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Kofi Annan
Foundation

ELECTORAL VULNERABILITY INDEX 2025-2026

COUNTRY ANALYSIS

MALAWI

GENERAL ELECTIONS: SEPTEMBER 2025



BACKGROUND

Malawi has established a record of holding regular, competitive elections and has experienced multiple peaceful transfers of power between political parties since transitioning to multiparty democracy in 1994. These processes have helped institutionalize elections as the legitimate means for gaining political authority, with the judiciary and civil society playing key roles in safeguarding democratic norms.

Despite these democratic structures, surveys indicate that a majority of Malawians are dissatisfied with how democracy operates, and there is fluctuating political participation. Press freedom has declined in recent years, and incidents of political violence and intimidation—such as the disruption of protests by armed groups—have raised concerns about the robustness of civil liberties.

Corruption remains a significant obstacle, with Malawi ranking 115th out of 180 countries on the 2023 Corruption Perceptions Index. Efforts at decentralization have made little real progress, and traditional authorities still wield considerable influence, especially in rural areas. Socio-economic challenges, including widespread poverty and underfunded government agencies, further constrain the effectiveness of democratic institutions. In December 2024, landmark judicial reform bills were passed to enhance judicial independence and accountability.

UPCOMING ELECTIONS

Malawi's 2025 general elections, scheduled for September, represent a pivotal moment for the country's democratic trajectory and socioeconomic future. Political tensions have been heightened by disruptions of anti-government protests and fears of political violence ahead of the 2025 elections.

The elections will test the ability of Malawi's political system to manage intense competition, coalition-building (as no candidate is likely to win outright in the first round), and the inclusion of reformist voices to address structural challenges.

The 2019 annulled elections exposed systemic flaws in Malawi's electoral process, highlighting the need for reforms to ensure transparency, fairness, and credibility. The performance of the Malawi Electoral Commission (MEC), judiciary, and other civic institutions will be closely scrutinized.

The elections will take place against the backdrop of severe economic challenges, including drought, high unemployment, food price inflation exceeding 20%, and widespread food insecurity affecting a quarter of the population.



POTENTIAL DRIVERS OF CONFLICT

According to the Electoral Vulnerability Index (EVI), these are the factors that contribute most to the increased potential for violence:

- Violence during the last election
- Number of consecutive elections with moderate violence
- Infant Mortality Rate
- Exclusion by socio-economic group from political life and access to services
- GDP per capita
- Score of V-DEM Accountability Index
- V-Score on V-DEM 'Civil Society Participation' Index.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- **Strengthen Peace Messaging and Preventive Diplomacy:** Peace messaging, especially when led by respected religious organizations and community leaders, has proven effective in reducing tensions and discouraging violence across various segments of society. Preventive diplomacy—active engagement by mediators and influential figures before and during the election cycle—can help address disputes before they escalate.
- **Expand Civic and Voter Education:** Civic education programs, such as those run by the National Initiative for Civic Education (NICE), have reached millions and are credited with fostering a culture of democratic tolerance and peaceful engagement

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

- [International IDEA Democracy Tracker for Malawi](#)