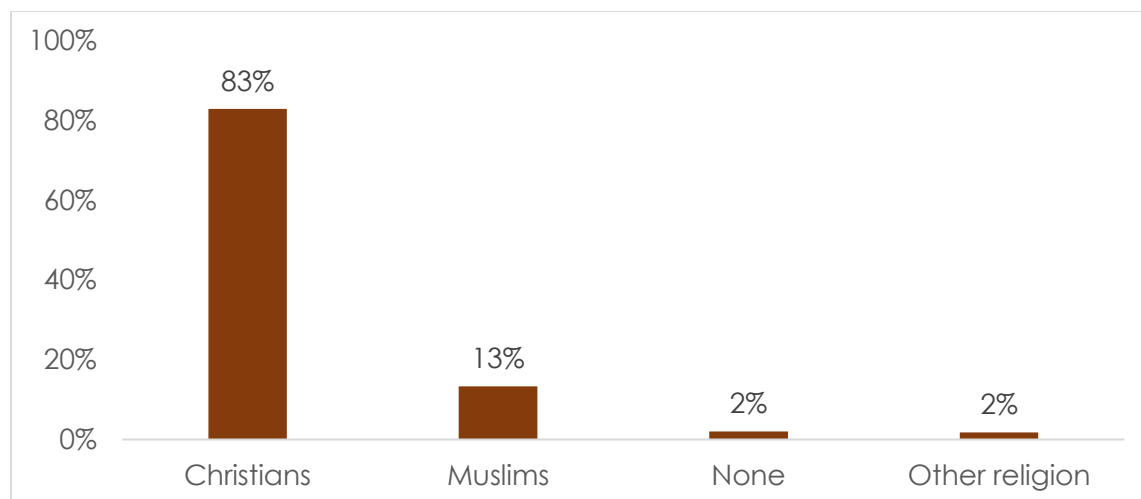


Respondents were asked: *What is your main occupation? [If unemployed, retired or disabled, ask:] What was your last main occupation?*

3.1.4 Religious composition of the sample

More than four-fifths of respondents (83%) identified as Christians, while 13% reported being Muslims (Figure 4). About 3% indicated no religious affiliation or identified with other faiths such as Hinduism, Bahá'í, Judaism, or traditional religions. These findings suggest that, although Malawi is home to a diversity of religious traditions, Christianity remains the dominant faith.

Figure 4: Religious composition of the sample



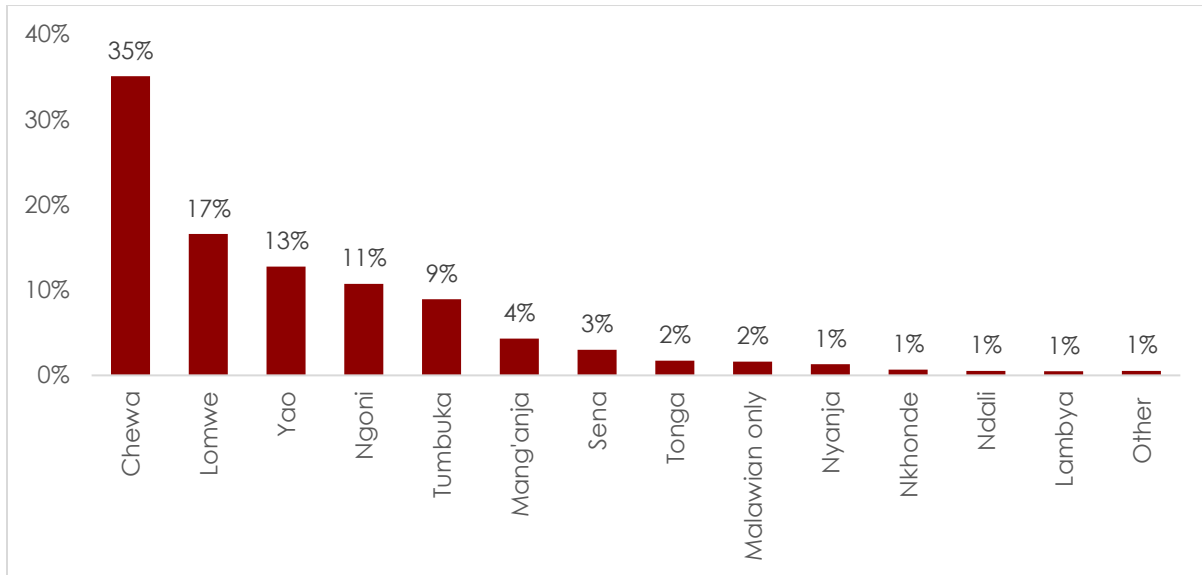
Respondents were asked: *What is your religion, if any?*

3.1.5 Ethnic Composition

Regarding the ethnic composition of the survey (Figure 5), most respondents were from the Chewa tribe (35%), followed by the Lomwe (17%), Yao (13%), Ngoni (11%), and Tumbuka (9%). Additionally, 3% identified as Sena, while 2% identified as Tonga. Other ethnic groups, such as Lambya, Nali, Nkhonde, and Nyanja, each constituted 1% of the sample. Notably, 2% of the respondents did not identify with any ethnic group and considered themselves solely as Malawians.

This is also consistent with the 2018 Population and Housing Census statistics which show that 6.0 million people (34.4%) were Chewa, 3.3 million people (18.9%) were Lomwe, 2.3 million people (13.3%) were Yao, 1.8 million people (10.4%) were Ngoni, and 1.6 million people (9.2%) were Tumbuka.

Figure 5: Sample distribution by ethnic group



Respondents were asked: *What is your ethnic community or cultural group?*

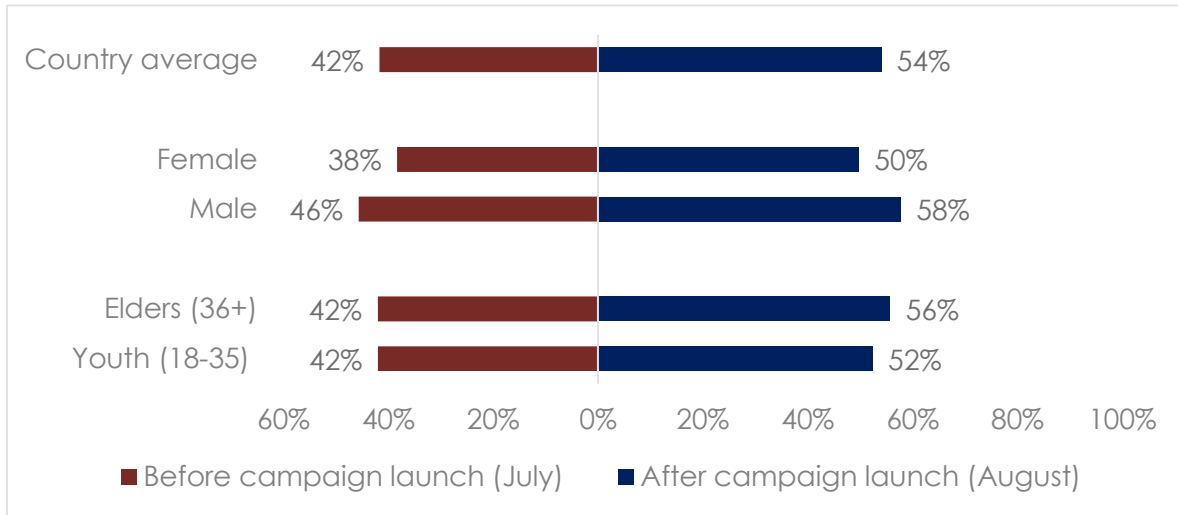
3.2 Civic Engagement and Political Participation

3.2.1 Political Rally Attendance

Overall, most Malawians are informed and active in the campaign and electoral process. More than half of Malawians (54%) reported attending a political rally or event in the past 12 months. Attendance levels varied by gender and age, with 58% of men attending political campaigns compared to 50% of women. Additionally, 56% of older adults (over 35 years) attended political campaigns, in contrast to 52% of the youth (ages 18-35) (Figure 6).

When compared to the results from the first round of the survey, which was conducted before the official launch of the election campaigns, the findings indicate that attendance at political rallies has increased from 42% prior to the campaign launch to 54% afterward. Furthermore, this increase in political rally attendance is similar for both men and women, although it is slightly higher among older adults than the youth.

Figure 6: Political Rally Attendance | by gender, age

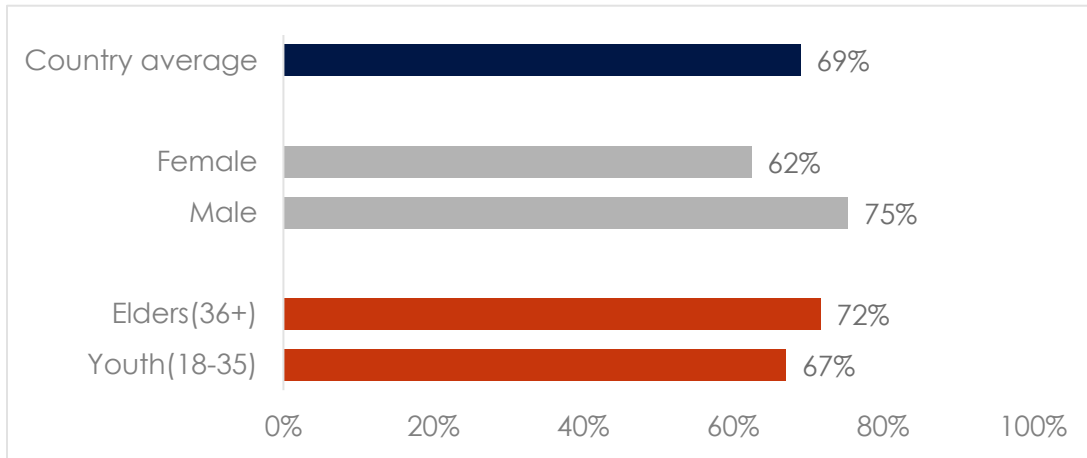


Respondents were asked: Here is a list of actions that people sometimes take as citizens. For each of these, please tell me whether you, personally, have done any of these things during the past year. If not, would you do this if you had the chance? **Attended a political rally or event?**

3.2.2 Interest in political campaigns

Assessing citizens' interest in political campaigns, over two-thirds (69%) of Malawians report that they follow these campaigns fairly closely or very closely. This interest is more pronounced among older adults (72%) compared to the youth (67%). Additionally, men show higher levels of engagement than women, with three-fourths of men (75%) stating they follow political campaigns fairly or very closely, in contrast to 62% of women. These findings indicate that political campaigns capture significant public attention across all demographic groups, although men and older adults appear to be somewhat more active in following developments than women and younger individuals.

Figure 7: Interest in political campaigns | by gender, age

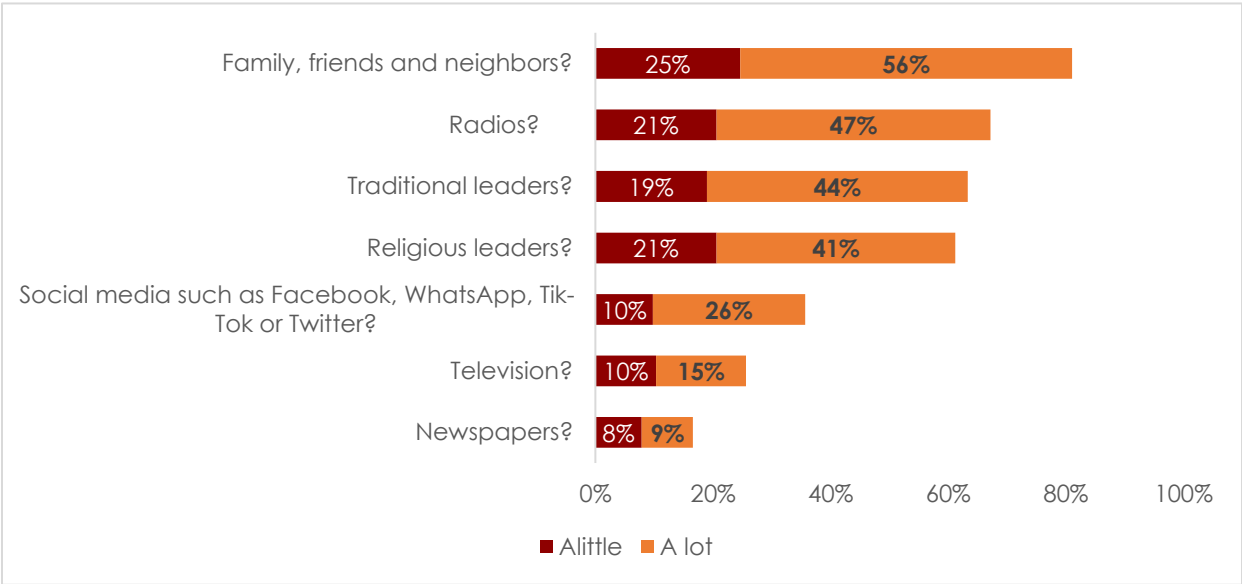


Respondents were asked: *How closely are you following the political campaigns for the forthcoming general elections?*

3.2.3 Sources of News or Information about the 2025 elections

Malawians were asked about their sources of election news or information about the 2025 elections. Family, friends, and neighbors were the most cited source, with 56% of respondents saying they received a lot of information from them and 25% reporting a little. Radio was the next most common source (47% a lot, 21% a little), followed by traditional leaders (44% a lot, 19% a little) and religious leaders (41% a lot, 21% a little). For social media platforms such as Facebook, WhatsApp, TikTok, and Twitter, 26% of respondents said they received a lot of information, and 10% said a little. Television was cited by 15% as a lot and 10% as a little, while newspapers had the lowest reach, with 9% reporting a lot and 8% a little. Overall, the findings show that informal personal networks remain the most influential source of election information, while mass media and social media provide additional, though smaller, channels for outreach.

Figure 8: Sources of news or information about the 2025 elections

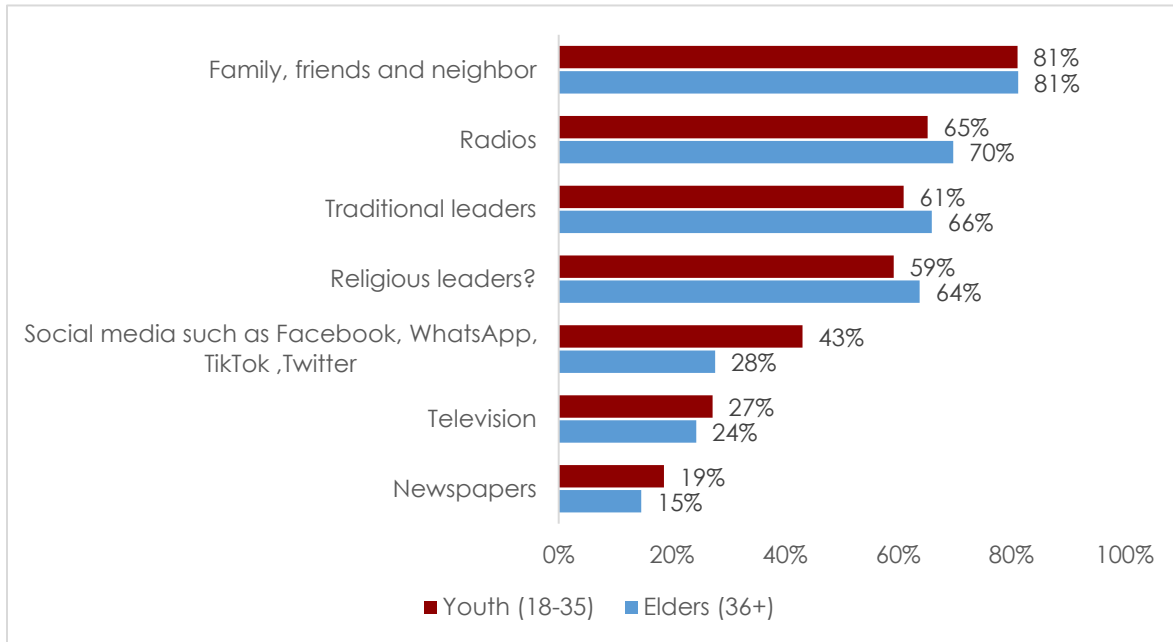


Respondents were asked: *How often do you get news about the 2025 election from each of the following sources of information?*

Disaggregating news sources by age, the findings in Figure 9 show that older adults rely more heavily on traditional sources: radios (70% vs. 65%), traditional leaders (66% vs. 61%), and religious leaders (64% vs. 59%), compared to the youth. In contrast, social media is more prominent among the youth (43%) than among older adults (28%).

These insights are important for guiding outreach strategies in voter civic education. Radio remains the most effective platform overall, particularly for reaching older adults, while social media is a more effective channel for engaging the youth.

Figure 9: Sources of news or information about the 2025 elections by age

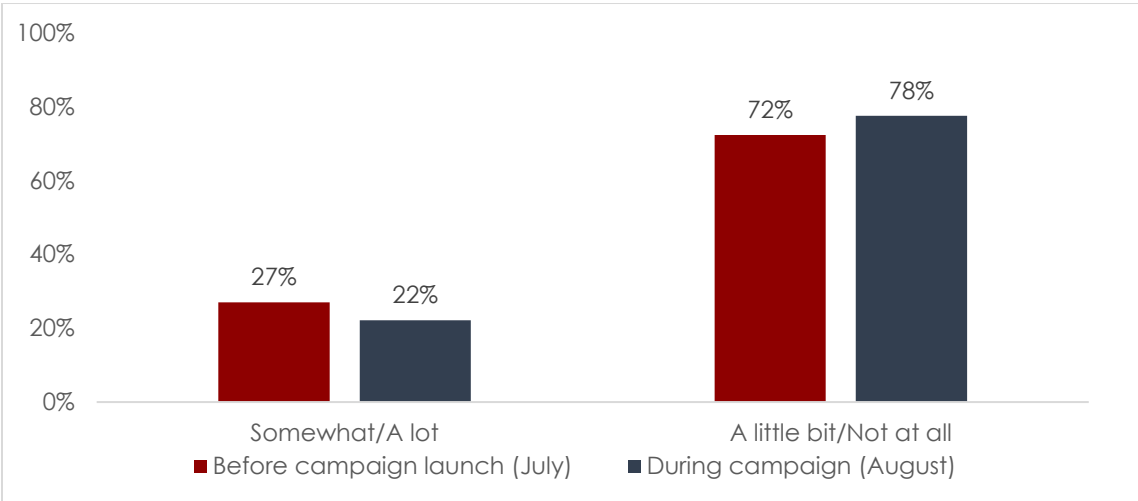


Respondents were asked: *How often do you get news about the 2025 election from each of the following sources of information? (% saying a little or a lot)*

3.2.4 Fear of Political Intimidation and Violence

The survey assessed perceptions of political intimidation and violence during the election campaign. The findings presented in Figure 10 indicate that most Malawians (78%) do not fear becoming victims of political intimidation or violence during the campaign period. Compared to the survey results prior to the campaign's launch, fear has decreased; 27% of Malawians expressed fear before the campaign officially began, while only 22% reported fear during the campaign. This suggests that the campaigns have been more peaceful than Malawians had anticipated before they started.

Figure 10: Fear of Political Intimidation and Violence



Respondents were asked: *During the campaigns for the forthcoming 2025 elections, how much do you personally fear becoming a victim of political intimidation or violence*

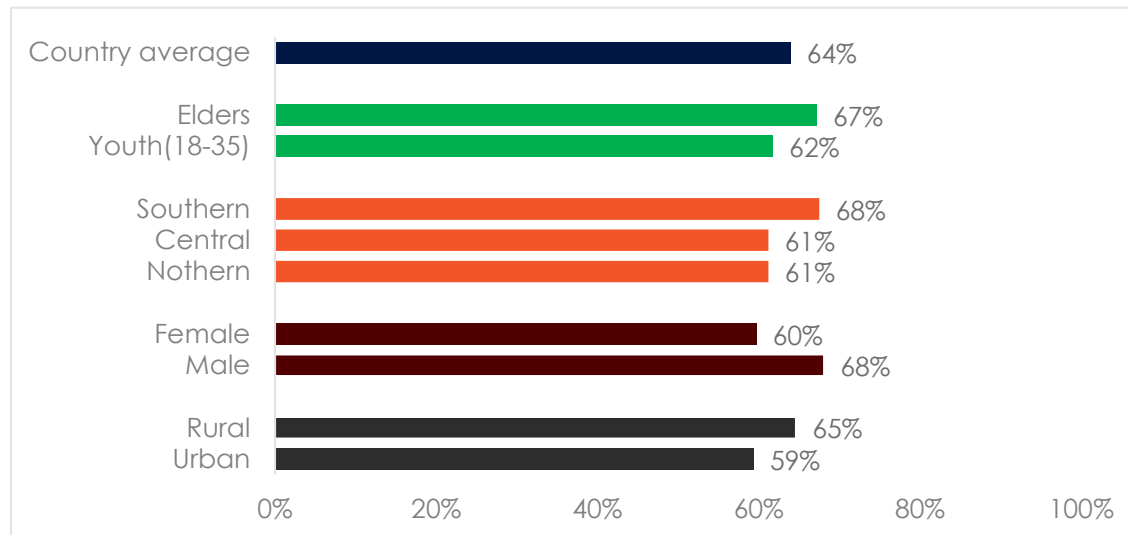
3.2.5 Receipt of Voter Education Information

Nearly two-thirds of Malawians (64%) reported having received information or participated in voter registration and civic education activities. Disaggregating the data by demographic groups reveals only modest differences. By age, more elders (over 35 years) (67%) reported receiving voter education compared to youth (ages 18–35) (62%). Regional differences were minimal, with more residents in the southern region (68%) receiving voter information compared to those in the central and northern regions, both at 61%.

Gender disparities were more pronounced: a higher percentage of men (68%) reported exposure to voter education compared to women (60%). Location also played a role, as a greater proportion of rural residents (65%) received voter education compared to urban residents (59%).

Overall, the findings indicate that while voter education efforts are reaching a majority of Malawians, access remains somewhat uneven, particularly by gender and location, highlighting the need to strengthen outreach among women and urban populations.

Figure 11: Receipt of voter education information | by age, region, gender, location

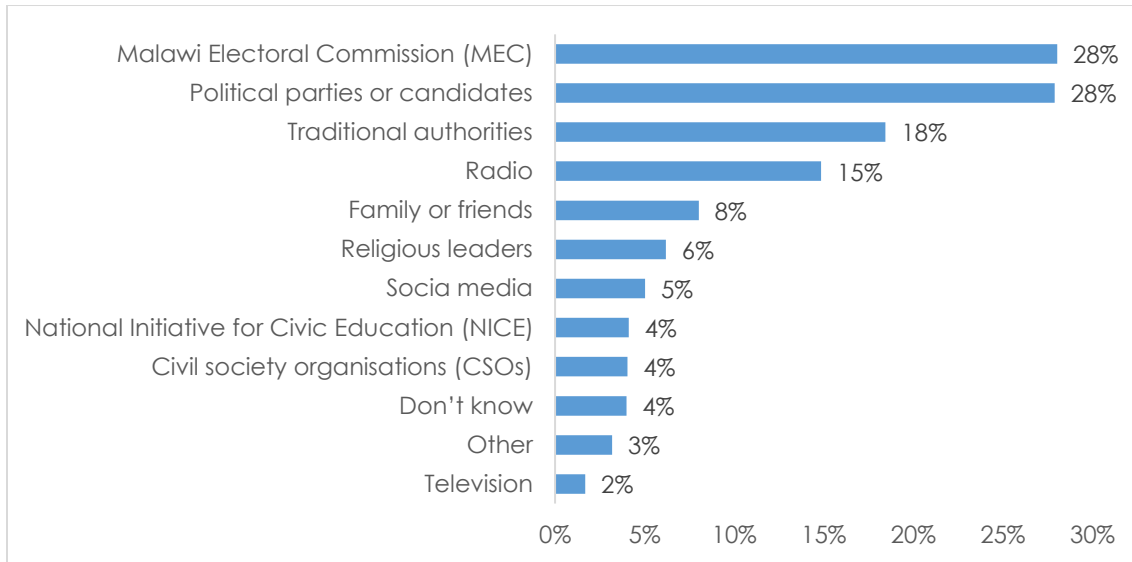


Respondents were asked: *In the past 12 months, have you received any information or participated in any activities such as meetings, workshops or campaigns informing you about voter registration, voting including why it is important to vote?*

Survey findings show that Malawians rely on a variety of sources for voter education. The Malawi Electoral Commission (MEC) and political parties or candidates emerged as the leading sources, cited by 28% of respondents. Traditional authorities (18%) and radio (15%) followed, highlighting the continuing importance of community leadership and accessible media platforms in delivering electoral messages. Informal networks also played a role, with family and friends (8%) and religious leaders (6%). Newer communication channels, such as social media (5%), are beginning to feature but remain less prominent compared to traditional methods.

A smaller proportion of Malawians reported obtaining voter education from the National Initiative for Civic Education (NICE), civil society organizations (CSOs), or indicated they did not know the source (4%). Overall, these results indicate that while formal institutions remain the most significant providers of voter education, traditional leaders, radio, and community networks are also critical in reaching citizens, with digital platforms gradually emerging as supplementary sources.

Figure 12: Main sources of voter education information



Respondents were asked: *from whom did you receive this information?*

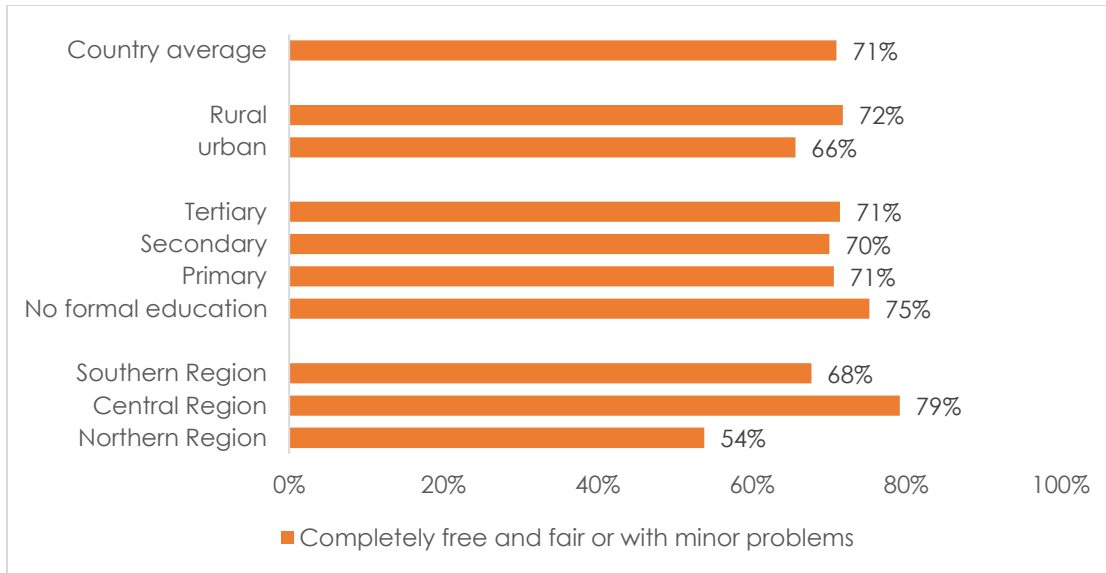
3.3 Confidence in Electoral Integrity and Processes

3.3.1 Expectations of election integrity

Overall, nearly three-fourths (71%) of Malawians expressed confidence that the 2025 election would be completely free and fair, or that it will experience only minor problems. Confidence is higher among rural residents (72%) compared to their urban counterparts (66%), and among those who have not attended any level of education (75%) compared to those with secondary (70%) or post-secondary education (71%). Additionally, residents of the central region (79%) have more confidence in electoral integrity than those in the southern region (68%), while residents of the northern region (54%) are the least confident.

Compared to the results from the previous survey conducted in July, confidence in elections integrity has increased from 64% to 71%.

Figure 13: Confidence in elections integrity | by location, education, and region

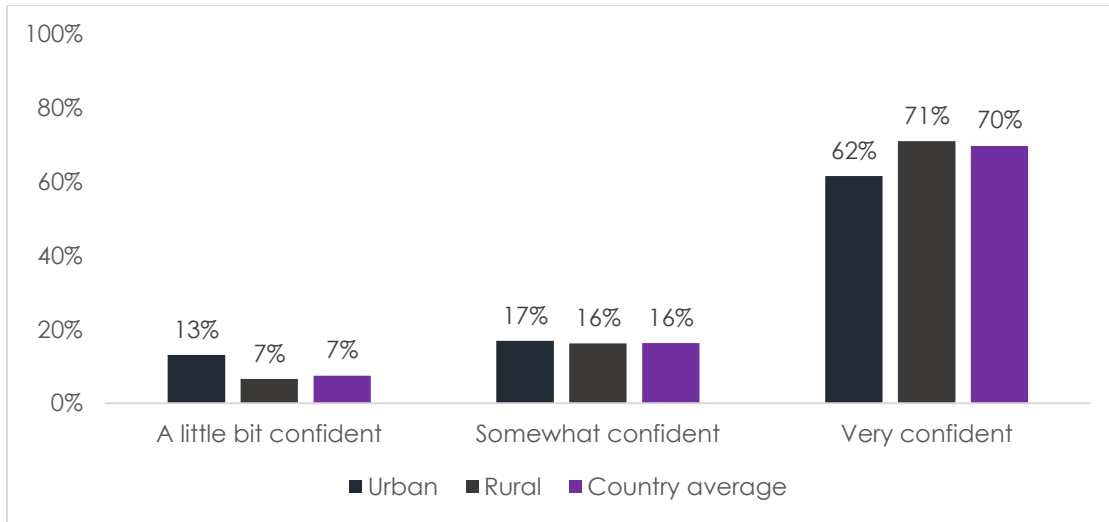


Respondents were asked: Overall, how free and fair do you expect the 2025 general elections to be? Will they be

Regarding confidence in the confidentiality of their vote, most Malawians (70%) believe their vote will remain secret, a third of Malawians still doubt the secrecy of their vote. Confidence in voting confidentiality is lower among urban residents (62%) compared to rural residents (71%). Confidence in vote confidentiality has also slightly improved from 67% in the first survey before the launch of the campaigns to 70% after the launch of the campaigns.

Confidence in the secrecy of the ballot is a cornerstone of free and fair elections. Without it, citizens may fear intimidation, or pressure, undermining their willingness to vote honestly. While the survey reveals high level of confidence in vote confidentiality, significant proportion of Malawians remains skeptical. This calls upon all stake holders to intensify voter education campaigns assuring voters of the secrecy of their vote.

Figure 14: Confidence in the secrecy of the vote | by rural-urban residency

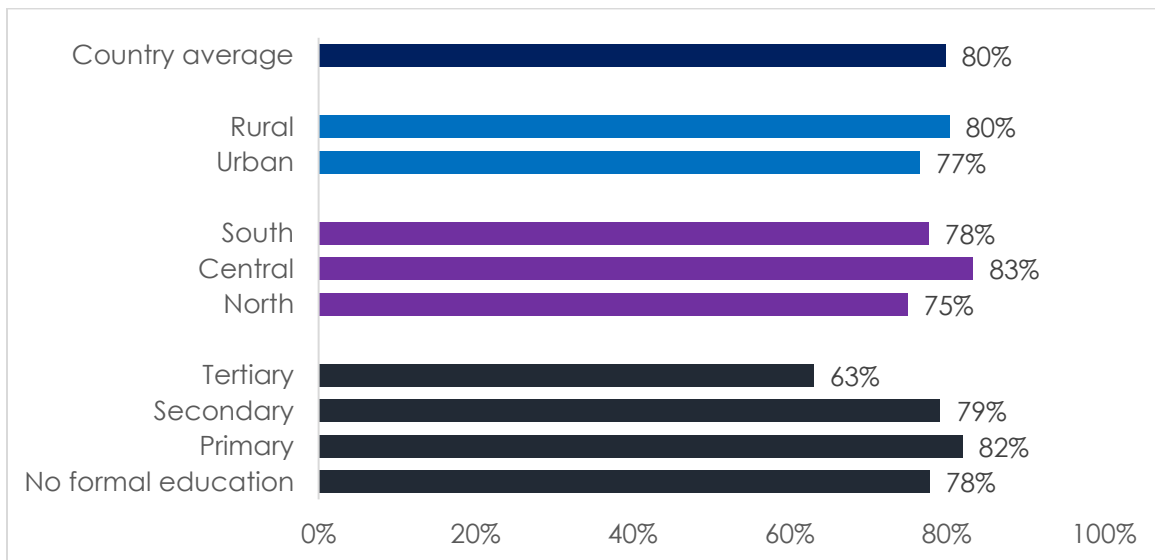


Respondents were asked: *How confident are you that your vote will be secret?*

About 80% of Malawians express confidence in the Malawi Electoral Commission (MEC), believing that the announced results will accurately reflect the outcome of their votes. Trust is notably higher among rural residents (80%) compared to urban residents, and among those who completed primary education (82%) compared to those with post-secondary (tertiary) education (63%).

Furthermore, confidence in the validity of the results announced by the MEC is greater in the central region (83%) than in the southern (78%) and northern regions (75%).

Figure 15: Trust in the validity of Presidential election results | by location, region, education



Note: the figure displays the percentage of those who have trust

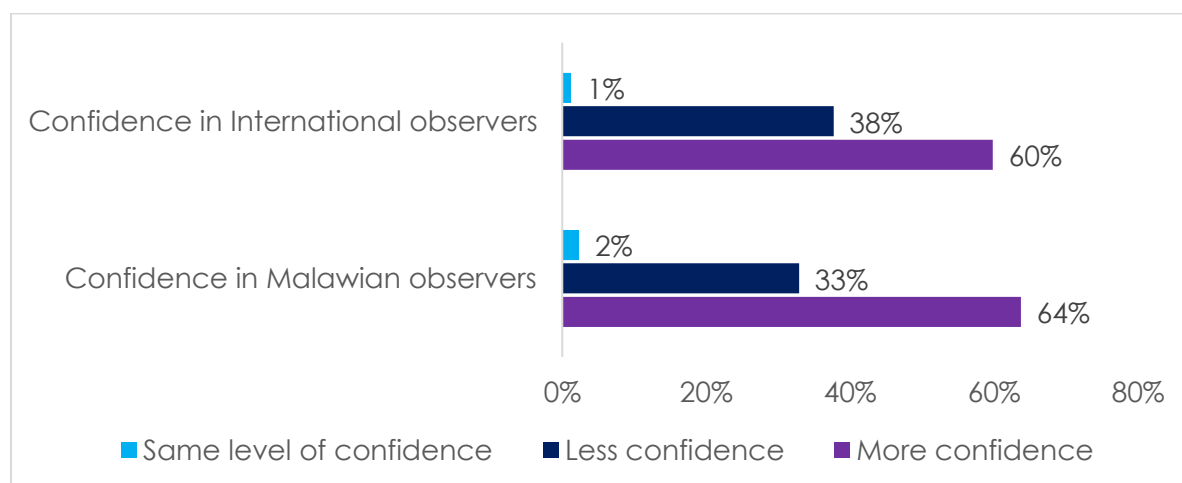
Respondents were asked: Do you trust that the presidential election results that will be announced by the MEC will be correct and reflect the ballots cast?

3.3.2 Role of election observers

Figure 16 below illustrates that both Malawian and international observers are considered important for enhancing public confidence in election results, although there are slight differences in perception.

A majority of respondents indicated they would feel more confident if observers were present, with 64% supporting Malawian observers and 60% supporting international observers. This suggests that Malawian observers inspire slightly more trust than their international counterparts. Conversely, a third of Malawians expressed that the presence of observers would decrease their confidence: 33% for Malawian observers and a higher 38% for international observers. This indicates that while international observers are valued, some citizens may be more skeptical of their role compared to local observers. Very few respondents felt that observers would have no impact on their confidence levels, with only 2% for Malawian observers and 1% for international observers.

Figure 16: Public confidence in electoral outcomes due to presence of observers



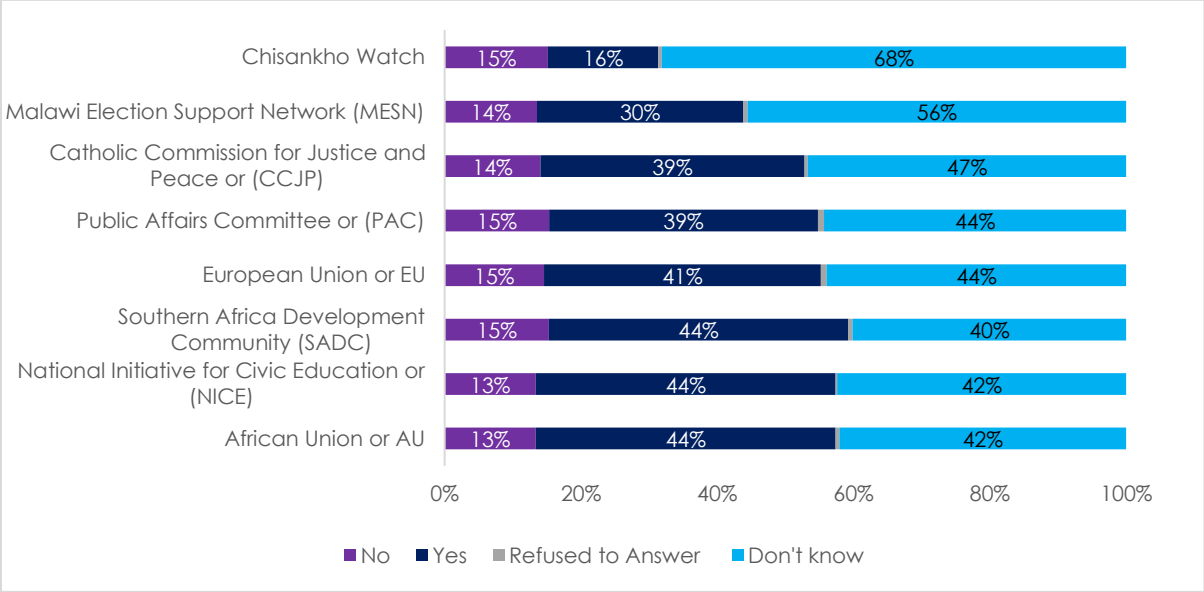
Respondents were asked: Would the presence of international observers make you feel more or less confident about the results of the forthcoming general elections?

Figure 17 below illustrates that, overall, Malawians have more trust in local observers, yet their awareness of these observers is significantly lower compared to international ones. Among local observers, the National Initiative for Civic Education (NICE) stands out as the most recognized (58%) and trusted (44%) organization perceived as independent and nonpartisan by Malawians. This is followed by the Public Affairs Committee (PAC) with 56% recognition and 39% trust, and the Catholic Commission for Justice and Peace

(CCJP) with 53% known and 39% trusted. In contrast, Chisankho Watch and the Malawi Election Support Network are unknown to 68% and 56% of Malawians, respectively.

Regarding international organizations, the Southern Africa Development Community (SADC) is the most recognized (60% known) and trusted (44%) as independent and nonpartisan. This is followed by the African Union (58% known vs. 44% trusted) and finally the European Union (EU) with 56% recognition and 41% trust.

Figure 17: Trust in election observer organizations (CSOs & international)



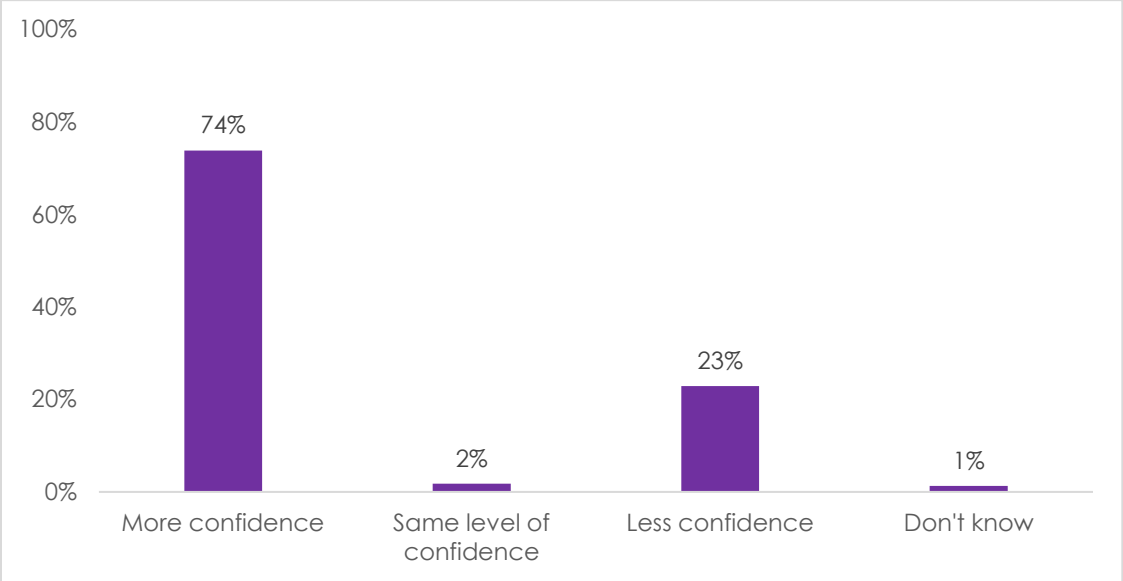
Respondents were asked: Some Malawian Civil society organizations and international organizations are preparing to observe the 2025 general elections. I am going to read to you a list of some of these organizations. For each organization, please, tell me whether you trust them to be independent, impartial and nonpartisan. If you do not know the organization, you can just say so.

Figure 18 below indicate that the majority of Malawians view civil society involvement in independently verifying presidential election results to strengthen trust in the electoral process. Specifically, 74% of respondents reported that such an initiative would give them more confidence in the results announced by the Malawi Electoral Commission (MEC). This demonstrates strong public demand for additional oversight and transparency beyond the official processes.

By contrast, only 2% said it would make no difference, suggesting that nearly all respondents see value in civil society verification. However, a significant minority, 23%, indicated that such a measure would give them less confidence, possibly reflecting mistrust of civil society organizations or concerns about conflicting narratives.

Overall, the findings highlight that civil society verification of election results could play a critical role in enhancing electoral credibility, though attention should be given to addressing skepticism among a notable minority of citizens.

Figure 18: Impact of independent CSO verification on confidence in MEC results



Respondents were asked: If a Malawian Civil Society Organization conducts a study to independently check to make sure the official results for the presidential election are correct and reflect the ballots cast would this give you a lot or less confidence in the results announced by the MEC?

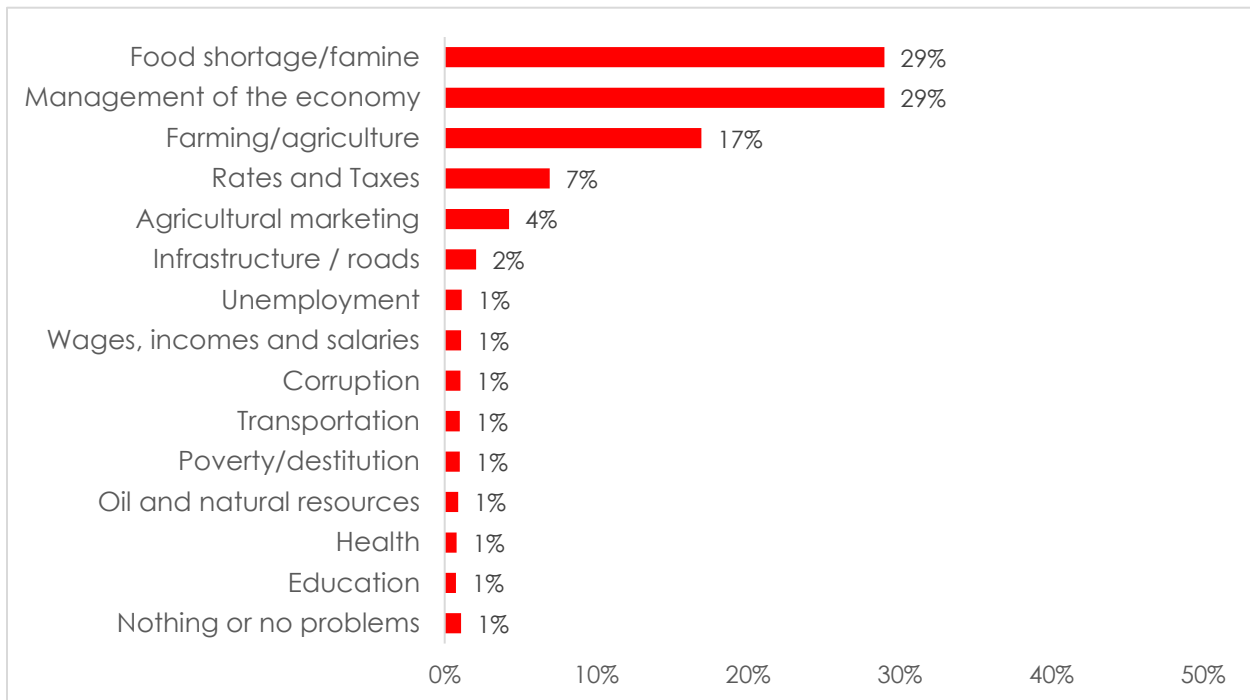
3.4 Voter Priorities and Influences of voting choice

Understanding voter priorities is vital for crafting policies and manifestos that align with citizens' needs. For political parties, tailoring campaign messages to address voter concerns can boost their appeal and attract more votes. Similarly, for the government, identifying and tackling pressing national challenges is essential to meet public expectations.

Malawians have identified food shortages (29%) and economic management (29%) as the top priorities for the government following the 2025 general elections. Other key concerns include agriculture (17%) and taxes and rates (7%) (Figure 19).

These findings highlight Malawi's ongoing struggle to meet its citizens' basic needs. Economic mismanagement, marked by high commodity prices, dwindling foreign exchange reserves, and unreliable fuel supplies, remains a significant challenge.

Figure 19: Popular priorities for government to address after the elections



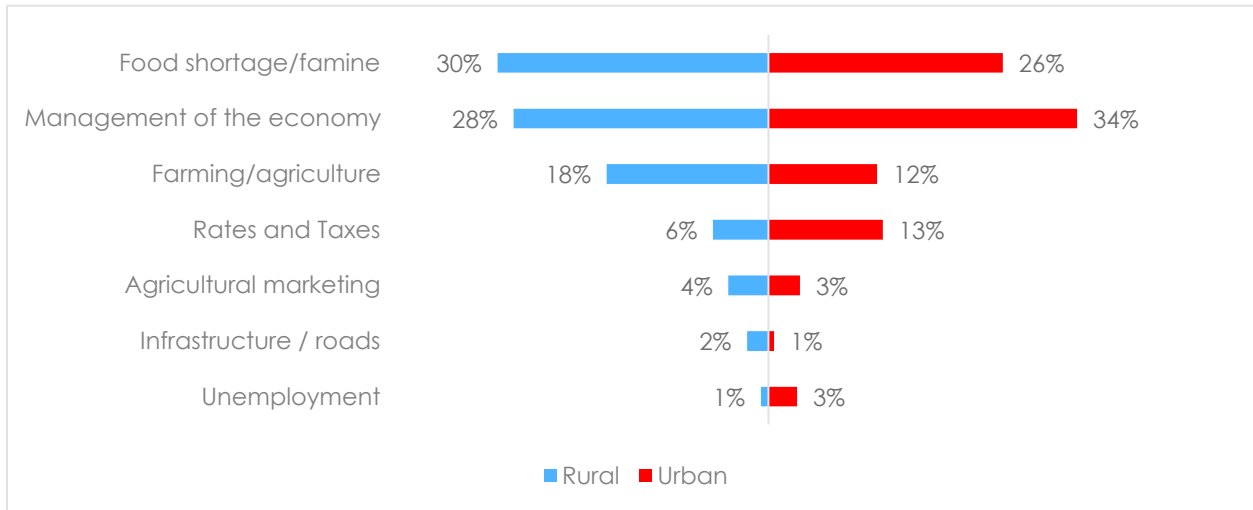
Respondents were asked: *In your opinion, what is the most important problem facing this country that the government should address after the 2025 elections? If respondent offers more than one answer options, ask "Which of these is the most important?"*

At the lower end of the spectrum, issues like roads (2%), corruption (1%), unemployment (1%), education (1%), and health are seen as less urgent. However, this does not diminish their importance; rather, they are overshadowed by the pressing need to address food insecurity.

The emphasis on food security aligns with Abraham Maslow's hierarchy of needs, which posits that basic physiological requirements, such as food, must be met before addressing higher-order needs. Consequently, the government should prioritize policies that tackle fundamental necessities like food security to lay the foundation for addressing other development challenges.

Analysis by location reveals distinct priorities: urban residents focus on economic management, while rural residents prioritize food security and agriculture. Specifically, 30% of rural residents prioritize food security compared to 26% of urban residents, while 34% of urban residents emphasize economic management compared to 28% of rural residents (Figure 20). Additionally, 18% of rural residents prioritize agriculture, compared to 12% of urban residents.

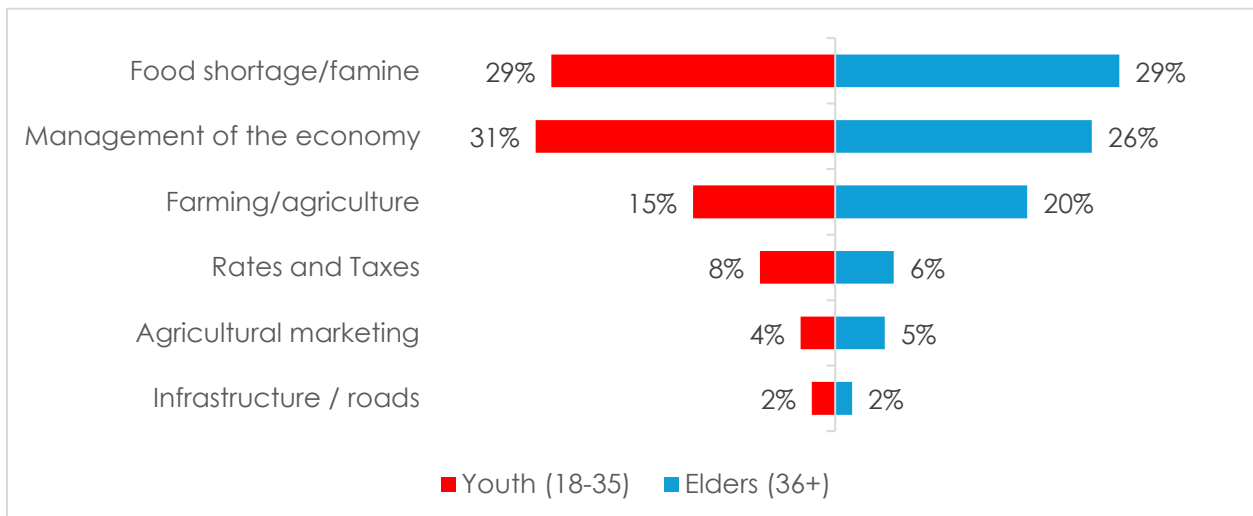
Figure 20: Popular priorities | by urban-rural residency



Respondents were asked: *In your opinion, what is the most important problem facing this country that the government should address after the 2025 elections? If respondent offers more than one answer options, ask "Which of these is the most important?"*

Similarly, younger Malawians focus more on economic management, whereas older generations prioritize agriculture (Figure 21). 31% of youth prioritize economic management compared to 26% of elders. While 20% of elders prioritize agriculture compared to 15% of youth.

Figure 21: Popular priorities | by age



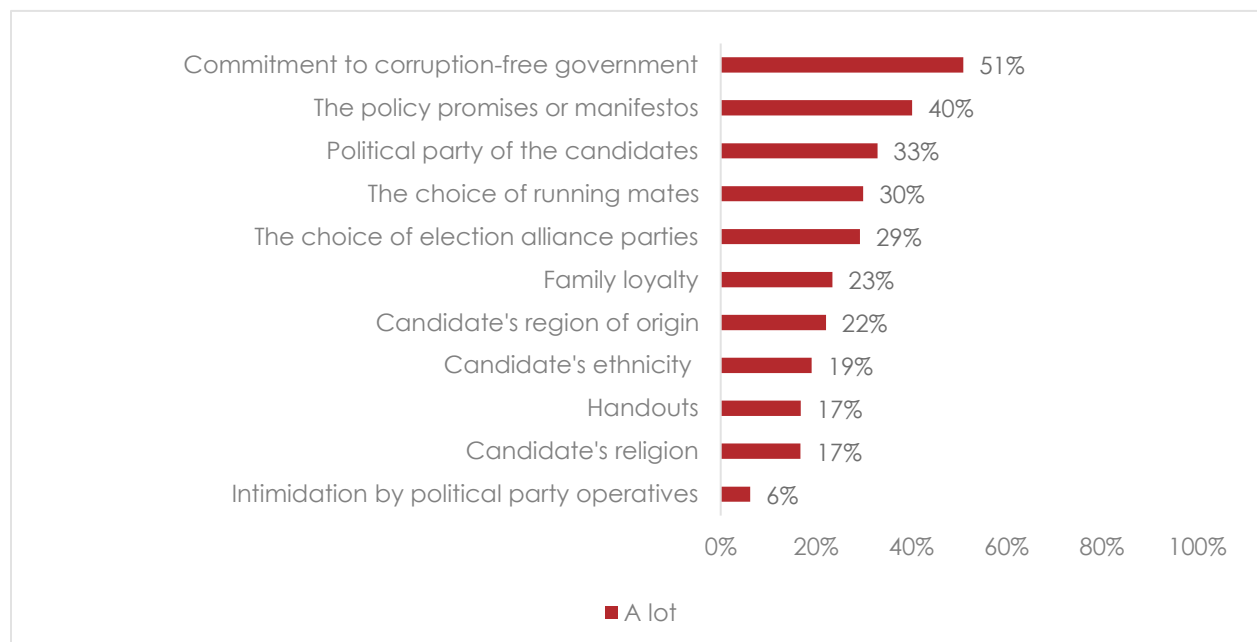
Respondents were asked: *In your opinion, what is the most important problem facing this country that the government should address after the 2025 elections? If respondent offers more than one answer options, ask "Which of these is the most important?"*

3.4.1 Key influences on voting choices

Voters will primarily base their choices on candidates' commitment to ending government corruption (51%) and party policy promises or manifestos (40%) (Figure 22). While party affiliation (33%) and the choice of running mates (30%) are also significant, they are secondary to anti-corruption efforts and policy commitments.

Region of origin of candidates (22%), Family loyalty (23%), ethnicity (19%), and religion (17%) of candidates have relatively low influence, indicating a shift away from identity-based voting. Handouts do not guarantee votes; however, 17% of voters may still be lobbied with them.

Figure 22 Perceived influences of voting choice



Respondents were asked: *Let's talk about your vote in the 2025 general elections. Please tell me how much your choice of presidential candidate as a voter will be influenced by:*

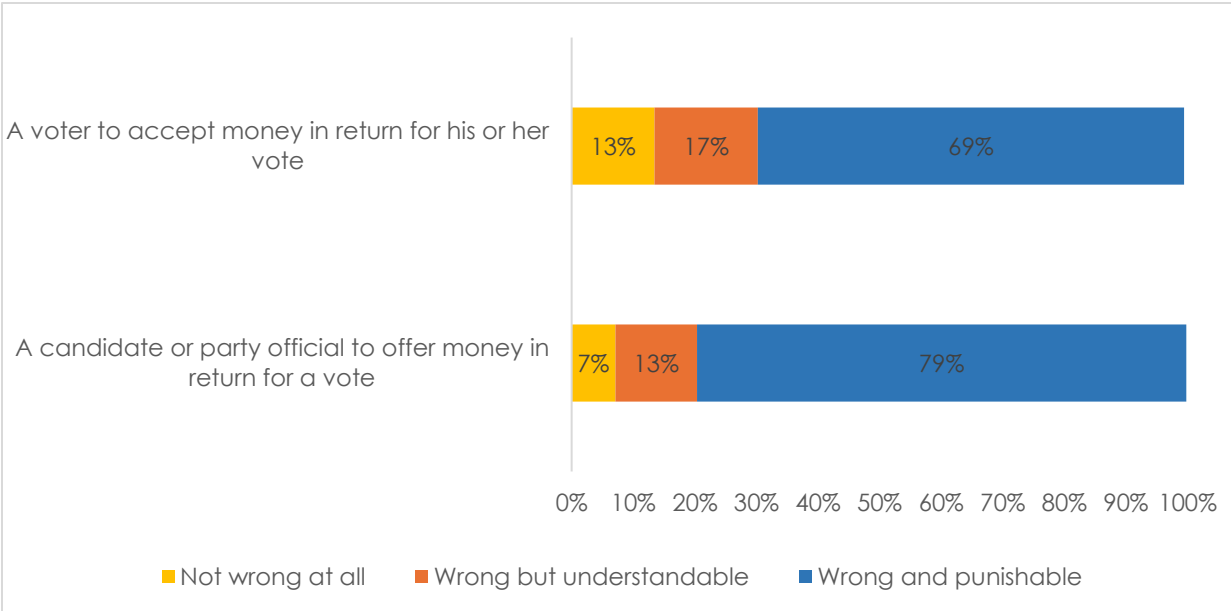
3.4.2 Views on campaign handouts

Section 41 of the Political Parties Act, 2018, in Malawi prohibits any person from offering, giving, or receiving handouts during political campaigns. Handouts are defined broadly to include cash, gifts, food, clothing, and any items given with the intention of influencing political support. Violating this provision can result in penalties, including fines and possible imprisonment.

In this context, the survey aimed to understand public attitudes toward the giving and receiving of money or gifts in exchange for votes. The results, shown in figure 23, reveal that a strong majority of Malawians disapprove of these practices, with 79% stating that political candidates or party officials who offer handouts should be punished. A slightly lower, yet still significant percentage (69%) believe that voters who accept such incentives also deserve punishment.

Interestingly, some Malawians adopted a more lenient stance, with 17% feeling that while it is wrong for voters to accept money, it is nevertheless understandable, and 13% expressing the same view toward candidates. These findings suggest that although both actions are broadly condemned, citizens place greater responsibility and accountability on political aspirants than on voters.

Figure 23: Citizens’ opinion about campaign handouts



Respondents were asked: *In some places in Malawi, candidates for political office or people from political parties sometimes offer money or gifts to voters in return for their vote. Do you think it is not wrong at all, wrong but understandable, or wrong and punishable for:*

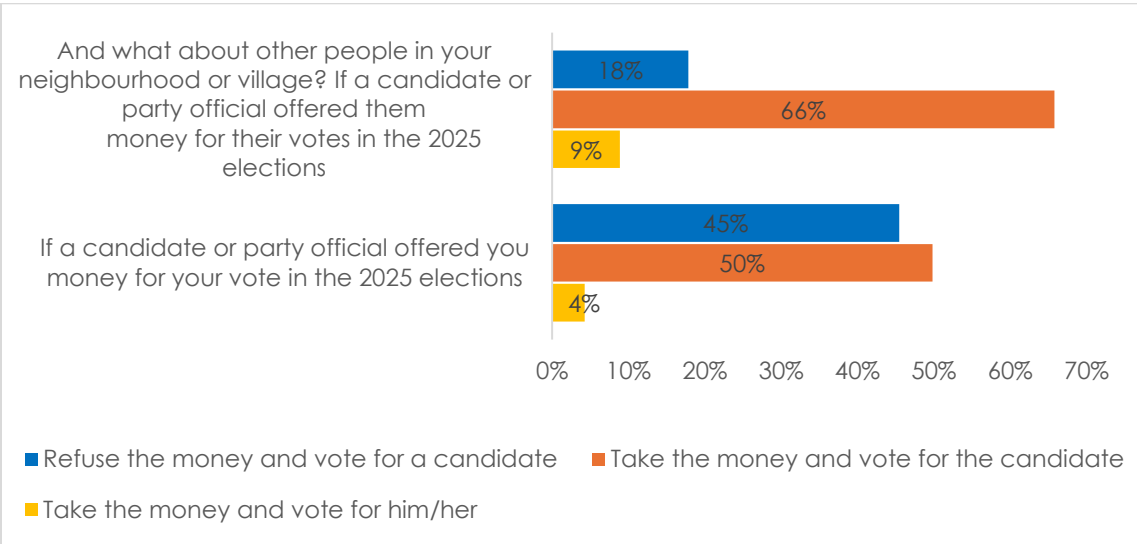
When asked how they would respond if political party officials or aspirants offered them money in exchange for their votes, the survey results in Figure 24 suggest that most Malawians value their freedom of choice over financial incentives. Nearly 45% of Malawians said they would refuse the money and still vote for their preferred candidate, demonstrating strong resistance to vote buying.

Another 47% indicated they would accept the money but still vote independently, suggesting that, for many, handouts do not actually influence their electoral decisions.

Only a small proportion (4%) admitted they would accept the money and vote for the candidate providing it. However, perceptions of others' behavior differ from self-reported attitudes.

When asked what they believed their neighbors would do, the majority (66%) felt others would take the money but still vote according to their preference, while 18% thought neighbors would refuse the money and vote independently, and 9% believed others would take the money and vote as instructed. These findings highlight a consistent pattern in which Malawians portray themselves as more resistant to vote buying than they perceive their communities to be

Figure 24: Personal and neighbor’s acceptance of a campaign handout

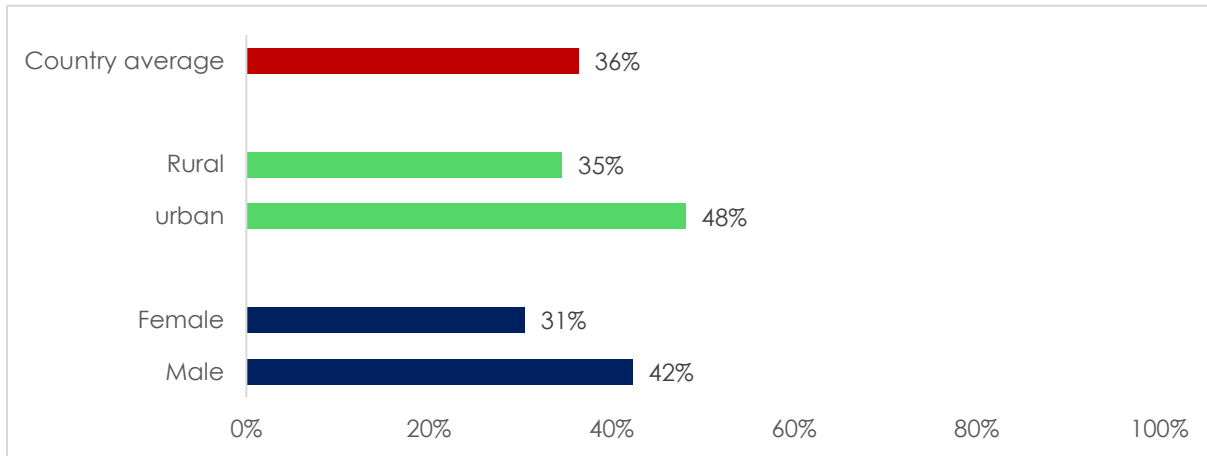


Respondents were asked: *If a candidate or party official offered you money for your vote in the 2025 elections, would you: And what about other people in your neighborhood or village? If a candidate or party official offered them money for their votes in the 2025 elections, would they:*

3.4.3 Awareness and Importance of election manifestos

More than one-third (36%) of Malawians have read or seen election manifestos from at least one political party or presidential candidate (Figure 25). Access to these manifestos varies by location and gender. Specifically, 48% of urban residents have read or seen a manifesto, compared to 35% of rural residents. Similarly, 42% of men have engaged with manifestos, compared to 31% of women. However, these figures may be inflated, as some respondents might have confused reading or seeing a manifesto with hearing about it, despite interviewers' emphasis on visual exposure rather than auditory sources like rallies or radio.

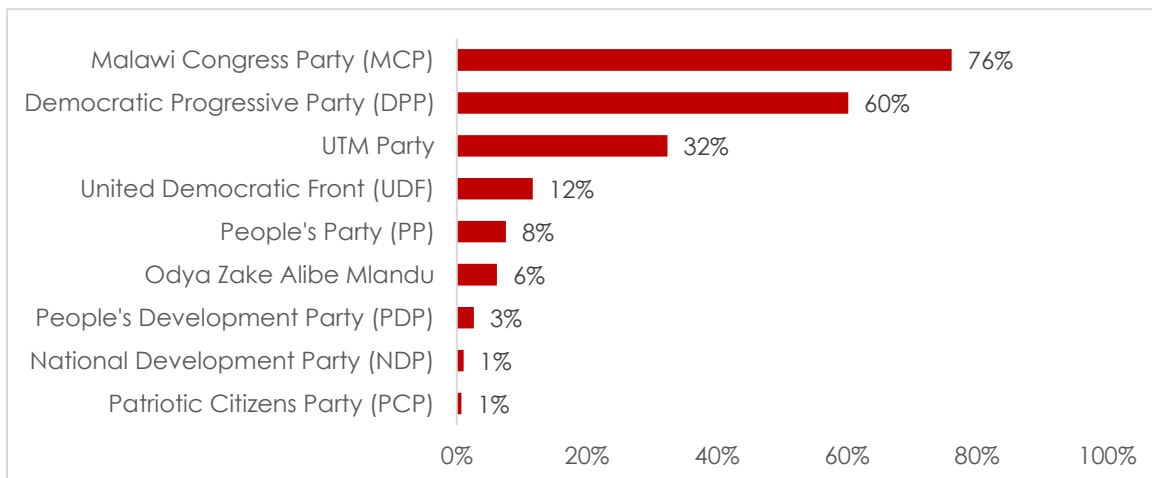
Figure 25: Access to election manifestos | by demographic group



Respondents were asked: Have you seen or read any election manifesto for the 2025 general elections? (% who have read or seen any election manifesto)

Among Malawians who have read or seen a campaign manifesto, 76% have engaged with the Malawi Congress Party's manifesto, 60% with the Democratic Progressive Party's, 32% with the UTM Party's, 12% with the United Democratic Front's (UDF), 6% with Odyza Zake Alibe Mulandu's, 3% with the People's Development Party's (PDP), and 1% each with the National Development Party's (NDP) and Patriotic Citizens Party's (PCP) (Figure 26).

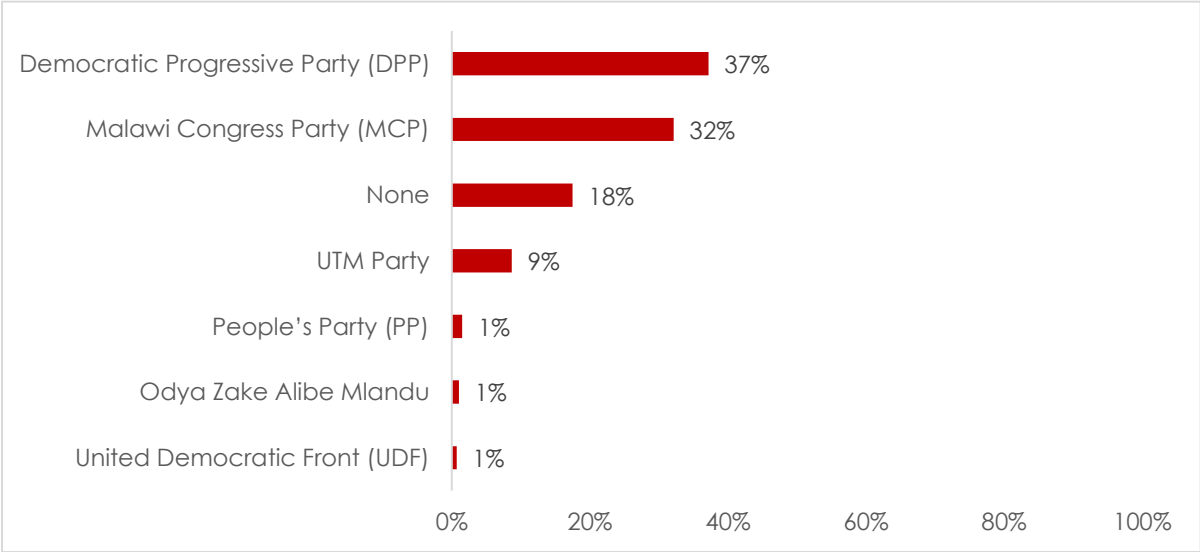
Figure 26: Most accessible campaign manifesto



Respondents were asked: Which political party's or candidate's manifesto have you seen or read? ((was asked only those who have read or seen any party manifesto))

When asked which campaign manifesto they find most realistic, over one-third (37%) of Malawians who have read or seen any manifesto cite the Democratic Progressive Party's manifesto as the most realistic (Figure 27). The Malawi Congress Party (MCP) follows closely with 32%, while the UTM Party receives 9%. Notably, 18% of respondents believe that no party or candidate has a realistic manifesto. This may indicate a loss of trust or hope among citizens regarding the ability of parties or candidates to fulfill their promises.

Figure 27: The most realistic manifesto.

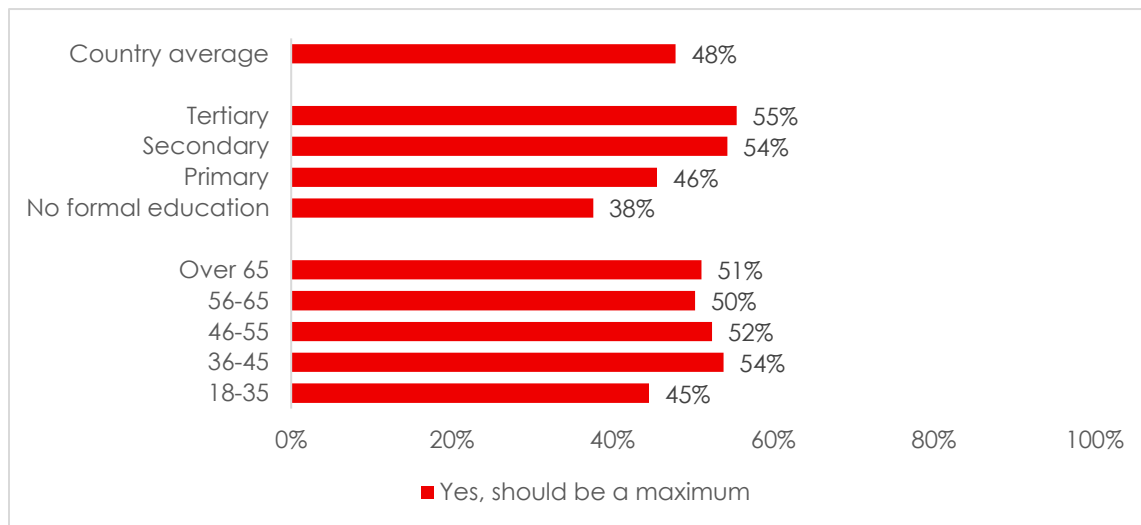


Respondents were asked: Which political party's or candidate's manifesto do you think has the most realistic promises? (was asked only those who have read or seen any party manifesto)

3.4.4 Views on age limit for presidential candidates

During the past year, there were proposals to pass a wage bill that would establish a maximum age beyond which individuals would not be allowed to run for the office of the President of the Republic of Malawi. However, as shown in Figure 28, less than half of Malawians support imposing a maximum age for presidential candidates. Approval for this age limit is highest among those with tertiary education (55%) and secondary education (54%), compared to those without any formal education (38%). Surprisingly, the youth (45%) also show less support for a maximum age limit compared to older individuals.

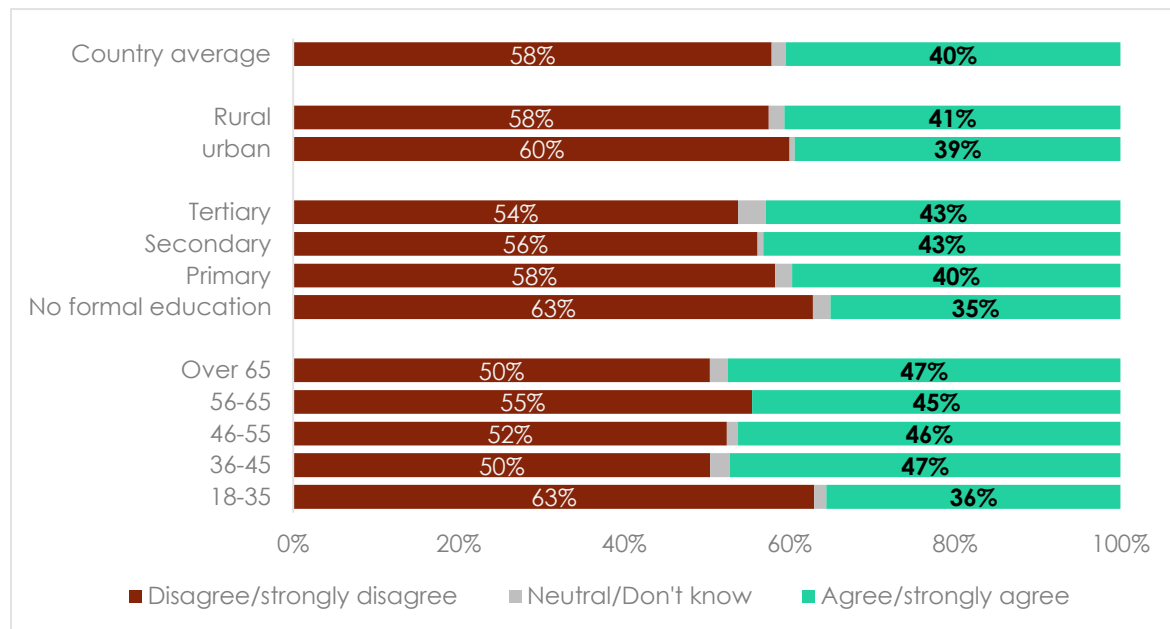
Figure 28: Views on maximum age limit for presidential candidate (% who said yes to maximum age limit)



Respondents were asked: *In your opinion, should there be a maximum age for candidates for presidential candidates?*

A majority of Malawians (58%) disagree with the notion that former president Peter Mutharika, the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) candidate, should be barred from running in the upcoming elections due to his advanced age (Figure 29). This sentiment is consistent across rural (58%) and urban (60%) residents. However, opposition to barring Mutharika is stronger among the youth (63%) and those with no formal education (63%) compared to older individuals (52%) and those with tertiary education (54%).

Figure 29: Concerns over former president, Peter Mutharika's age | by demographic group



Respondents were asked: Some people have expressed concerns that former president, Peter Mutharika, who is candidate for the Democratic Progressive Party or DPP, should not be standing as a candidate in the forthcoming elections because of his advanced age. How about you, do you agree or disagree with those who say the former president, Peter Mutharika, should not stand in the forthcoming elections because of his advanced age?

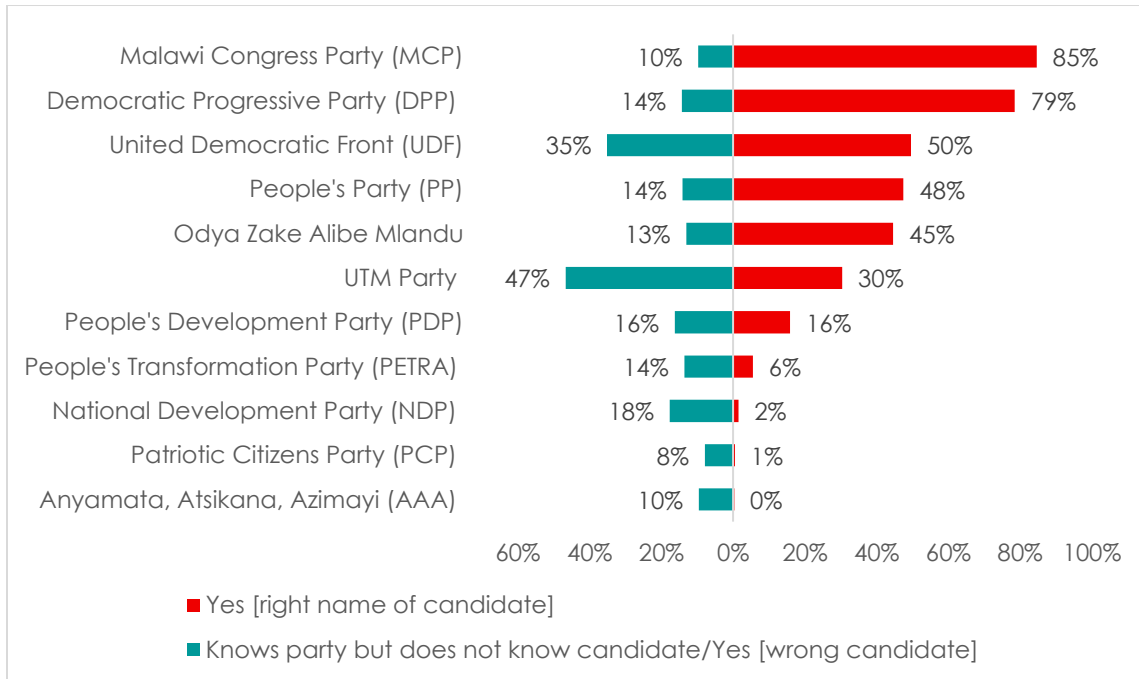
3.5 Assessment of presidential candidates and their running mates

3.5.1 Recognizability of various presidential candidates

The survey assessed the recognizability of presidential candidates for Malawi's 2025 general elections, with results presented in Figure 30. President Lazarus Chakwera leads as the most recognized candidate, known by 85% of Malawians, followed closely by former President Peter Mutharika at 79%. Atupele Muluzi of the United Democratic Front (UDF) is recognized by 50% of respondents, while Joyce Banda of the People's Party (PP) is known by 48%. Michael Usi of Odyza Zake Alibe Mlandu follows with 45% recognition, Dalitso Kabambe of the United Transformation Movement (UTM) with 30%, and Kondwani Nankhumwa of the People's Development Party (PDP) with 6%.

Interestingly, some political parties enjoy greater recognition than their candidates. The UTM party is familiar to 47% of Malawians, surpassing the recognition of its candidate, Dalitso Kabambe. Similarly, a significant portion of Malawians are familiar with the UDF party but not its candidate, Atupele Muluzi

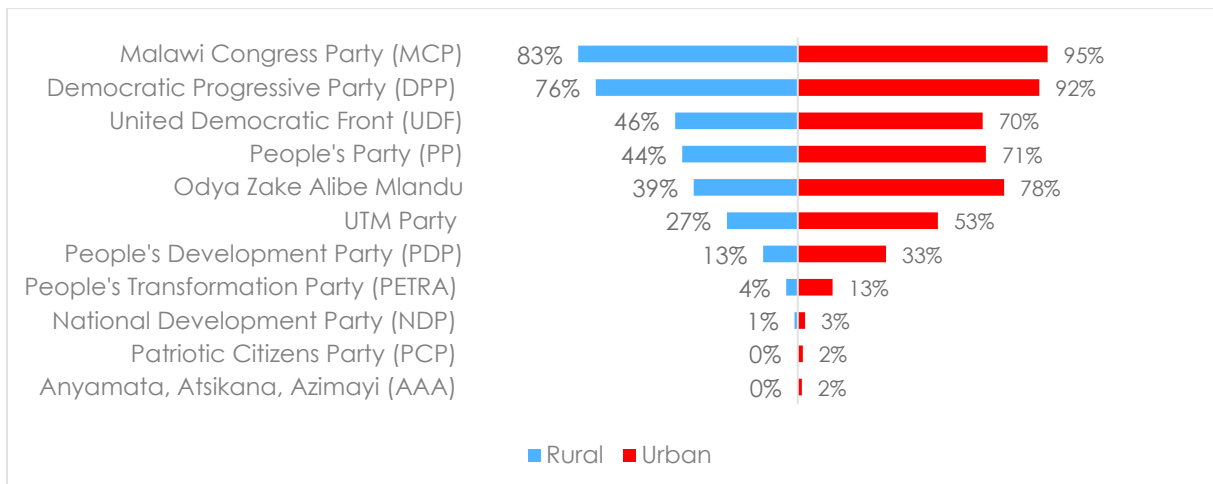
Figure 30: Awareness of presidential candidates for various parties



Respondents were asked: Now I am going to read out to you a list of some of the political parties that will field presidential candidates in the forthcoming general elections. When I read the name of a political party, please tell me whether you know the party and the name of the party's presidential candidate or not

An analysis of presidential candidate recognizability by rural-urban residency reveals distinct patterns. President Lazarus Chakwera is more recognized in rural areas (83%) compared to former President Peter Mutharika (76%) (Figure 31). However, their recognition levels are comparable in urban areas. Notably, most presidential candidates enjoy higher recognition in urban areas than in rural areas.

Figure 31: Awareness of presidential candidates for various parties | by urban-rural residency

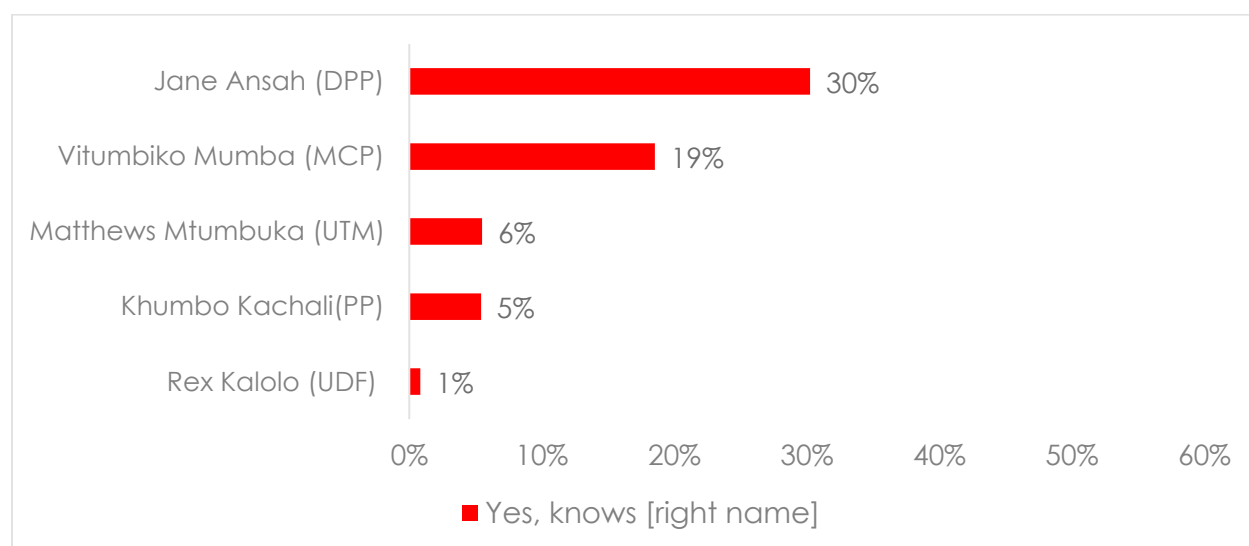


Respondents were asked: Now I am going to read out to you a list of some of the political parties that will field presidential candidates in the forthcoming general elections. When I read the name of a political party, please tell me whether you know the party and the name of the party's presidential candidate or not

3.5.2 Recognizability and favorability of presidential running mates

The survey also assessed recognizability of running mates for various presidential candidates or parties and the results are presented in Figure 32. Jane Ansah of the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) (30%) emerges as the most recognized running mate. She is followed by Vitumbiko Mumba of Malawi Congress Party (MCP) (19%), Matthews Mtumbuka of UTM party (6%), Khumbo Kachali of People's Party (PP) (5%), and Rex Kalolo of United Democratic Front (UDF) (1%).

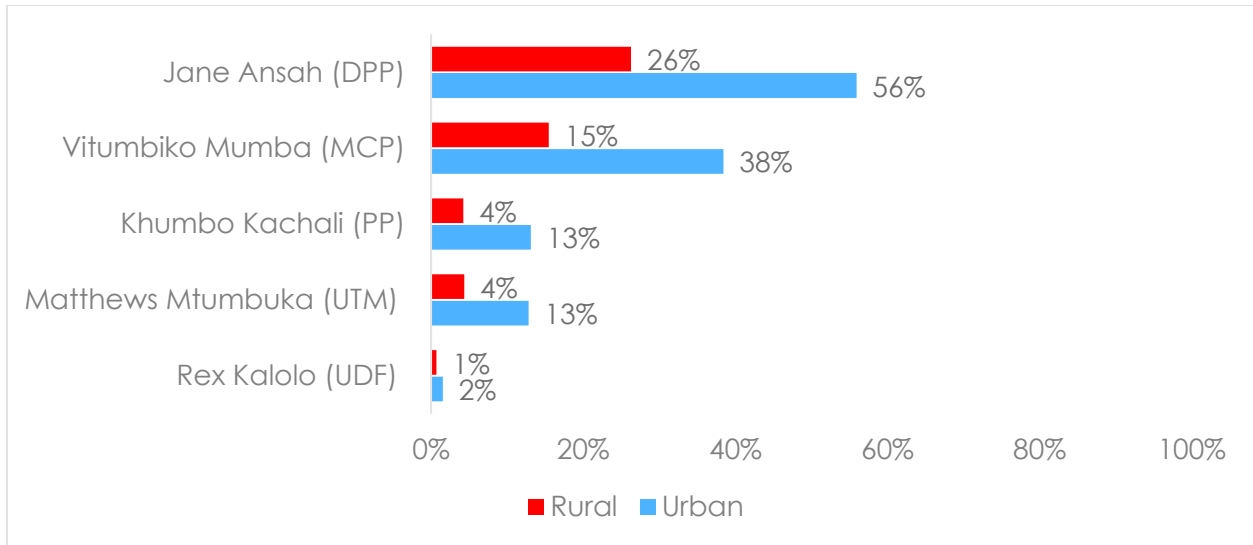
Figure 32: Popular recognition of some running mates



Respondents were asked: I am now going to read out to you a list of the names of presidential candidates and their political parties in the forthcoming general elections. When I read the name of a political party or candidate, please tell me whether you know the name of their running mate or not. If you know their running mate, please, tell me their name. If you do not know the name of running mate, just tell me you do not know

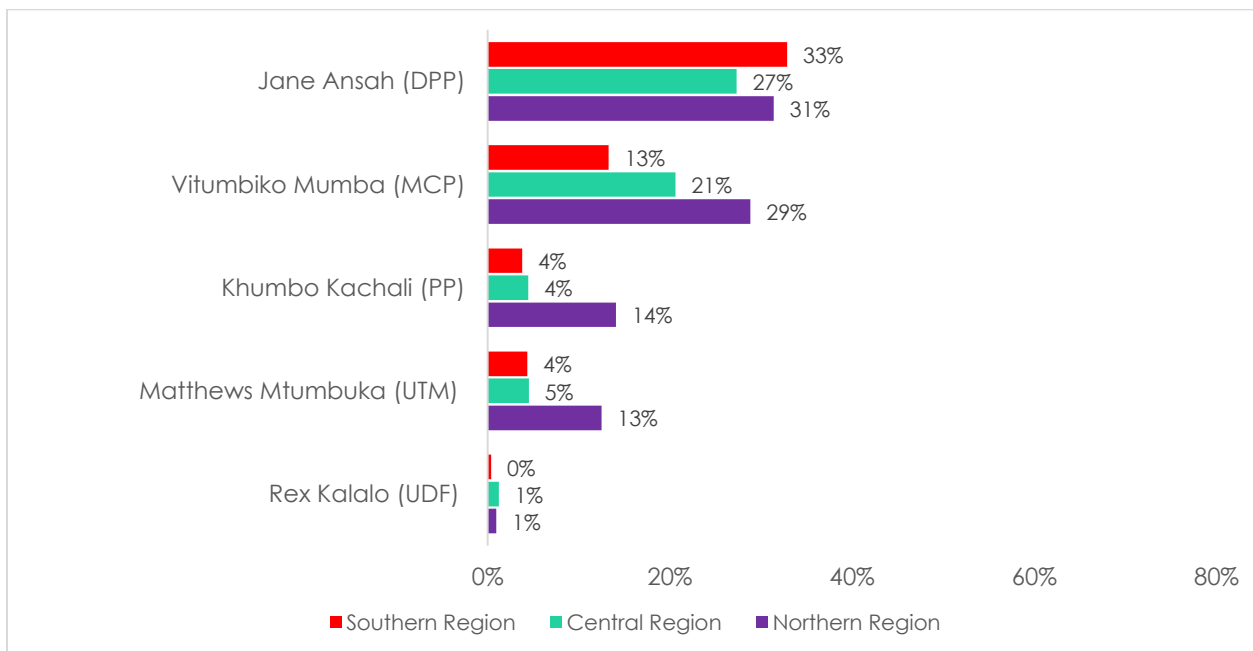
Analysing recognizability of various rural-urban locations, it shows that Jane Ansah is most recognizable running mate both in the rural and urban areas, followed by Vitumbiko Mumba (Figure 33). It is also evident that all running mates are mostly known in urban areas, signaling their lack of visibility in the rural areas. However, even in the urban areas, it is only the DPP running mate, Jane Ansah is recognized by more than half (56%) of Malawians. This may be because she was a public figure in 2019 and 2020 as a chairperson for the Malawi Electoral Commission (MEC) when election results were nullified by court ruling and a re-run was done due to electoral irregularities.

Figure 33: Recognition of running mates | by rural-urban residency



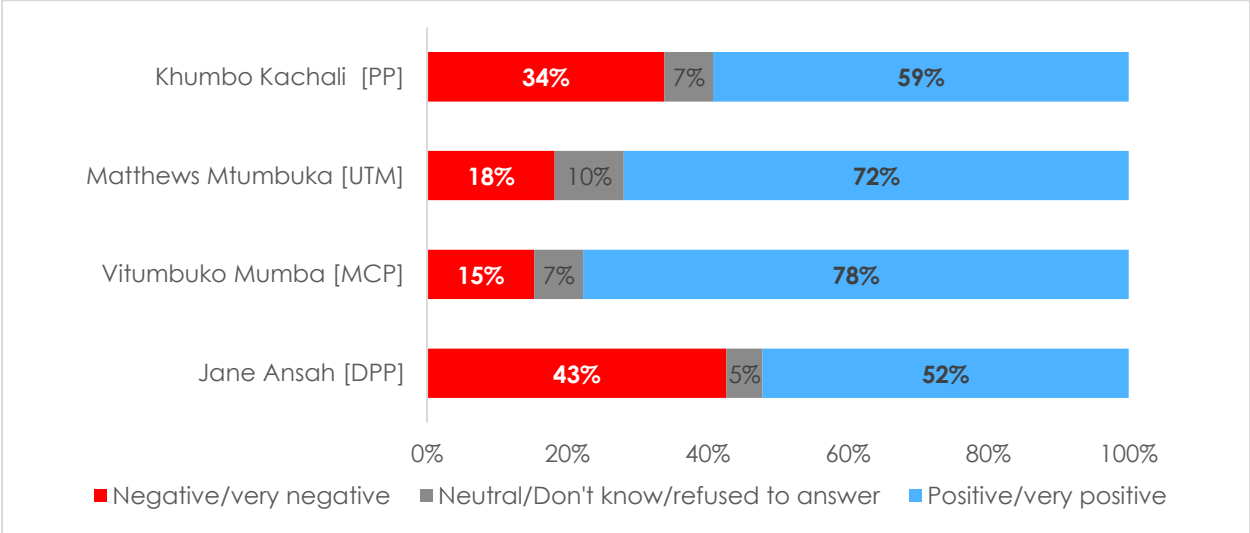
Disaggregating the recognizability of various running mates across regions. It indicates that DPP running mate is recognized fairly across all the three regions of Malawi, North, Central and South and more than other running mates. Vitumbiko Mumba (29%), Khumbo Kachali (14%) and Matthews Mtumbuka (13%) are fairly recognized in their region of origin, the North compared to the central and Southern regions (Figure34).

Figure 34: Recognition of running mates | by region



The survey results, as shown in Figure 35, highlight the favorability of various running mates among those aware of them. While recognition is important, it does not necessarily equate to favorability. Jane Ansah, despite being the most recognized running mate, elicits mixed opinions, with just over half of those aware of her expressing positive views and 43% expressing negative views. In contrast, Vitumbiko Mumba and Matthews Mtumbuka, though less widely known, enjoy stronger favorability. Among those aware of Vitumbiko, 78% speak positively of him, and among those aware of Matthews Mtumbuka, 72% speak positively of him.

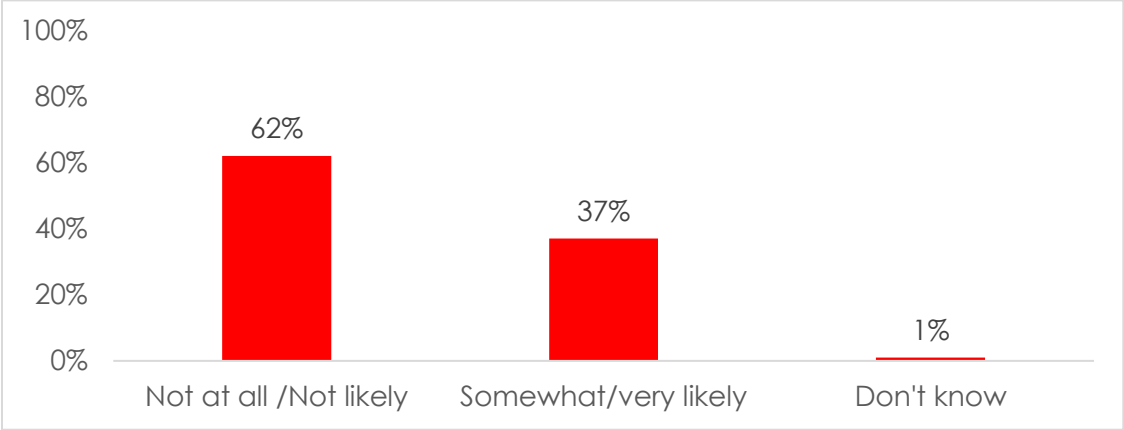
Figure 35: Favorability of various running mates



Only respondents aware of the running mate were asked: Some people have positive views about some of the presidential running mates and others have negative views. I am going to read to you names of some of the presidential running mates in the forthcoming general elections. For each running mate, please, tell me whether you have a positive or negative view about them or do not know enough about them to say. If you do not know the running mate, you can say so

However, it is important to note that 62% of Malawians say they would not change their vote even if the presidential candidate chose a running mate they do not agree with (Figure 36). This suggests that while running mates can influence perceptions and, to some extent, voting decisions, the choice of presidential candidate remains the dominant factor shaping voter preferences.

Figure 36: Likelihood of changing vote if respondent disapproves of choice of running mate



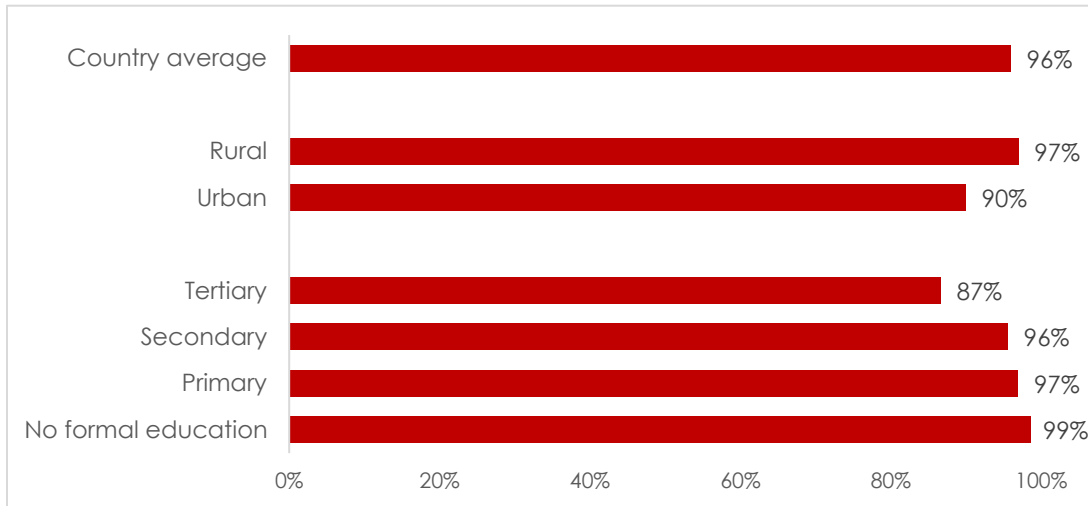
Respondents were asked: *If your preferred presidential candidate chose a running mate you disagree with, how likely is it to change your vote*

3.6 Voter Intentions ahead of 2025 general elections

3.6.1 Enthusiasm to vote in the upcoming 2025 general elections

To assess Malawians' intentions to vote in the 2025 elections, the survey first measured their enthusiasm to turn out on election day. As shown in Figure 37, enthusiasm is overwhelmingly high, with 96% of registered voters indicating they intend to cast their ballot. When disaggregated by rural-urban location, turnout enthusiasm remains strong among both rural (97%) and urban (90%) residents, with rural voters slightly more likely to participate. A similar trend emerges across education levels: while enthusiasm is high across the board, registered voters with tertiary education (87%) are less likely to say they will vote compared to those with primary education (97%) or no formal education (99%).

Figure 37: Likelihood of voting in 2025 elections | by location, education

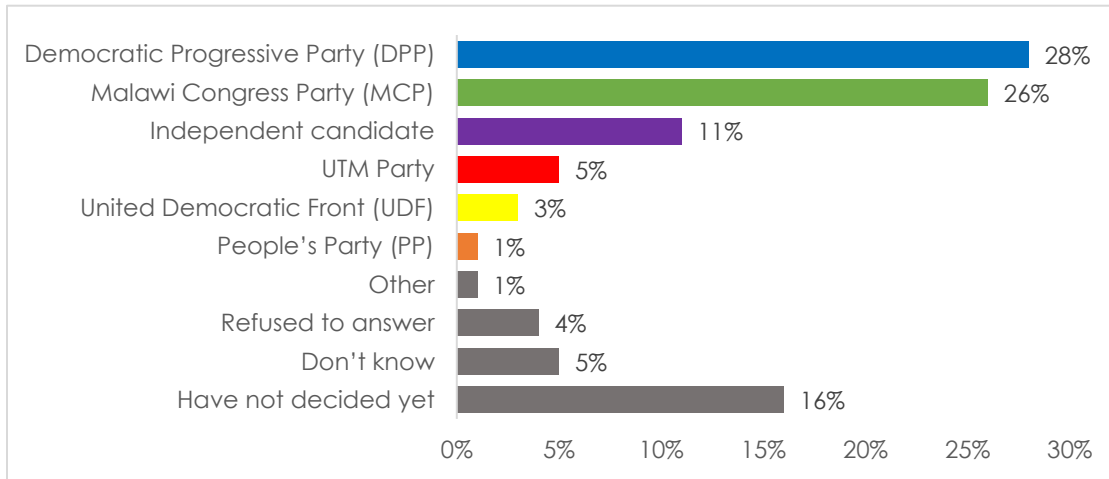


Only respondents who registered to vote were asked: How likely are you to vote in the 2025 elections?

3.6.2 Voters' choice of local government councilor

Assessing voters' potential choice of party-affiliated local government councillors in the upcoming elections, results in Figure 38 show that 28% of registered voters would choose a Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) candidate, followed closely by 26% who would vote for a Malawi Congress Party (MCP) candidate. Smaller shares indicate support for other parties, with 5% favoring a UTM councillor, 3% a United Democratic Front (UDF) candidate, and 1% a People's Party (PP) candidate. Notably, 11% of voters say they would prefer an independent candidate, while 16% remain undecided about their choice of councilor.

Figure 38: Voters' choice of party's local government councilor

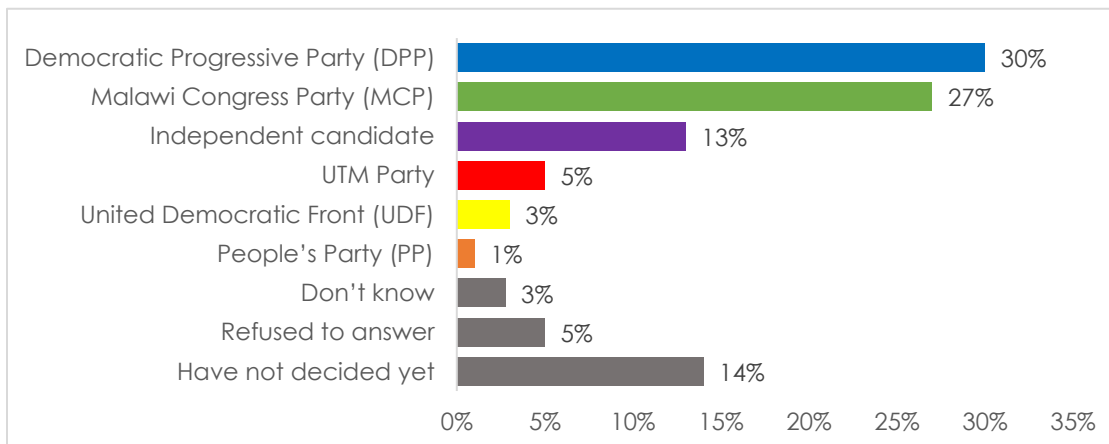


Only respondents who are registered and indicated that they will vote were asked: Looking forward to the 2025 general elections, which party's local government candidate are you likely to vote for?

3.6.3 Voters' choice for party's parliamentary candidate ahead of 2025 elections

Similarly, when asked which party's member of parliament they would vote for in the upcoming elections, 30% of registered voters indicated support for a Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) candidate, followed closely by 27% for a Malawi Congress Party (MCP) candidate (Figure 39). Support for other parties is smaller, with 5% favoring a UTM candidate, 3% a United Democratic Front (UDF) candidate, and 1% a People's Party (PP) candidate. Notably, 13% of voters say they would prefer an independent candidate, while 14% remain undecided about their choice of parliamentary candidate.

Figure 39: Voters' choice for party's parliamentary candidate



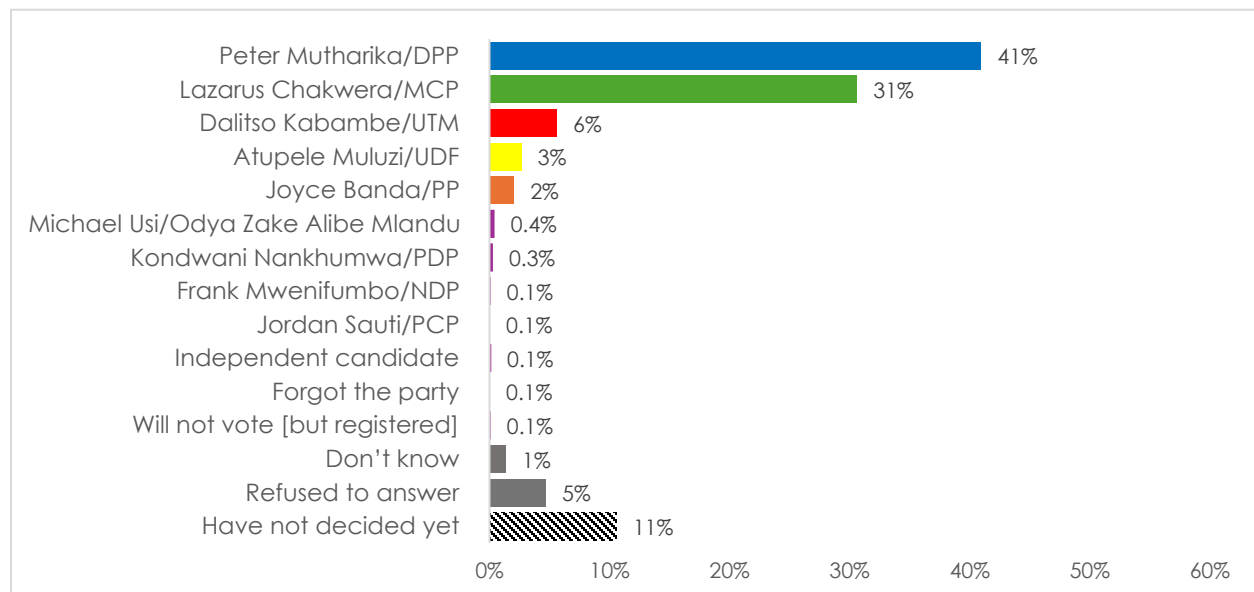
Only respondents who are registered and indicated that they will vote were asked: Looking forward to the 2025 general election, which party's parliamentary candidate are you likely to vote for?

3.6.4 Voters' choice of presidential candidates

Furthermore, regarding the choice of presidential candidate, three to four weeks before the elections, 41% of registered voters indicated they would vote for Peter Mutharika of the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP), followed by incumbent Lazarus Chakwera of the Malawi Congress Party (MCP) at 31% (Figure 40). Dalitso Kabambe of the UTM registered 6%, Atupele Muluzi of the United Democratic Front (UDF) received 3%, and Joyce Banda of the People's Party (PP) received 2%, while other candidates attracted less than 1%.

It is worth noting that 11 % have not yet made up their mind who they will vote for and 5% refused to answer the question. With the decision of a combined 16% of the electorate's decision unknown at this point, there is a possibility of significant changes between now and election day.

Figure 40: Voters' choice of presidential candidates



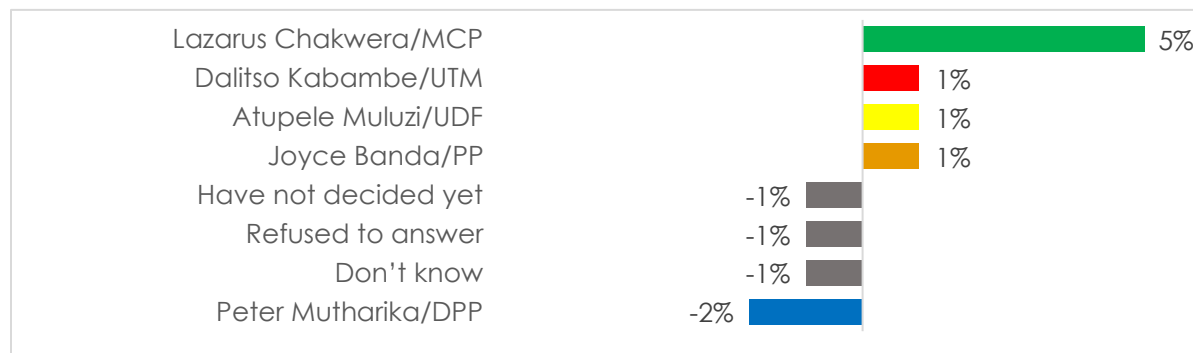
Only respondents who are registered and indicated that they will vote were asked: Thinking about the 2025 general election, which presidential candidate are you likely to vote for?

Compared to pre-campaign levels, Chakwera's support has increased by 5 percentage points, while Mutharika's has dropped by 2 points, suggesting a potential shift in momentum following the campaign launch (Figure 41). The results also shows that the other candidates; Dalitso kabambe, Atupele Muluzi and Joyce Banda have gained 1

percentage point each. However, this change is not significant as it is within the margin of error $\pm 2\%$.

It is also important to note that despite the changes in voting intentions, no candidate meets the 50%+1 majority rule required for a candidate to secure an outright win in the first round. This suggests the possibility of a run-off election between the two leading political parties.

Figure 41: Changes in Voter's choice of presidential candidates before and after campaign launch

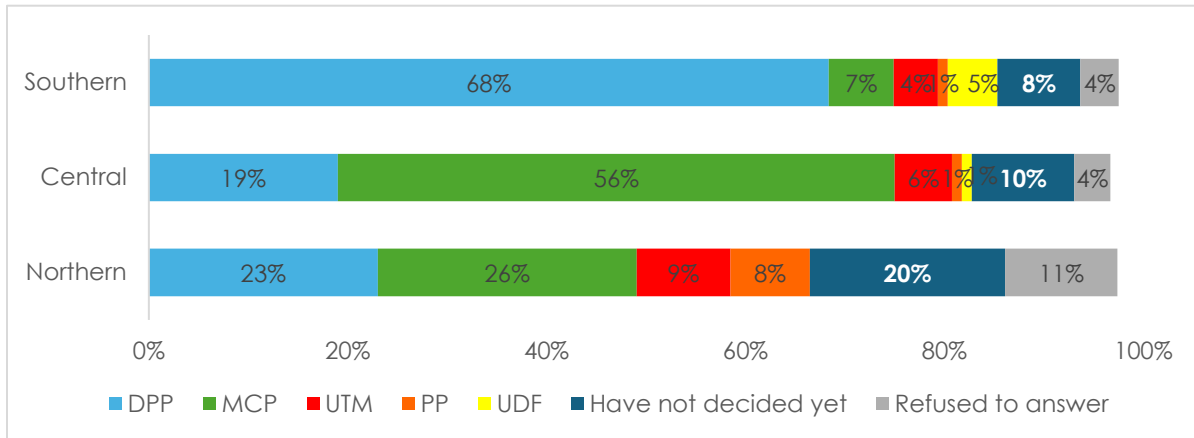


Note: the graph displays the percentage point differences in voters' choices before the launch of election campaign (July) and after campaign launch (August)

The results reveal notable regional differences in voting intentions. As shown in Figure 42, residents of the southern region are more likely to vote for Peter Mutharika (68%), followed by Lazarus Chakwera at 7%. Atupele Muluzi and Dalitso Kabambe receive 5% and 4% respectively. In contrast, Lazarus Chakwera dominates the central region with 56%, followed by Peter Mutharika at 19% and Dalitso Kabambe at 6%. Unlike the southern and central regions, which are dominated by Peter Mutharika and Lazarus Chakwera, respectively, the northern region shows a more balanced distribution of support between the two candidates. Lazarus Chakwera (26%) has slightly more support than Peter Mutharika, but the difference is not statistically significant as it falls within the margin of error.

This relative balance signals that no single party has secured a decisive foothold in the north, making it a potentially pivotal swing region in the upcoming elections. Notably, Dalitso Kabambe performs better in the north (9%) than in other regions, suggesting some openness among voters to other candidates. It is also important to note that the northern region has a higher proportion of registered voters who are undecided (20%) about their choice or have declined to reveal their preferred candidate (11%), further underlining its importance as the region most likely to shape the outcome depending on how parties engage these voters during the campaign.

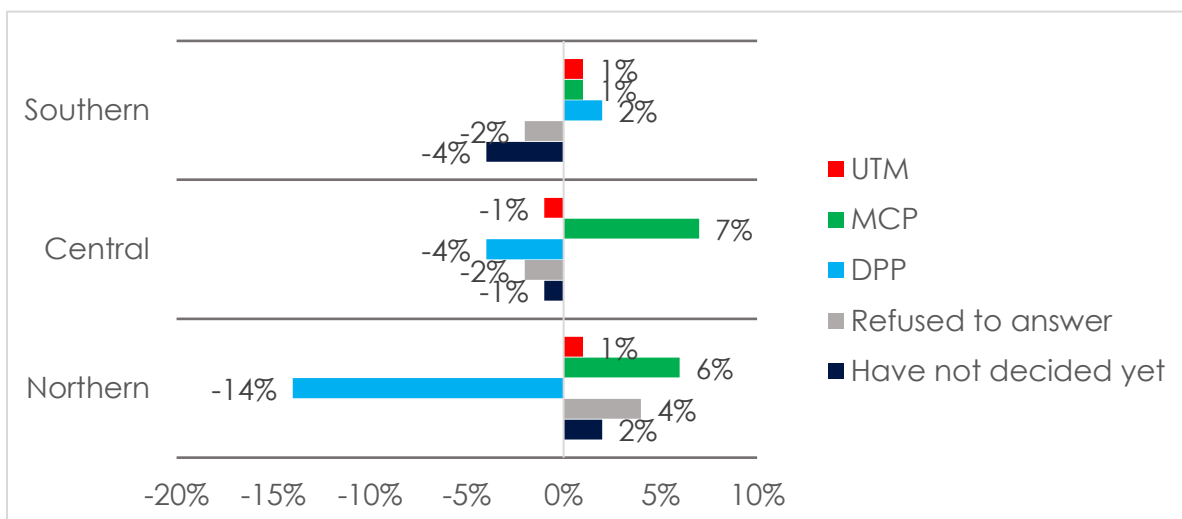
Figure 42: Voters' choice of presidential candidate | by region



Analyzing regional voting intentions before and after the launch of the election campaign, the submission of nomination papers, and the announcement of running mates, the results in Figure 43 suggest shifting dynamics. Lazarus Chakwera has gained significant ground in the northern region (+6%) and the central region (+7%), while his closest rival, Peter Mutharika, has lost considerable support in the north (-14%) and experienced a modest decline in the central region (-4%). Chakwera's gains in the north are likely linked to his choice of Vitumbiko Mumba as running mate, a figure from the region who enjoys a positive reputation locally.

In the south, meanwhile, the share of registered voters who were previously undecided about their preferred presidential candidate has fallen by four percentage points. This suggests that as the campaign unfolds, voters in the region are beginning to firm up their choices, potentially consolidating around the leading contenders.

Figure 43: Changes in Voter's choice of presidential candidates | by region

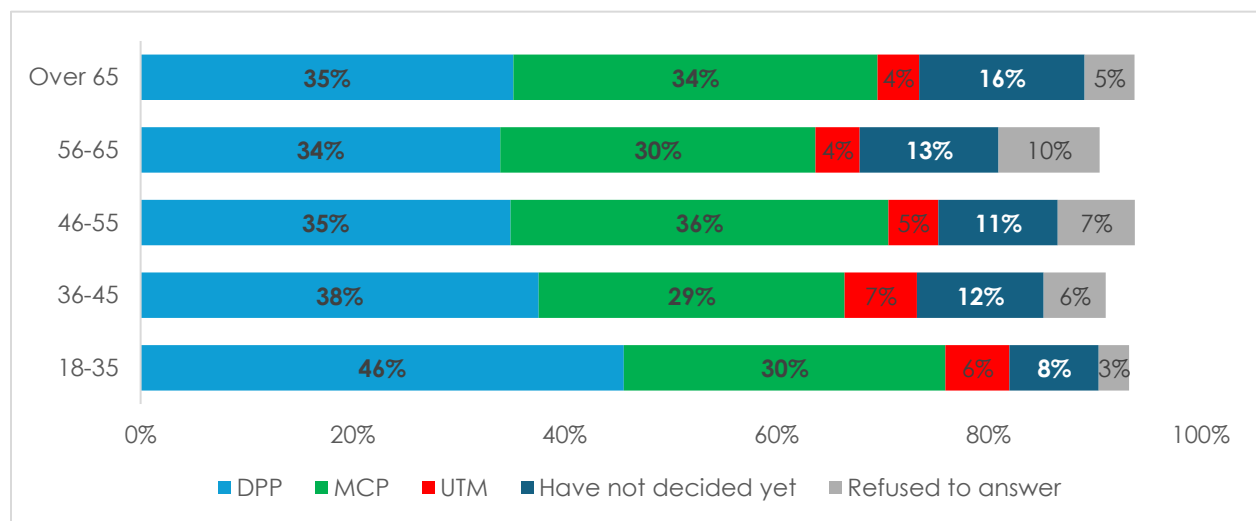


Note: the graph displays the percentage point differences in voters' choices before the launch of election campaign (July) and after campaign launch (August)

Analysis of voting intentions across age groups reveals notable differences. The results presented in Figure 44 indicate that most young Malawians, specifically those aged 18-35 and 36-45, are likely to vote for Peter Mutharika, followed by Lazarus Chakwera and Dalitso Kabambe. In detail, 46% of the youth (18-35) intend to vote for Mutharika, while 30% favor Chakwera and 6% support Kabambe. Among those aged 36-45, 38% plan to vote for Mutharika, with 29% supporting Chakwera and 7% backing Kabambe. Voting intentions among older adults (above 45 years) show a similar preference between Mutharika and Chakwera.

These findings contradict speculations that young voters would prefer a younger candidate to lead the country, as evidenced by their disapproval of the age bill aimed at preventing Mutharika from running for president. However, this does not necessarily imply that young Malawians do not desire a younger candidate; rather, they may be frustrated by the economic challenges and high cost of living under the current government. Additionally, they may feel nostalgic for former president Peter Mutharika, despite the issues during his administration, as living standards were relatively better at that time.

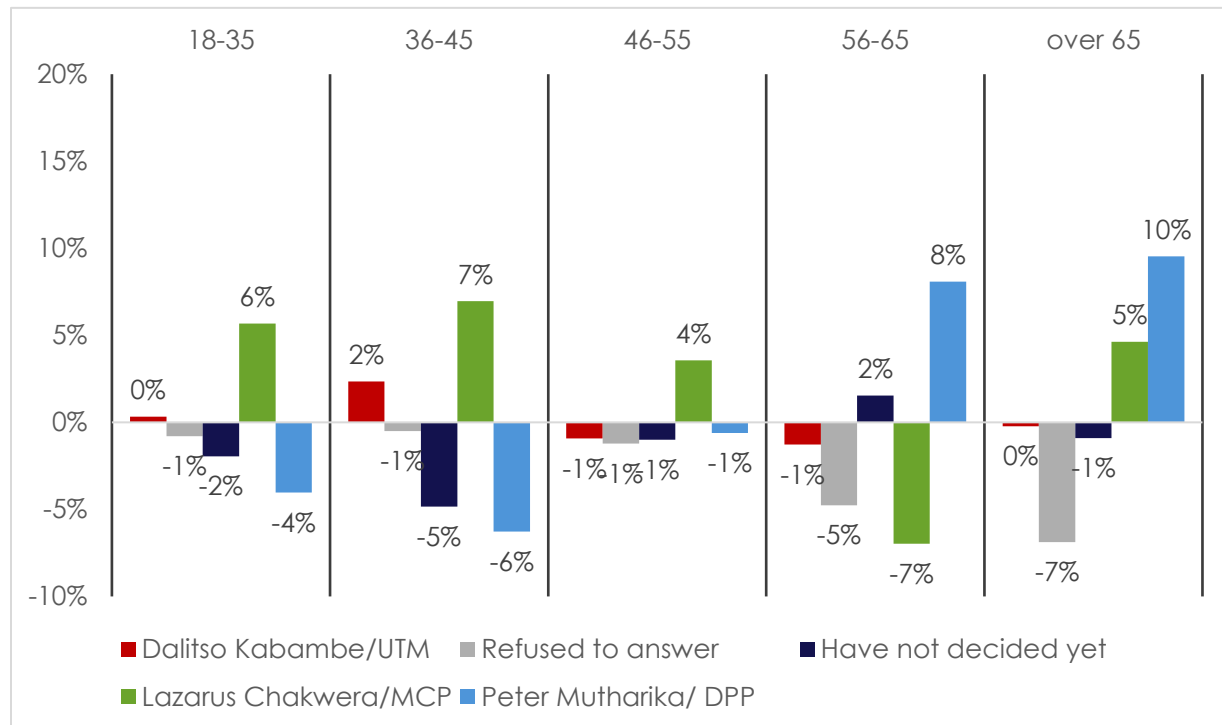
Figure 44: voters' choice of presidential candidates | by age



Compared to pre-campaign levels, Lazarus Chakwera had gained support among younger Malawians at the expense of Peter Mutharika following the launch of campaigns, the submission of nomination papers, and the selection of running mates. Specifically, Lazarus Chakwera has increased his share of the youth vote (ages 18-35) by 6 percentage points, while Mutharika has lost 4 percentage points (Figure 45).

Additionally, Chakwera has gained votes from those aged 36-45 by 7 percentage points, while Mutharika has lost 6 percentage points. In contrast, Mutharika has gained votes among older adults, increasing his support among those aged 56-65 by 8 percentage points and those aged 65 and over by 10 percentage points. However, Lazarus Chakwera has lost 7 percentage points among individuals aged 56-65.

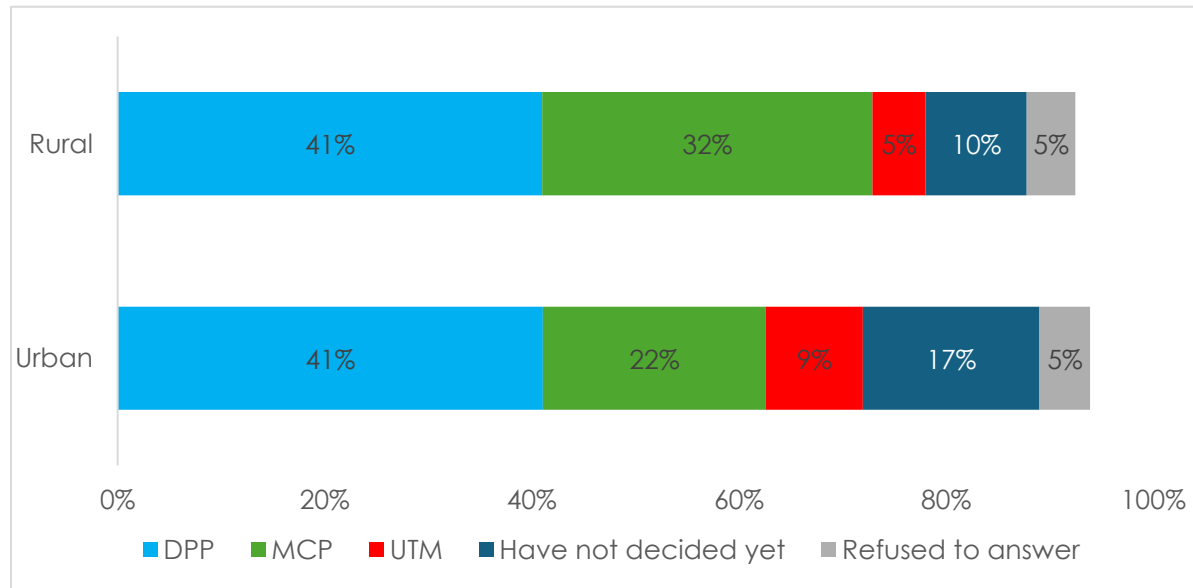
Figure 45: Changes in voters' choice of presidential candidates | by age



Note: the graph displays the percentage point differences in voters' choices before the launch of election campaign (July) and after campaign launch (August)

Disaggregating presidential voting intentions by rural-urban location shows Peter Mutharika leading in both settings, followed by Lazarus Chakwera. In rural areas, 41% of voters say they would back Mutharika compared to 32% for Chakwera. The same pattern is observed in urban areas, where Mutharika (41%) also holds an advantage over Chakwera (32%) (Figure 46). Interestingly, Dalitso Kabambe performs better among urban voters (9%) than his national average, suggesting his appeal resonates more strongly in cities. At the same time, urban areas register a relatively high share of undecided voters (17%), highlighting the potential for shifts in support as the campaign unfolds

Figure 46: Voters' choice of presidential candidate | by rural-urban location

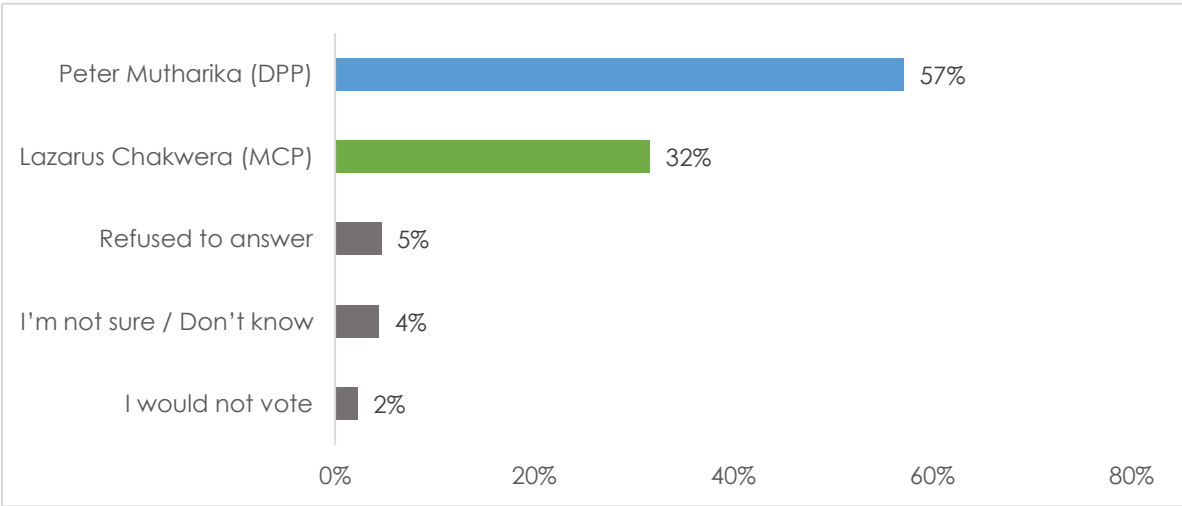


3.6.5 Voting intentions in case of a run-off

The majority rule requires that a presidential candidate secure more than half of the total votes cast (50% + 1) to be declared the winner. If no candidate achieves this threshold, a run-off election is held between the top two contenders. As shown in Figure 47, it appears unlikely that any candidate would surpass the 50% + 1 threshold in the first round, making a run-off between Peter Mutharika and Lazarus Chakwera highly probable.

When asked about their preferences in such a run-off, 57% of registered voters indicated support for Mutharika (DPP), while 32% favored Chakwera (MCP). However, these preferences may shift during the 60-day interval between the announcement of first-round results and the run-off. During this period, some political parties may choose to endorse one of the two candidates, though not necessarily by forming formal coalitions. In addition, some voters may opt out of participating in the run-off. A similar pattern was observed in the 2020 presidential re-run, held after the nullification of the 2019 results due to electoral irregularities. Voter turnout declined significantly, falling from 74% in 2019 to 65% in 2020.

Figure 47: Voters' choice of presidential candidate in case of a run-off election



4 Conclusion

The 2025 pre-election survey provides a timely and credible assessment of Malawians' political attitudes, expectations, and voting intentions in the period leading up to the September general elections. The results reveal that Malawians remain highly engaged in the democratic process, with 96% of registered voters expressing their intention to vote. This enthusiasm demonstrates the strong commitment of citizens to participate in shaping the country's future.

Confidence in electoral institutions is also relatively strong. A significant majority of Malawians believe that their vote will remain secret and that results announced by the Malawi Electoral Commission (MEC) will accurately reflect ballots cast. Trust in both domestic and international observers further reinforce this perception, although a notable minority remain skeptical about impartiality and independence. This indicates that continued transparency, impartial oversight, and consistent communication will be essential for sustaining confidence.

Voter priorities are clearly defined and revolve around fundamental livelihood concerns. Food insecurity and economic management dominate the agenda, followed closely by agriculture. These issues highlight both the persistent challenges facing Malawians and the urgent need for policy responses that directly address everyday hardships. While party loyalty and the choice of running mates influence some voters, the majority prioritize anti-corruption commitments and concrete policy proposals. This reflects a gradual shift away from personality- or identity-based voting toward more issue-driven decision-making.

The political landscape also shows fluidity. While former President Peter Mutharika and incumbent President Lazarus Chakwera remain the front-runners, neither has reached the 50%+1 majority required to secure an outright win in the first round. With 11% of voters undecided and 5% declining to state their preference, significant shifts remain possible before election day. These undecided and silent voters could play a decisive role in determining the final outcome or influencing the likelihood of a run-off.

It is important to emphasize that the survey findings should not be interpreted as predictions of the actual election results. Instead, they provide an estimation of the electorate's mood at a specific moment in time. Campaign strategies, last-minute events, and shifting alliances can alter voter decisions in the final weeks. The survey therefore serves as a tool for informing public discourse, shaping campaign engagement, and identifying priority issues, rather than forecasting definitive outcomes.

Bibliography

- Anderson, G. (2017). *Government performance and public approval*. *Journal of Political Science*, 35(1), 123-140
- Brown, A. (2016). *Campaign strategies and voter support*. *Journal of Political Science*, 28(3), 45-62
- Clark, R. (2019). *Voter attitudes towards government initiatives*. *Public Opinion Quarterly*, 72(4), 567-584.
- Davis, R. (2021). *Policy positions and electorate alignment*. *Public Opinion Quarterly*, 85(1), 78-95
- Garcia, L. (2019). *Tracking support levels over time*. *Political Behavior*, 41(4), 602- 619.
- Jones, M. (2018). *Surveys and voter intentions*. *Electoral Studies*, 54, 112-128
- Lewis, A. (2016). *Voter turnout and election outcomes*. *Journal of Elections, Public Opinion & Parties*, 26(4), 456-472.
- Mauk, M. (2022). *Electoral integrity matters: how electoral process conditions the relationship between political losing and political trust*. *Quality & Quantity*, 56(3), 1709-1728.
- Partheymüller, J., Müller, W. C., Rabitsch, A., Lidauer, M., & Grohma, P. (2022). *Participation in the administration of elections and perceptions of electoral integrity*. *Electoral Studies*, 77, 102474.
- Powell, G. B., & Powell Jr, G. B. (2000). *Elections as instruments of democracy: Majoritarian and proportional visions*. Yale University Press.
- Roberts, G. (2021). *Voter participation and campaign success*. *Public Opinion Quarterly*, 85(1), 73-89.
- Smith, J. (2020). *Political polling and voter sentiment*. *International Journal of Public Opinion Research*, 32(2), 256-273
- Taylor, J. (2018). *Economic policies and voter response*. *Communication Research*, 45(2), 234-251.
- Wilson, P. (2014). *Crafting messaging to emphasize popular policies*. *Journal of Political Marketing*, 13(4), 301-318

Closing statement

Finally, IPOR is grateful for the support received in conducting these opinion polls, which remain an integral part of the electoral process. By offering data-driven perspectives on elections and the broader democratic landscape, the survey empowers Malawian voters to make informed choices, enriches public discourse, and fosters trust in democracy through transparency.

IPOR therefore urges all registered voters to turn out and cast their ballots on election day. Voting is the most powerful tool citizens have to choose leaders who reflect their needs and to hold those leaders accountable. Choosing not to vote is, in effect, a decision that may benefit a candidate one does not prefer. Active participation is the surest way for Malawians to shape their country's future.