



**Zimbabwe Election  
Support Network** ■  
Promoting Democratic  
Elections In Zimbabwe

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**THE ELECTORAL SUPPORT NETWORK OF SOUTHERN AFRICA  
AND  
THE ZIMBABWE ELECTION SUPPORT NETWORK  
OBSERVATION LEARNING MISSION  
  
MALAWI 2025 GENERAL ELECTIONS**

**PRELIMINARY STATEMENT**

**18 SEPTEMBER 2025 LILONGWE, MALAWI**

## **1. INTRODUCTION**

In line with the Election Support Network of Southern Africa'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 Mission to observe the Malawi General Elections held on 16 September 2025. The Learning Mission comprised 13 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.

Upon its arrival, the Learning Mission conducted a briefing session with key electoral stakeholders, which included citizen observer groups gathering nuanced views on the electoral environment and the various interventions being conducted by faith-based organisations, gender and inclusion experts and a Commissioner from the Malawi Peace and Unity Commission. The briefing enabled the Mission to gather nuanced views on the electoral environment and the various interventions conducted by electoral stakeholders ahead of the 2025 Malawi elections. Additionally, they provided an assessment of the state of preparedness of the Malawi Electoral Commission and other stakeholders.

Following the briefing, the ESN-SA and ZESN deployed 13 mobile observers to the Lilongwe Central, Dowa, Salima, Lilongwe Mpeno (Mbuna) and Dedza Districts. They observed the opening, voting, closing of polling stations, and counting.

The findings and recommendations of this preliminary statement are made in reference to the Electoral Laws of Malawi, the Southern African Development Community (SADC) Principles and Guidelines Governing the Conduct of Democratic Elections as well as other international and African election guidelines and principles such as the African Charter on Democracy, Elections and Governance (ACDEG) and the Principles for Election Management, Monitoring and Observation in the SADC region (PEMMO) and the Declaration of Global Principles for Non-partisan Election Monitors.

This preliminary statement is based on reports received from the ESN-SA and ZESN observers, as well as engagement meetings held by the Mission with various stakeholders since its arrival in Malawi. It is important to note that this statement has been issued whilst the electoral process is still ongoing and does not represent the Mission's overall or final assessment.

## **2. LEGAL FRAMEWORK**

The Malawi General Elections are 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 political party conduct, and safeguard the rights of citizens to participate in free and fair elections.

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 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.

## **3. ELECTION ADMINISTRATION**

### **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. The MEC also registered 137,925 voters with various disabilities, which represents approximately 1.92% of all registered voters. The Mission applauds the higher registration statistics of women, given that they constitute approximately 51,2% of

the population.

### **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 Councillor for the 2025 General Elections. For the 2025 Malawi General Elections, the MEC reduced the nomination fees for women, youth, and persons with disabilities aspiring to be candidates by 50% as a way of encouraging their greater participation, as financial hurdles are often a significant barrier to their candidature.

### **Polling day political environment**

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 co-existed 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 also contributed to transparency, allowing observers, media and stakeholders to observe the voting and counting processes effectively. Such a peaceful atmosphere significantly fostered voter trust and encouraged participation.

### **Set up and opening of polling stations**

ESN-SA and ZESN observers reported that at the polling stations observed, they were 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). 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.

### **Political Parties' and Candidates' 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.

### **Polling officials, voting process, and procedures**

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, with a slight predominance of female officers 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.

### **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.

### **Redirected and turned away voters**

The ESN-SA and ZESN Learning Mission observed that voters were redirected or turned away at polling stations 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.

### **Citizen Observers and other Key Electoral Stakeholders**

The Civil Society Organisations (CSOs)-led Election Situation Room (ESR) played a pivotal role in strengthening the integrity and responsiveness of the electoral process. By facilitating real-time coordination among citizen observers, the MEC, the Malawi Police, the Centre for Multi-Party Democracy, the Malawi Peace and Unity Commission, the United Nations Development Program (UNDP), women and children's rights organisations, youth groups, organisations of persons with disabilities, and regional bodies such as the African Union and the Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA), in the Situation Room enhanced incident response, promoted transparency, and ensured greater accountability among stakeholders throughout the election period.

The Learning Mission draws inspiration from this remarkable collaboration and wholeheartedly commends all participating institutions and organisations for their unwavering commitment to democratic values and collective action. Their collective efforts not only safeguarded the credibility of the electoral process but also demonstrated the power of inclusive, multi-stakeholder engagement in building a peaceful and participatory democracy. This model of cooperation is important not only for Malawi's democratic consolidation but also for the region to emulate, as it sets a strong precedent for unity and shared purpose of fostering a culture of transparency, peace, and accountability.

## **Counting and Results**

ESN-SA and ZESN observers reported that the vote counting process at the polling stations they observed was largely transparent, peaceful, and professionally managed. Polling staff generally followed established procedures, and the presence of party agents and citizen 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. 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.

## **4. COMMENDABLE PRACTICES OBSERVED DURING THE 2025 MALAWI ELECTORAL PROCESS**

- 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.
- 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 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% 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 the number of polling stations from 5002 to 15148, as well as moving up 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.
- 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.
- 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.
- Deployment of sign language interpreters at key national electoral events and the provision of tactile jackets supported the inclusive 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.



## 5. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In conclusion, the ESN-SA and ZESN commend 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.

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:** Introduce legislated gender quotas or temporary special measures to guarantee a minimum threshold of women's representation in Parliament and local councils.
- **Inclusive Candidate Support:** Establish dedicated campaign finance support schemes and mentorship programs for women, youth, and persons with disabilities.
- **Civic Education and Voter Registration:** Fund continuous voter registration and civic education throughout the electoral cycle to increase citizen participation in electoral processes.

- **Targeted Voter Education:** Conduct targeted outreach to communities which had low turnout, using data-driven strategies and inclusive messaging to encourage participation.
- **Strengthen Political Finance Oversight:** Develop and implement a clear and enforceable framework to monitor how political parties and candidates raise and spend money during elections.
- **Technology Reliability:** Improve the reliability and usability of the BMVIDS to prevent delays and ensure smoother verification processes.
- **Infrastructure:** Upgrade lighting and infrastructure at polling stations, especially in rural areas, to ensure safe and accurate vote counting after dark.
- **Cultural Transformation:** 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.

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