



Zimbabwe Election
Support Network
Promoting Democratic
Elections In Zimbabwe

**ELECTORAL SUPPORT NETWORK OF SOUTHERN AFRICA (ESN-SA)
AND ZIMBABWE ELECTION SUPPORT NETWORK (ZESN)**

MALAWI 16 SEPTEMBER 2025 GENERAL ELECTIONS

OBSERVATION AND LEARNING MISSION REPORT



CONTENTS

Terms and Abbreviations	2
Acknowledgements	3
Executive Summary	4
Introduction	7
1. Malawi General Elections Background	8
2. Methodology	9
3. The Legal Framework	10
4. Election Administration	11
5. Voter Registration	11
6. Nomination	12
7. The Media Environment	12
7.1 The Mainstream Media	12
7.2 Social Media	12
8. Civil Society Organisations	13
9. Voter Education	13
10. Inclusive Electoral Processes	14
10.1 Women	15
10.2 Youth	15
11 Special Voting	16
11.1 Diaspora Voting	17
12. Election Day Observation	17
12.1 Opening and Setting Up	17
12.2 Signage	18
12.3 Queue Management	19
12.4 Polling Officials	19
12.5 Party Monitors	19
12.6 Redirected and turned away voters	19
12.7 Closing and Counting	20
12.8 Voter Turnout	20
13. Results Declaration	20
14. Key Lessons	21
15. Recommendations	23
16. Conclusion	23

TERMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

ACDEG	African Charter on Democracy, Elections and Governance
AU	African Union
CCJP	Catholic Commission for Justice and Peace
BMVIDS	Biometric Voter Identification System
COMESA	Common Market of Eastern and Southern Africa
CSOs	Civil Society Organisations
DPP	Democratic Progressive Party
EMB	Electoral Management Body
EMD	Electronic Management of Data
ESN/SA	Electoral Support Network of Southern Africa
ESR	Election Situation Room
FBOs	Faith-Based Organisations
MBC	Malawi Broadcasting Corporation
MCP	Malawi Congress Party
MEC	Malawi Electoral Commission
MESP	Malawi Electoral Support Project
MPD	Multi-Party Democracy
MPUC	Malawi Peace and Unity Commission
NICE	National Initiative for Civic Education Public Trust
PAC	Public Affairs Committee
PEMMO	Principles for Election Management, Monitoring, and Observation
PPLGEA	Presidential, Parliamentary and Local Government Elections Act
SRHR	Sexual and Reproductive Health Rights
UDF	United Democratic Front
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UTM	United Transformation Movement
ZESN	Zimbabwe Election Support Network

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Electoral Support Network of Southern Africa and the Zimbabwe Election Support Network jointly deployed an Observation and Learning Mission to the Malawi General (Presidential, Parliamentary and Local Government) Elections held on 16 September 2025. The Mission comprised 12 observers who were deployed to four districts in the Central Region, namely Lilongwe Central, Salima, Dowa and Dedza. The Mission undertook a comprehensive review of the political, administrative, and legal frameworks governing elections in Malawi. In addition, the Mission held consultations with key electoral stakeholders, such as citizen observer groups, women's organisations and other international observer missions. These engagements were instrumental in enhancing the Mission's understanding of the broader electoral environment.

Through these interactions, the Mission gathered critical insights into the level of preparedness of the Malawi Electoral Commission and other stakeholders involved in the electoral process. The Joint Mission observed the opening of polling stations in Lilongwe Central, Dowa and Dedza Districts. These were characterised by long queues before opening. The polling stations observed during the opening commenced voting on time, with all the essential voting materials in place. The voting stations had an average of 7 voting officials, with a higher proportion of female presiding officers and young people serving as polling officials. Polling procedures such as checking ink on fingers, verifying voters on the voters' rolls, and the use of the Biometric Voter Identification System (BMVIDS) were consistently followed. On polling day, the environment was generally peaceful, with long queues in the morning, and voters were observed patiently waiting for their turn to vote. Queues were efficiently managed, and the elderly, pregnant women, and nursing mothers were given priority. Voting took place outdoors at all polling stations in the presence of all polling staff, party agents and observers. Generally, at all polling stations visited, all essential materials were available and adequate, and the polling staff and monitors professionally conducted themselves.

The Mission noted that counting at polling stations observed was conducted in a transparent and professional manner and was witnessed by monitors who peacefully conducted themselves.

Professor Arthur Peter Mutharika of the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) was declared the winner of the Presidential election on 24 September 2025, garnering 56.8% of the valid votes.

In view of these observations, the Electoral Support Network of Southern Africa and the Zimbabwe Election Support Network proffer the following recommendations:

KEY RECOMMENDATIONS



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- **Accessibility of Polling Stations:** The Malawi Electoral Commission (MEC) must ensure that all polling stations are fully accessible by upgrading infrastructure, deploying trained disability support staff, and offering sign language interpretation. Booths should accommodate wheelchair users and persons of short stature.
 - **Polling Stations Signage:** The MEC should invest in clear signage to help voters locate their designated polling stations, and these measures will further reduce the number of redirected and turned away voters.
 - **Gender Representation:** The government of Malawi is encouraged to introduce legislated mechanisms or special measures to guarantee a minimum threshold of women's representation in Parliament and local councils.
 - **Inclusive Candidate Support:** Political parties should be mandated to establish dedicated campaign finance support schemes and mentorship programmes for women, youth, and persons with disabilities.
 - **Targeted Voter Education:** The MEC should consider conducting targeted outreach to communities which had low turnout, using data-driven strategies and inclusive messaging to encourage participation.
 - **Strengthen Political Finance Oversight:** The Government of Malawi and the MEC is urged to consider developing and implementing a clear and enforceable framework to monitor how political parties and candidates raise and spend money during elections.
 - **Technology Reliability:** The MEC should improve the reliability and usability of the BMVIDS to prevent delays and ensure smoother verification processes.

INTRODUCTION

In line with the Electoral Support Network of Southern Africa (ESN-SA)'s mission to contribute to higher levels of electoral integrity in Africa and the Zimbabwe Election Support Network's (ZESN) mission to promote democratic, free, and fair electoral processes through objectively and impartially observing elections, the two organisations deployed a Joint Learning and Observation Mission to observe the Malawi General Elections held on 16 September 2025. The Learning Mission comprised 12 accredited short-term observers from citizen observer groups in Angola, Mozambique, South Africa, Zambia, and Zimbabwe. The elections encompassed the Presidential race, the election of 229 members of the National Assembly, and the election of 509 Local Government Councillors.

1.1 Objectives of the Learning Mission

The main goal of the joint Learning Election Observation Mission was to assess whether the Malawian general election was conducted in line with its national laws, and to determine if the country's electoral framework adheres to regional and international norms, standards and best practices. In pursuit of the above-stated objectives, the ESN-SA and ZESN Joint Mission implemented the following activities:

i. Application for Accreditation: The ESN-SA and ZESN successfully applied for and were granted permission to observe the Malawi General Election. The application and accreditation processes were smooth and efficient. Applications were submitted via email, there were no accreditation fees, and the accreditation cards were collected from the MEC offices in Lilongwe. All enquiries that the Mission had were promptly attended to.

ii. Development of Observation Checklist:

To standardise observers' observation and reports, the members of the Joint Mission utilised checklists specifically developed to guide the observers on the key electoral aspects that observers needed to track and report on during the observation effort. The checklist covered the polling station opening and set-up, the polling process, and the closing and counting procedures. An additional checklist was developed for any potential critical incidents that could occur during the observation process.

iii. Mission Briefing and Deployment:

ESN-SA and ZESN conducted a briefing session to prepare the ESN-SA and ZESN observers for the observation effort. The Joint Mission deployed to four districts within the Central Region, namely Lilongwe Central, Dedza, Dowa and Salima Districts.

1. MALAWI GENERAL ELECTIONS BACKGROUND

Malawi is a unitary republic with a presidential system of government. The President serves as both the Head of State and the Head of Government and is directly elected by citizens for a renewable five-year term. The President appoints Ministers and senior officials and is supported by a Vice-President elected on the same ticket.

The National Assembly, a unicameral parliament with 229 elected members, exercises legislative authority. The Judiciary operates independently, with the Supreme Court of Appeal and the High Court at the apex of the system, supported by lower and specialised courts.

Administratively, Malawi is divided into three regions: the Northern, Central, and Southern Regions. The districts are further subdivided into 28 districts. Each district is managed by a District Commissioner appointed by the central government, alongside elected local councils. Traditional leaders also play an important role in local governance.

Since Malawi transitioned to multi-party rule in 1993, the country has demonstrated its dedication to democratic principles by consistently holding regular elections. Despite having a robust democracy with an active civil society, diverse media outlets, and judicial checks, the Mission noted that polarisation and socio-economic discontent played crucial roles in the 2025 elections.



2. METHODOLOGY

Upon its arrival, the Learning Mission conducted a briefing session with key electoral stakeholders, which included citizen observer groups gathering their nuanced views and perspectives on the electoral environment and the various interventions being undertaken by CSOs, media, faith-based organisations, gender and inclusion experts and the Malawi Peace and Unity Commission. Additionally, they provided an assessment of the state of preparedness of the Malawi Electoral Commission and other key stakeholders.



Picture: Members of the Mission with Stakeholders



Picture: A representative of the Centre for Multiparty Democracy making a presentation to the Mission

On polling day, the ESN-SA and ZESN deployed 12 mobile observers to the Lilongwe Central, Dowa, Salima, Lilongwe Mpeno (Mbuna) and Dedza Districts. They observed the opening, voting, and closing of polling stations, as well as the counting.

In its assessment of the elections, the joint Mission used various global, regional normative and legal instruments for democratic elections, such as the African Charter on Democracy, Elections and Governance (ACDEG), the SADC Principles and Guidelines Governing Democratic Elections, the Principles for Election Management, Monitoring, and Observation (PEMMO), together with Malawi's legal framework. The Joint Mission closely observed the voting on 16 September 2025.



3. The Legal Framework

The Malawi General Elections were governed by the Constitution of Malawi (1994), supported by key legislation including the Presidential, Parliamentary and Local Government Elections Act (PPLGEA) No. 10 of 2023, the Electoral Commission Act (2023 Amendment), and the Political Parties Act (2018). These laws collectively define the roles and responsibilities of electoral stakeholders, regulate the conduct of political parties, and safeguard citizens' rights to participate in free and fair elections.

The Presidential, Parliamentary and Local Government Elections Act (PPLGEA) amended on the 5th of September 2025 brought significant changes to Malawi's electoral process.

The Act introduces a threshold where a presidential candidate must secure 50% + 1 of the votes to win. If no candidate achieves this, a second round of voting will be held. The Act also reforms the MEC, which is responsible for overseeing elections, to ensure its effectiveness and impartiality. It introduced the Electronic Management of Data (EMD) system, which is used for making the Voter registration process more efficient. The PPLGEA also includes provisions that regulate party financing and ensure accountability, which helps reduce the influence of money in politics and promotes transparency.

The Learning Mission found that Malawi's laws largely align with international and regional standards for holding democratic elections, outlined in the African Charter on Democracy, Elections and Governance (ACDEG) and the Southern African Development Community (SADC) Principles and Guidelines Governing the Conduct of Democratic Elections. While these laws support the enjoyment of fundamental civil and political rights, there are still some shortcomings regarding their implementation. For instance, the Mission noted inadequate oversight of campaign financing, the absence of affirmative measures for youth, persons with disabilities, and women, as well as the lack of provisions enabling Malawians in the diaspora or who are incarcerated to vote.



4. Election Administration

An independent, impartial, and professional Electoral Management Body (EMB) is the cornerstone of any credible electoral outcome and is essential for ensuring the integrity, transparency, and fairness of the electoral process, thereby fostering public trust and confidence in the democratic system. The MEC is the national authority mandated to organise and oversee elections in Malawi. It is established under Section 75 of the 1995 Constitution and further guided by the Parliamentary and Presidential Elections Act of 1998, the Local Government Elections Act of 1996, and the Electoral Commission Act of 1998. Its primary functions encompass organising national, parliamentary, local government elections, by-elections, and referenda. Key responsibilities include voter registration, ballot production and distribution, polling centre set up, civic and voter education, and promoting public awareness of electoral matters among other responsibilities.

The electoral calendar was officially launched by the MEC on 2 July 2024, under the theme ***“Promoting Democratic Leadership Through Your Vote”***. The campaign period for the 2025 general elections commenced on 14 July 2025 and concluded on 14 September 2025 at 6.00am, providing political parties and candidates with a 60-day window to engage with voters.

The Mission noted the MEC used a data-driven approach to constituency and ward demarcation, which resulted in a more equitable representation. Key outcomes included an 18.65% increase in constituencies (from 193 to 229) and a 10.17% increase in local government wards (from 462 to 509). This exercise addressed historical imbalances in voter distribution, aligning with international standards set by the African Charter on Democracy, Elections and Governance (ACDEG) and SADC Principles.



5. Voter Registration

The Mission was informed that the MEC conducted 14 days of voter registration exercises, in separate phases between June 2024 and the first months of 2025. This culminated in 7,203,390 Malawians being registered, of whom 4,114,720 were women and 3,080,670 were men, representing 57% and 43% of the total number of eligible voters, respectively. This was a slight increase from 6.8 million registered voters in 2019. The MEC also registered 137,925 voters with various disabilities, which represents approximately 1.92% of all registered voters. The high voter registration statistics of women were attributed to the robust voter mobilisation efforts conducted by the MEC in conjunction with CSOs.



6. Nomination

In accordance with section 29 (2)(a) and (b) and section 40 (2)(a) and (b) of the Presidential, Parliamentary, and Local Government Elections Act, 2023 (the “Act”), the MEC determined the nomination fees payable by or on behalf of candidates nominated for the positions of President, Member of Parliament, or Councilor for the 2025 General Elections. The MEC reduced the nomination fees by 50% for women, youth, and persons with disabilities aspiring to be candidates in the 2025 General Elections. The breakdown of the fee reduction was as follows:

The nomination fee for a parliamentary seat was 2,500 000MWK for male candidates. This fee was reduced by 50% for women, youth, and persons with disabilities. For the Local Government (Councillorship) Seats, the original fee for male candidates was K200,000, which was similarly reduced by 50% for women, youth, and persons with disabilities to 100,000MWK.

However, in the case of the Presidential Seat, the fee for all candidates was 10,000,000MWK, with no reduction mentioned for women, youth, and persons with disabilities. The MEC implemented the 50% reduction for the parliamentary and local government candidate nomination fees to promote inclusivity and encourage more women, youth, and persons with disabilities to participate in the electoral process.



7. The Media Environment

The media plays a crucial role in elections by providing news, analysis, and information about candidates, policies, and by creating a platform for candidates to engage with each other and with voters. This helps voters make informed decisions by providing information about voting procedures, candidate platforms, and election issues.

7.1 The Mainstream Media

The joint Mission noted concerns raised regarding the public media’s partisan coverage of the election. The Malawi Broadcasting Corporation’s coverage of the election was tilted towards the incumbent despite the obligations for the media to remain impartial and balanced in covering election campaigns, political parties, and election candidates.

7.2 Social Media

Social media played a pivotal role in enhancing the transparency and engagement of the elections. The MEC effectively leveraged platforms like WhatsApp to disseminate crucial updates on electoral developments. Additionally, the Commission also utilised social media channels to launch targeted civic and voter education campaigns, empowering citizens with the information they needed to participate in the electoral process. This strategic use of digital platforms not only amplified the Commission's outreach but also fostered a more informed and engaged electorate and stakeholders.

A notable innovation was the creation of a dedicated WhatsApp Channel for all observers and key electoral stakeholders facilitating real-time information sharing, coordination, and updates on the electoral process. This platform enabled the aforementioned to gain a deeper appreciation of the electoral environment and developments well ahead of their arrival and deployment in the country.



8. Civil Society Organisations

CSOs are a key stakeholder in electoral processes; their active participation throughout the electoral cycle helped to ensure the integrity and credibility of the process and contributed to building trust in the democratic process and promoting more inclusive and representative elections. The Joint Mission was impressed by the active involvement of CSOs in promoting peaceful citizen participation, provision of civic and voter education, advocacy, and observing the election.

A broad coalition of civil society organisations converged through the Election Situation Room (ESR), launched on September 12, 2025. Led by the National Initiative for Civic Education (NICE) Public Trust, in collaboration with the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and over 20 other stakeholders, the initiative received support from the Malawi Electoral Support Project (MESP). This inclusive platform brought together diverse representatives from women's groups, youth organisations, faith-based groups, media, government departments, security agencies, and development partners.

By monitoring polling stations in real-time, identifying hotspots, and responding swiftly to incidents, the ESR complemented the Malawi Electoral Commission's efforts to ensure a credible 2025 general election. With 509 observers deployed across all wards, the ESR provided a comprehensive national overview, enabling stakeholders to track trends, pinpoint issues, and take corrective action. The Joint Mission was impressed by the stakeholders' unity and dedication to advancing participatory democracy. Through this joint initiative, the stakeholders collectively developed a preliminary report, which underscored the power of collaboration and inclusivity in promoting transparent and credible elections.



9. Voter Education

Voter education is crucial for a healthy democracy as it empowers citizens to participate effectively in the electoral process. By providing voters with accurate information about candidates, policies, and voting procedures, voter education promotes informed decision-making. This not only helps individuals make choices that align with their values and interests but also fosters civic engagement and enhances the overall integrity of the electoral process. Ultimately, voter education supports the democratic values of transparency, accountability, and public participation, leading to more legitimate and representative outcomes. The Mission noted that the MEC conducted robust and broad-based voter education ahead of the election.

According to interlocutors, the MEC collaborated with CSOs and other Faith-based organisations, employing a multi-media approach, and the messaging was tailored to appeal to the different targeted communities. The MEC and its CSOs partners employed a range of community engagement strategies including, roadshows, radio programmes, social media campaigns, radio and television programmes, jingles, music, sports tournaments, drama among other community engagement strategies to mobilise voters and encourage participation.

CSO partners employed a range of community engagement strategies, including roadshows, radio and television programmes, social media campaigns, jingles, music, sports tournaments, and drama. The MEC accredited and collaborated with 116 CSOs to conduct voter education activities, emphasising the importance of inclusivity and transparency and peace in the electoral processes. The MEC also provided CSOs with voter education pamphlets, brochures and flyers.



Picture: MEC training Constituency Civic and Voter Assistants

Source Malawi Electoral Commission

10. Inclusive Electoral Processes

Inclusive electoral processes are vital for ensuring that all citizens have an equal opportunity to participate in the democratic process. It is important to foster a democratic environment where every citizen has an equal opportunity to participate, regardless of their background, gender, age, ability, or socioeconomic status.

By ensuring that all voices are heard and valued, inclusive processes help build trust, promote social cohesion, and ultimately strengthen the legitimacy of democratic institutions.

Malawi's National Gender Policy commits to gender mainstreaming across all sectors.

However, some sections of the society that the Joint Mission interacted with believed that the barriers, such as entrenched patriarchy, limited financial resources, and hostile party environments, that discourage women from seeking leadership roles, persist.

CSOs in Malawi have been very active in promoting the active participation of women, young people and persons with disabilities in the electoral process. Efforts to promote inclusive electoral processes have not shown positive results, as observed by the number of women, youths and persons with disabilities who participated in the elections as candidates. Challenges such as limited representation of women in high-level positions, like the Presidential race, accessibility issues for people with physical disabilities, mistrust in electoral technologies and patriarchal attitudes affecting women's participation persist.

10.1 Women



Ahead of the elections,
326 women
were approved as valid
parliamentary candidates in
the elections,

a development which was by CSOs that the Joint Mission met to have dealt another setback to a perennial national multi-stakeholder campaign promoting women's participation in politics and leadership positions.

The female parliamentary aspirants in the 16 September general elections did not reach a quarter of the total figure of 1,488 candidates, despite the 50:50 campaign by women's rights lobby groups that sought to achieve 50 per cent women's representation in Parliament and local government authorities.

10.2 Youth

Malawi's population is estimated to be around 21.7 million, with the youth (18-35 years old) accounting for over 50% of the voting population. This demographic represents a crucial human resource that can positively shape the direction of the country's developmental aspirations. To foster a participatory, responsive, and sustainable democracy, the participation of young people in electoral processes is key. When young people engage in the electoral process both as voters and candidates, they can hold leaders to account, influence policy, bring new perspectives, innovative ideas, and energy, which can lead to more inclusive and representative governance. As candidates, young people can champion issues that affect them, ensuring that policies are tailored to meet their needs.

The Joint mission noted that despite campaigns by MEC and CSOs to enhance youth involvement in politics and decision-making, the number of young people taking up leadership positions remained low.

To address this challenge, the Joint Mission encourages that mechanisms be put in place to ensure the meaningful participation of youth in governance and electoral processes. This can be done through youth quotas, providing mentorship and building the capacity of young political aspirants, and ensuring that political parties set aside quotas for young candidates.

10.3 Persons with Disabilities

Participation of persons with disabilities in politics and in elections is a key pathway for them to influence legislation and policies that enhance the full enjoyment of their rights as citizens. The Joint Mission noted positive efforts made by the MEC to increase participation and inclusion as candidates and voters. CSOs advocated for improved accessibility throughout the electoral cycle.

The Joint Mission urges electoral stakeholders in Malawi to do more to address barriers and societal attitudes that hinder the full participation of persons with disabilities as candidates. This includes conducting civic and voter awareness initiatives that educate citizens about the electoral process, voting rights, and the importance of participation, and reviewing and reforming electoral laws to ensure they are inclusive and promote participation of all citizens, particularly marginalized groups such as persons with disabilities.

To address these challenges, recommendations include several key strategies.

These include implementing a tracking system for women's rights, providing ongoing support to women, youth, and persons with disabilities, offering mentorship programs, advocating for Sexual and Reproductive Health Rights, and closely monitoring electoral processes for security and transparency.

Additionally, engaging with local communities through various platforms can help promote inclusive electoral processes. Addressing issues like low voter registration and media bias is also crucial.

11 Special Voting

The MEC provided for special voting to facilitate the participation of security personnel, electoral staff, and officials involved in managing the electoral process to ensure their votes were cast without disrupting their duties on polling day. Members of the armed forces and police officers were allowed to cast their votes before the general polling day to ensure their safety and security while performing their duties.

In Malawi, polling officials and security personnel were allowed to cast their votes at the polling stations where they were stationed on election day, provided they obtained a special vote certificate that authorised them to do so. The Joint Mission noted that this arrangement promotes the principles of inclusivity and universal suffrage.

11.1 Diaspora Voting

In Malawi, there is no enabling law that allows for diaspora voting. Diaspora voting promotes inclusion and enhances democratic participation. Citizens living abroad will develop a sense of belonging, which increases voter turnout and creates an opportunity for them to contribute to the development of their country. The Joint Missions recommends that Malawi consider diaspora voting in line with the best regional and international practice.

12. Election Day Observation

The Mission covered 31 polling stations on election day in Lilongwe Central, Dowa, Dedza and Salima districts during the General Elections. In these areas, the Mission focused on observing the setting up of polling stations, opening, voting, closing, and counting procedures.

The polling day environment was generally peaceful across all locations visited by ESN-SA and ZESN observers. At the polling stations visited, the various party monitors coexisted peacefully and exhibited high levels of political tolerance. Voters also waited patiently and peacefully to cast their vote despite the long, winding queues witnessed in the morning. The peaceful environment^[1] also contributed to transparency, allowing observers, media and stakeholders to observe the voting and counting processes effectively. The peaceful atmosphere significantly fostered voter trust and was conducive for the free participation of citizens.

12.1 Opening and Setting Up

In the areas covered, it was observed that the polling stations were generally opened on time with all the essential polling materials such as ballot boxes, ballot papers, indelible finger markers, voters' rolls and the Biometric Voter Identification System (BMVIDS) in place. In addition to this, it was noted that the MEC officials were present to direct voters to the correct polling stations. The Mission observed that, few polling stations opened late due to the late arrival of materials. For example, voting at Nathenge Primary School in Lilongwe's Central Region was delayed by 35 minutes due to initial start-up glitches with the BMVIDS. At Chigoneka CDSS School, voting was also delayed at Polling Stations 1 and 2 due to configuration challenges of the BMVIDS. The Polling Officials requested technical support, and the problems were quickly resolved. The swift action by the Polling officials is commendable.



Pic: ESN-SA/ZESN Observers following voting proceedings at polling stations in Dowa District

[1] SADC observed that peace prevailed in 96% of polling stations nationwide



Pic: ESN-SA/ZESN observers at a polling station in Lilongwe Central



ESN-SA/ZESN Observers following the opening of voting stations

12.2 Signage

The signage directing voters to polling stations could have been more effective if it had been strategically placed on main roads leading to the polling station, rather than only beginning on side roads near the polling station entrances. This would have allowed voters to quickly locate polling stations. Furthermore, within the polling stations, there was inadequate

signage to guide the voters in queuing and in the flow of casting their ballots for the three tiers of the election. The BMVIDS was consistently used across all polling stations to verify voter identities through fingerprint data captured during registration. Polling officials demonstrated strong proficiency in using the devices, with minimal cases of malfunction or technical issues, ensuring a smooth voting process. The manual voter's roll was used as backup in instances of glitches with the BMVIDS.

12.3 Queue Management

Queue management was effectively implemented, with notable efforts to prioritise vulnerable groups, including breastfeeding mothers, mothers with babies, elderly individuals, and people with disabilities. Although queues were longer in the morning, they significantly decreased in length by the afternoon. By 4 pm, all individuals who were in line were accommodated to cast their votes. The queues were generally orderly, and voters displayed a high level of maturity and patience throughout the process.

12.4 Polling Officials

On average, each polling station was staffed by seven (7) election officials. Observations indicate a commendable level of gender inclusivity, with both male and female officials actively participating in the electoral process. Notably, Presiding Officers comprised individuals of both men and women across most polling stations observed. This reflects positively on efforts to uphold gender parity and inclusiveness in the administration of electoral duties. Polling procedures were duly followed in accordance with the law. For example, voters presented either a voter certificate or an identification document, which was verified using the BMVIDS or by checking voters' names on the manual voters' roll and verifying their fingers for ink before they cast their vote.

12.5 Party Monitors

ESN-SA and ZESN observers noted the presence of party monitors, mostly from the Malawi Congress Party (MCP),

Democratic Progressive Party (DPP), People's Party (PP), United Democratic Front (UDF), United Transformation Movement (UTM), and some independent candidates. The gender composition of party monitors varied across locations, with both male and female representatives participating in the electoral process, which contributes to inclusivity and representation within the broader democratic framework. The Mission commends political parties and independent candidates for their efforts in deploying party monitors. The deployment of monitors not only enables political parties to monitor the polling process closely but also enhances transparency and accountability. Additionally, it enables them to make informed interventions where necessary, thereby contributing to the overall credibility and integrity of the electoral process.

12.6 Redirected and turned away voters

The ESN-SA and ZESN Learning Mission observed that voters were redirected or turned away for being at the wrong polling stations or their names not found in the voters' roll. For those who were redirected, MEC officials guided them to the correct streams. This contributed to a smoother voting experience and reduced voter frustration. The Mission noted that, although the poor signage was a concern, MEC officials tried to manage and improve voter streams to ensure that every eligible voter could cast their ballot without unnecessary delays or confusion.

12.7 Closing and Counting

ESN-SA and ZESN observers reported that the closing and vote counting processes at the polling stations they observed were largely transparent, peaceful, and professionally managed. Polling staff generally followed established procedures, and the presence of party agents and observers at most counting centres helped reinforce public confidence in the process. Notably, the decision to close polls at 16:00 hours contributed positively to the efficiency and security of the counting process, as it allowed counting to begin while there was still daylight, reducing the risks associated with poor lighting, fatigue, and errors, and enabling more accurate and timely tabulation of results.



MEC Officials counting votes at a polling station in Lilongwe Central

Source Malawi Electoral Commission

However, in many cases, counting extended into the night, highlighting the need for further improved infrastructure and adequate lighting in some centres, especially in rural areas, to safeguard the integrity of the process further. ESN-SA and ZESN commend the MEC for its efforts and encourage continued investment in logistical preparedness, infrastructure, and staff training to strengthen future electoral processes.

12.8 Voter Turnout

The Mission noted that voter turnout in the Malawi general election was about 61%, indicating that nearly two-thirds of registered voters participated in the electoral process. This level of engagement reflects a moderate degree of public interest and trust in the democratic process. While it is encouraging that a majority of voters exercised their right to vote, the figure also suggests that a significant portion, over one-third, did not participate.

13. Results Declaration

On Wednesday 24 September 2025, the Chairperson of the Malawi Electoral Commission, Justice Annabel Mtalimanja declared Professor Arthur Peter Mutharika of the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP), the winner and President elect of the September 16, 2025, General Elections, securing a decisive vote of 56.8 % of the valid votes. His closest contender was outgoing President Dr. Lazarus McCarthy Chakwera, who got 33.0% of the valid votes. Dr Chakwera conceded defeat hours before the official announcement of results by the MEC.

Top 3 Presidential Candidates summary

Photo	Name	Gender	Party	Votes	%
	Muthalika P	M	Democratic Progressive Party	3,035,249	56.76%
	Chakwera L	M	Malawi Congress Party	1,765,170	33.01%
	Kabambe D	M	UTM Party	211,413	3.95%

14. Key Lessons

The MEC and the government demonstrated their commitment to transparency and international cooperation by extending invitations to regional and international observers eight months ahead of the elections. Both ESN-SA and ZESN received formal invitations in December 2024, reflecting a spirit of openness, early engagement, and respect for the sanctity of the electoral process. The timely invitations enabled observers to adequately plan their missions and interventions in support of the people of Malawi. Below are the additional key lessons drawn from the Malawi General Elections.

- The accreditation process for both local, regional and international observers was smooth, simple and timely. The MEC did not charge accreditation fees to these groups, which, to some extent, enabled different observer groups, in particular citizen observers, to deploy large numbers of observers.
- The Lilongwe Peace Declaration, signed just before the arrival of our Learning Mission in Malawi, led by the Public Affairs Committee (PAC) and stakeholders, demonstrated strong political will and cross-party commitment to peaceful elections.
- To increase women, persons with disabilities and youth participation, the MEC reduced nomination fees by 50 % cent for these groups.
- To increase efficiency in the processing of voters, the MEC reduced the number of voters per polling station from 800 to 600 and increased the number of polling stations from 5002 to 15,148, as well as extending the closing time from 18:00hrs to 16:00hrs, enabling daylight counting and enhancing result credibility.
- The MEC employed various engagement strategies with different stakeholders to ensure that they were constantly informed about developments in all key electoral processes, including regular updates on social media platforms.
- To ensure the enfranchisement of all personnel on electoral duty on polling day, there were new legal provisions to allow registered election officials, security personnel, and party monitors to vote at the stations where they were deployed, improving operational efficiency and the enjoyment of universal suffrage.

- The low number of turned away, redirected, and assisted voters pointed to effective civic and voter education
- The open voting system fostered transparency of the polling process.
- There were high levels of trust and tolerance among stakeholders and the public, as evidenced by low levels of security personnel at polling stations, compared to other countries in the region.
- Citizen observer groups were able to deploy to most of the polling stations that the Mission observed, ensuring comprehensive coverage and strengthening public confidence.
- Priority voting was given to the elderly, persons with disabilities, pregnant women, and nursing mothers.
- To minimise redirected and turned-away voters, a polling official checked voter certificates and guided individuals to the correct queue.
- The CSO-led Election Situation Room facilitated real-time coordination between citizen observers, MEC, the Police, the Human Rights Commission, the Peace Commission, and regional bodies such as the African Union and COMESA, enhancing incident response and stakeholder accountability throughout the electoral process.
- The Malawi model of the CSO-Led Election Situation Room offers a valuable lesson for other countries in the region. This collaborative framework of partnership and joint reporting fosters a culture of transparency, accountability, and inclusivity in electoral processes.
- Deployment of sign language interpreters at key national electoral events and the provision of tactile jackets supported the participation of persons with visual impairments.
- To ensure transparency during counting, polling officers used a two-step verification process, first confirming with monitors before allocating ballot papers to candidates

15. Recommendations

To build on these gains and address persistent challenges, the Learning Mission proffers the following recommendations:

- **Accessibility of Polling Stations:** Ensure all polling stations are fully accessible by upgrading infrastructure, deploying trained disability support staff, and offering sign language interpretation. Booths should accommodate wheelchair users and persons of short stature.
- **Polling Stations Signage:** The MEC should invest in clear signage to help voters locate their designated polling stations, and these measures will further reduce the number of redirected and turned away voters.
- **Gender Representation:** The Government is encouraged to introduce legislated mechanisms to guarantee a minimum threshold of women's representation in Parliament and local councils.

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- **Inclusive Candidate Support:** Political parties ought to establish dedicated campaign finance support schemes and mentorship programs for women, youth, and persons with disabilities.
 - **Civic Education and Voter Registration:** The MEC and CSOs should fund continuous voter registration and civic education throughout the electoral cycle to increase citizen participation in electoral processes.
 - **Targeted Voter Education:** The MEC in partnership with CSOs should conduct targeted outreach to communities which had low turnout, using data-driven strategies and inclusive messaging to encourage participation.
 - **Strengthen Political Finance Oversight:** The MEC encouraged develop and implement a clear and enforceable framework to monitor how political parties and candidates raise and spend money during elections.
 - **Technology Reliability:** The MEC should improve the reliability and usability of the BMVIDS to prevent delays and ensure smoother verification processes.
 - **Infrastructure:** The MEC urged to upgrade lighting and infrastructure at polling stations, especially in rural areas, to ensure safe and accurate vote counting after dark.
 - **Cultural Transformation:** The MEC, CSOs, Political Parties and Media Houses should expand civic education and media campaigns to challenge cultural stereotypes, barriers, and promote women, youth and persons with disabilities' participation in vying for political office.

16. Conclusion

In conclusion, the ESN-SA and ZESN applaud the people of Malawi and all stakeholders for their dedication to upholding democratic principles through peaceful, transparent, and inclusive electoral processes. The collaborative efforts witnessed in the CSO-led ESR demonstrate the power of unity in safeguarding democracy. As Malawi continues to strengthen its democratic legal framework and institutions, this experience serves as a beacon for the region, reaffirming that citizen engagement is one of the essential pillars for credible elections and sustainable peace. ESN-SA and ZESN remain committed to supporting such initiatives across Southern Africa and encourage continued investment in inclusive, citizens' rights-based electoral governance.

About ESN-SA

The Electoral Support Network of Southern Africa (ESN – SA) is a regional network of fifteen non-governmental organisations working in the area of elections in the Southern African Development Community (SADC) region. The ESN-SA (formally known as Southern African Development Community – Election Support Network (SADC-ESN) was established in January 1998 at a launching conference held in Dar-es-Salaam, Tanzania. It is a regional network of organisations working in the field of democracy and elections organised into country chapters. In its early formation the ESN-SA focused mainly on domestic election observation and thereafter on regional election observation; building capacity of network members to design and develop voter and civic curricula and internal capacity building. In 2013, ESN-SA observed the Zimbabwe Harmonised Elections as well as the first round of the Malagasy Presidential Election.

The Network provides opportunities for sharing lessons learnt, peer exchange, encourages exchange of best practices at the regional level and provides opportunities for members to participate in various workshops and conferences including workshops on election observation, electoral reforms, and gender equity in the democratic process. ESN-SA is currently being hosted by one of its member organisations, the Zimbabwe Election Support Network (ZESN), which is the current Secretariat. Hence, all the Network's activities are coordinated from the said organisation based in Zimbabwe. ESN-SA is a member and sits in the Steering Committee of the Global Network of Domestic Election Monitors (GNDEM), which is pivotal in ensuring international best practice and monitoring in the conduct of domestic election observation.

About ZESN

The Zimbabwe Election Support Network (ZESN) formed in 2000 is a coalition of 37 non-governmental organisations formed to co-ordinate activities pertaining to elections. The major focus of the Network is to promote democratic processes in general and free and fair elections in particular.

It was also established to standardise the NGOs election-related activities and methodology as well as to ensure wider geographical coverage and co-ordination of activities. The broad aim of the Network was therefore to enhance the election process in Zimbabwe in order to promote democracy and good governance in general as well as free and fair elections in particular whilst adhering to internationally acceptable standards.

List of ESN-SA and ZESN Accredited Observers

ESN-SA Observers

1. Rindai Chipfunde Vava
2. Nzira Sofia Razao De Deus
3. Bhekithemba Madodenzani Buthelezi
4. Celestino Tchitta BUTÃO Epalanga
5. Komborero Nkomo
6. Evans Kunda
7. Hassan Musa Yousuf



ZESN Observers

9. Dumisani Ncube
10. Emmaculeta Chiseya
11. Permanent Ngoma
12. Chief Edson Chihota
13. Heather Koga





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