

Study into the reasons for non-voting during the 2004 Presidential and Parliamentary Elections in Malawi

Second Draft Report

Malawi Electoral Commission (MEC) and National Initiative for Civic Education

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Acronyms

Aford	Alliance for Democracy
CILIC	Civil Liberties Committee
DCEO	District Civic Education Officers
MCP	Malawi Congress Party
MEC	Malawi Electoral Commission
MGDS	Malawi Growth and Development Strategy
MSI	Management Systems International
NDA	National Democratic Alliance
NICE	National Initiative for Civic Education
PAC	Public Affairs Committee
PPE	Parliamentary and Presidential Elections
PPM	Progressive Peoples Movement
RP	Republican Party
UDF	United Democratic Front

Executive Summary

A. Background

Since 1993 Malawians have shown enthusiasm about elections. In terms of voting behaviour, Malawians like to exercise their rights to choose their political leaders and political system. Hence voter turnout (as expressed as a percent of registered voters) increased from 69 percent in the 1993 referendum to 94 percent in the parliamentary and presidential elections of 1999. However, in the 2004 elections there was a drastic drop in voter turn-out from 94% to 63%. This drop has been a matter of concern and this study was prompted by this trend.

B. The Objectives of the Study

NICE commissioned this study to attempt to find an answer to non-voting behaviour in the country. This study was also expected to help the Malawi Electoral Commission to become more proficient in promoting and nurturing participatory democracy in which voter turn-out remains high. Consequently, the main objectives of the survey were to:

- i) Understand the reasons why a significant percentage of the electorate failed to vote in the 2004 Presidential and Parliamentary Elections (PPE); and
- ii) Recommend appropriate strategies for overcoming non-voting.

C. Methodology of the study

MEC decided to go a more difficult but in the end more promising route of conducting a survey by exclusively interviewing non-voters. Tracing and interviewing actual non-voters would have been easier if MEC had up-to-date lists of those registered voters who actually cast their votes. As this was not the case, MEC had to go another way of identifying non-voters, which involved using the country-wide network of the National Initiative for Civic Education (NICE). With the help of NICE it was possible to individually identify and interview a sufficiently large and statistically representative number of non-voters through a series of village meetings.

While developing the questionnaire it became evident that the non-voters would have to be differentiated in four sub-groups and some questions would have to be asked specifically for each sub-group. The four sub-groups identified were:

- People who decided not to vote at all.
- People who tried to register but failed and were thus prevented from voting.
- People who decided after registration not to vote.
- People who registered but then failed to cast their vote.

D. Findings of the study

i) Are Malawians indifferent to voting?

The results show that of the sample of 2,897 respondents, 33% did not want to vote at all while the large majority (67%) wanted to vote but failed to do so for one reason or another. Hence Malawians are not indifferent to voting.

ii) Why did some people not want to vote all?

A large majority (79%) of those who did not want to vote did so because they were dissatisfied either with delivery of campaign promises or inter-party politics which did not see their candidates selected as candidates. A significant minority (13%) did not vote due to religious reasons. Another group (4%) did not want to vote because they did not know the importance of voting and the rest were busy, sick or away from the country.

iii) Why did some people fail to register?

The problems mentioned by the respondents included lack of registration materials, missing information (e.g. registration cards, voters name, picture, etc.), registration staff unable to process transfer or issue a duplicate certificate, voter being turned back by the registration staff as ineligible, or due to the fact that registration process was tiresome and confusing. Close to two in every ten respondents (17%) failed due to being intimidated by others; or that their registration card was snatched by traditional/political leader; or registration certificate was bought by someone. Another 11% failed because either they were ill themselves or were attending to a patient.

iv) Why did some people change their minds?

The survey shows that of the 2,897 non-voters, 1,330 or approximately 46% registered but failed to vote. Of these 704 or 24% changed their minds and decided not to vote. The study was designed to get information on such non-voters regarding their decision not to vote. A large majority (60%) of the non-voters cited the political system as the main culprit for their change of mind at the last minute. Approximately 32% said they were generally dissatisfied with the performance of elected leaders and that they feel cheated by their MPs. Twenty-eight percent (28%) cited diminishing confidence in elected leaders and pointed out that they have no confidence in election outcomes because people vote for parties not personalities.

v) What prevented some people from voting?

The results of this survey have shown that some of the non-voters actually registered and had all the intentions to go to the polls on the polling day. A good percentage (36%) failed due to poor health. Another 20% did not vote because they lost the registration certificate. Furthermore, 20% said that there was neither assistance nor encouragement from polling staff or that they were turned back by polling staff as ineligible. A further 12% failed due to intimidation by political leaders or party members. Eleven percent was not able to vote because they were way.

vi) Did people know enough about the elections?

Virtually everyone (99%) knew about the May 20 elections in 2004. Furthermore, 95% of those interviewed said they had access to information concerning the elections. This result shows that none of the people interviewed could have failed to vote on account of ignorance of the elections. Furthermore, only a small percentage of people could have failed due to lack of information.

vii) Did religion affect voting behaviour?

We wanted to know the extent to which religion might have played a role in people's decisions not to vote. In terms of religion Christians and Moslems dominated the sample. Other religions were extremely low in the sample.

Nonetheless we note more Christians claimed that they did not want to vote at all than Moslems (34% vs. 27%). In terms of those who registered but were prevented from voting, more Moslems claimed to have been prevented from voting compared to Christians.

viii) Did gender affect voting behaviour?

Contrary to common sense, a higher percentage of men (37% male vs. 29% female) did not register to vote because they did not want to vote at all. On the other hand, in term of registration, a slightly higher proportion of women (23% compared to 19% men) failed to register. Similarly, significantly more women (26% vs. 18% men) who registered were prevented from voting.

ix) Did ethnicity affect voting behaviour?

In terms of those non-voters who wanted to vote but failed to register, the results show that:

- The Tongas met the greatest challenge in trying to register. Most of those who failed to register failed due to no registration materials or were turned back by the registration staff as ineligible.
- There are those who registered but later decided not to vote. The Chewa, Yao and Ngoni slightly dominated this category and reasons were mostly to do with diminishing confidence in the political system and imposition of candidates.
- Lastly, there were those that were prevented from voting. The results show that the Nkhonde (32%), Tumbuka and Yao (27%) were most disadvantaged in this respect.
- The Nkhondes failed mostly due to loss of registration certificate. On the other hand the Yao and Tumbuka were prevented mostly by illnesses.

x) What were the major key findings on election civic education in the 2004 PPE?

Key findings on civic education indicate serious shortfalls in a number of areas. These include the fact that major issues are not covered by civic education messages; the fact that political parties dominate civic education meetings; the fact that the electorate, by far, prefer the radio as a source of election information and the fact that a majority of the electorate did not attend civic education meetings in the 2004 PPE.

xi) What type of information was disseminated and through what means?

- Eighty-eight percent (88%) mentioned the radio as their source of information for the elections. The radio was therefore the most common means of communication about the elections.
- A large majority (72%) attended civic education meetings organized by political parties. The National Initiative for Civic Education (NICE) came second with 33% of the respondents attending their meetings. Only 16% of the respondents mentioned having attended a civic education meeting organized by MEC. PAC and the traditional leaders were mentioned by 11% and 10% respectively.
- It is also important to note that political leaders, religious organisation, NGOs and friends also played important roles. Political leaders were mentioned by 38% of the non-voters whereas 20% mentioned religious organisations, 18.5% NGOs and 17% friends.
- In terms of the preferred source of information, the majority (66%) of the respondents, by far, preferred the radio.
- A significant minority (29%) of the respondents who did not vote did not receive information on the registration process.
- Information on other processes of the elections was not available to majority of the respondents. For instance, 59% claimed that they had no information on the polling process. Information on the campaign and nomination processes was received by a mere 27% and 17% respectively. Furthermore, only one in five Malawians had information on voter rights.

1. Background

1.1. The Context of the 2004 Presidential and Parliamentary Elections (PPE)

For 30 years, from 1964 to 1994, Malawi was under a centralised, one-party and one-man dictatorship. On 14 June 1993, a referendum was held in Malawi to vote for a multiparty system of democracy or maintain the authoritarian constitutional order that had been in place since shortly after independence. That national referendum brought to an end the era of one-party rule and ushered in multiparty democracy through the formation of new political parties. Malawians greeted the referendum results and the subsequent general elections with optimism and hope for a better Malawi. Political commentators claimed that the voters' decision to change the system of government in the 1993 referendum was strong evidence that the one-party system of government had failed to meet the expectations of the majority of the people.

Since 1993, Malawi has been struggling to consolidate its young democracy. The Malawi Vision 2020, which is the long term National Development Plan, has identified democratic governance, with attendant transparency, accountability and fairness, as a core challenge facing Malawi. The Governance Pillar (Chapter Five of the Malawi Growth and Development Strategy (MGDS)) emphasises the importance of good governance as follows:

“The success of the strategies suggested in the first four themes owes much to the prevalence of good governance. The main tenets of good governance are issues to deal with good public sector management, absence of corruption and fraud, decentralization, justice and rule of law, security, good corporate governance, democratisation and information communication and technology. In addition, the need for political will and change of mindset within a democratic political environment is also envisaged to contribute positively towards the attainment of economic prosperity and poverty reduction. Malawi will, therefore, endeavour to address concerns in these areas as they underpin the achievement of all economic growth and social development objectives in the medium term.”

Elections are part of the democratisation process. Hence it is important that all Malawians of voting age participate in the electoral process at all levels. Failure to do so should arouse concern among the citizenry.

1.2. Trends in Voting Behaviour since 1993

Since 1993 Malawians have shown enthusiasm about elections. In terms of voting behaviour, Malawians like to exercise their rights to choose their political leaders and political system. As can be seen in Figure 1 below, voter turnout (as expressed as a percent of registered voters) increased from 69 percent in the 1993 referendum to 94 percent in the parliamentary and presidential elections of 1999.

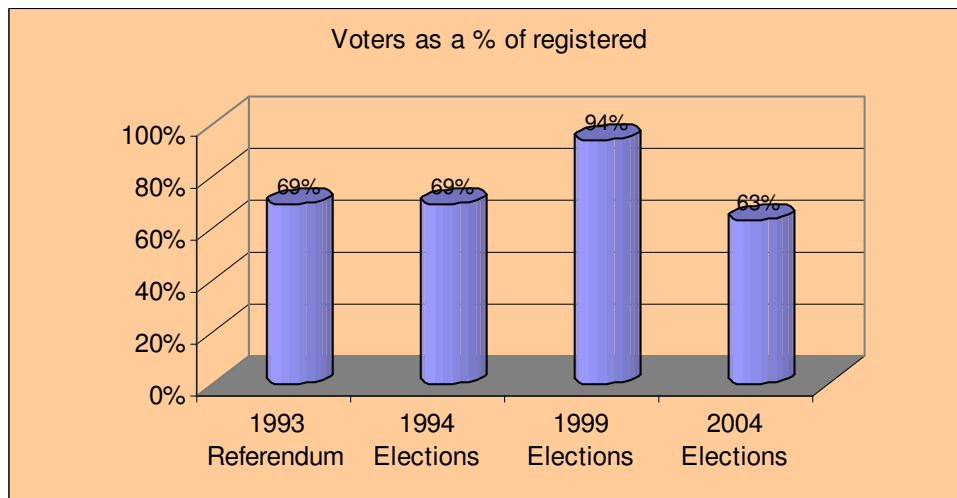


Figure 1: Voter Turnout (as percentage of registered voters): 1993 to 2004. Source: 1993 figures are from the 2004 Report of the Public Affairs Committee. 1994 to 2004 figures are from the 1994, 1999 and 2004 reports of the Malawi Electoral Commission.

However, what is disturbing is that in the 2004 parliamentary and presidential elections (PPE), voter turnout dropped to 63 percent. A number of reasons have been given to explain the drop. These reasons include insufficient voter education, too many political candidates, confusion brought about by last minute change in the polling date, confusion over registration rolls, problems with counting of results, inaccuracy of the voter roll, frustration with the political system and disillusionment with unfulfilled promises made by politicians at the last election. However, all these reasons are based on conjecture and none has any proof.

Furthermore, registration of voters has also been increasing from 1994 to 2004 (See Figure 2).

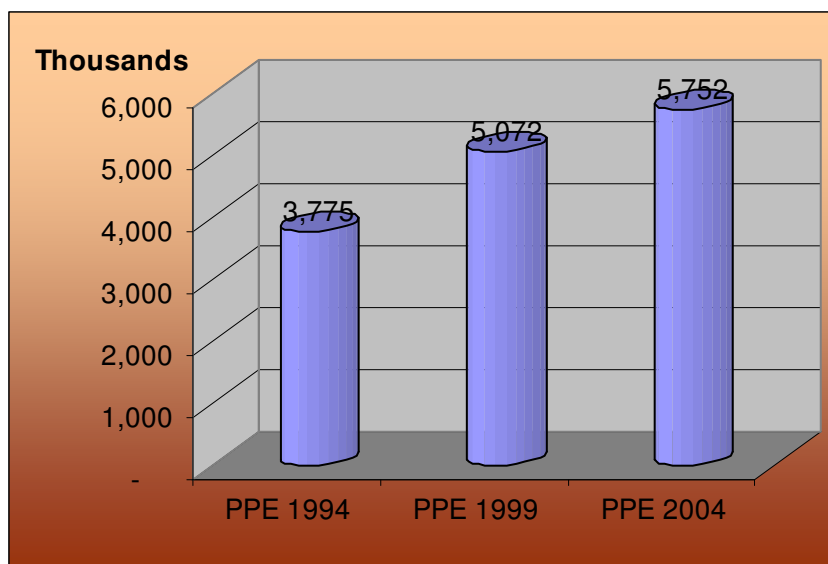


Figure 2: Voter registration since 1994. Figures are from the 1994, 1999 and 2004 reports of the Malawi Electoral Commission.

The dawn of multi-party democracy offered hope for a more just and democratic nation. This is precisely because multi-party democracy allows citizens to choose leaders they want. But when citizens start losing interest in elections, then other people will impose leaders on them. This is not good for democracy. This is why it is important to look more carefully into the drop in voter turnout in the 2004 PPE.

1.3. Trends in Voting Behaviour in other countries

It may be useful to see how other countries have performed in elections since the emergence of democratic systems in the 1990s. By 2004, most countries had already held three general elections. As comparative research for elections during the 1990s has shown, the so called ‘founding elections’ between 1989 and 1997, i.e. elections which facilitated a regime change from dictatorship to democracy, attracted on average about 64.1% of the registered voters. In the next round of elections - so called ‘second elections’ (1995-1997) – participation rates dropped to an average of 55.8%. The relatively low and decreasing levels of voter participation have been explained in several ways: “...*tardy election planning, inadequate systems of voter identification and outdated voter registers...*” as well as with “...*the state’s fiscal and administrative weakness and growing voter indifference ... [and] premeditated interference on the part of politicians*”. Evidence for ‘third elections’ is still sketchy but seems to indicate that participation rates have stabilised at a lower level (Figure 3).

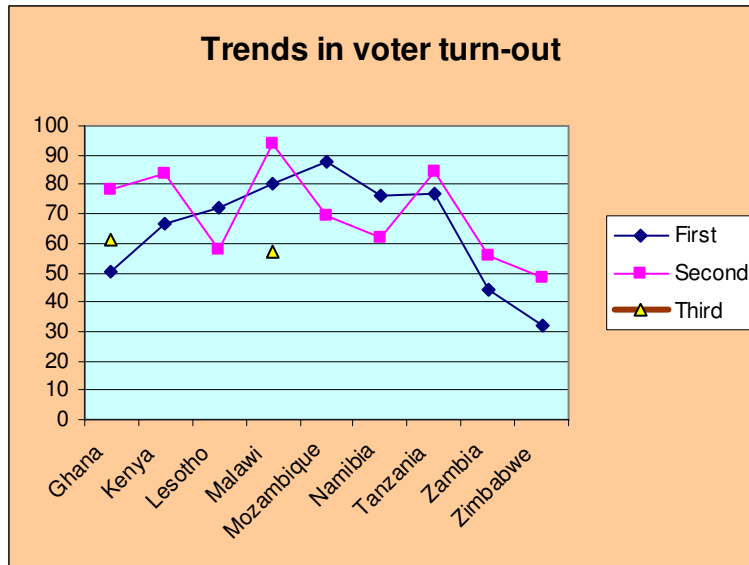


Figure 3: Trends in Voter Turn-out in selected countries. Sources: EISA website

Against these general trends participation rates for parliamentary and presidential elections in Malawi stick out:

- in 1994 more than 80% of the registered voters participated;
- In 1999 this figure rose to 93%.

By the end of the 20th century it seemed as if Malawians had embraced democracy full-heartedly. This is confirmed by a comparative survey of political attitude and values amongst seven SADC states (Botswana, Zimbabwe, Zambia, Malawi, Lesotho, Namibia and South Africa) of the Afrobarometer Series. The survey found that Malawians value their civil liberties highest of the seven SADC member states but are also very concerned about the economy. Of the seven states surveyed, Malawi scored the highest percentage for the value of voting, electoral choice and multi-party competition. Of particular interest in this respect is that Malawians value the act of “voting” highly. The survey seems to underscore the high participation rates of elections in Malawi: only people who attach high significance to voting will also actually cast their vote.

All the more surprising was thus the seemingly drastic drop of participation for the 2004 elections. According to the figures of the Malawi Electoral Commission (MEC) only about 57% of the registered voters cast their votes in the 2004 Presidential and Parliamentary Elections (PPE) (Figure 4). However, there was widespread agreement that the 2004 voters roll was strongly inflated and did not reflect the number of actual voters.

The available figures also showed that the numbers of non-voters differed slightly between the three regions of Malawi. The national participation rate was 57.8% and only the North was a bit out of line with 63.3%.

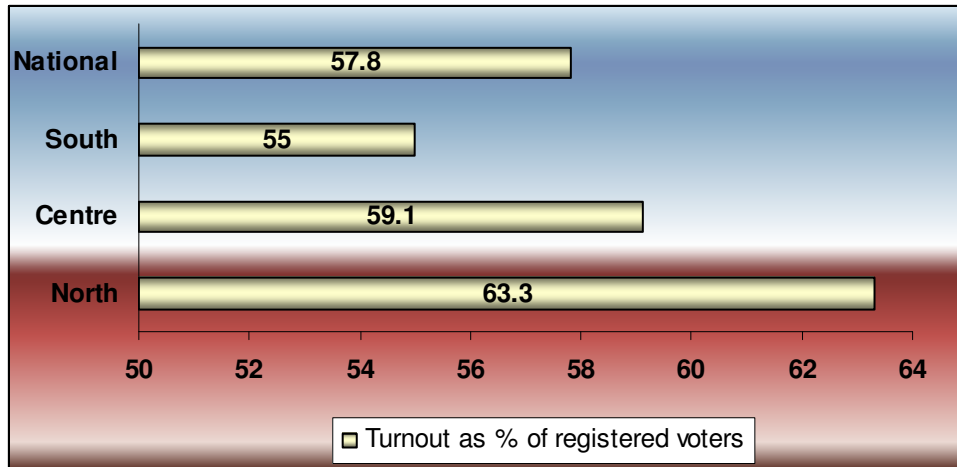


Figure 4: Election results of 2004. Source: Dulani 2005 and own calculations

2. Literature Review

2.1. Views on voter apathy

Political participation has been described by Jane Mansbridge as “the bottom-up practice of deliberative democracy.” It consists of “legal activities by private citizens that are more or less directly aimed at influencing the selection of government personnel and the actions they take.” The concept encompasses voting in elections, collective action around policy issues, contacting political representatives and outbursts of street protests. One line of argument is that if conventional forms of participation fail to make popular voices heard, citizens in a democracy are within their rights to stage boycotts, strikes and demonstrations. Participation also includes engagement in community affairs and contacting patrons such as traditional leaders, religious figures, or business leaders.

Khaila and Mthinda (2006) report that Malawians exhibit relatively high levels of participation in some forms of politics, but quite low levels in others. For instance they said political participation, as defined by voting behaviour, is very high in Malawi. However, Malawians are less inclined to participate in civic activities or political actions.

Voting is perhaps the most primary requirement of political participation and one of the most important forms of participation in multi-party democracies. Indifference to elections or voter apathy has interested researchers and philosopher for a long time. Hence a number of theories have been developed to explain voter apathy. It is necessary, therefore, to briefly outline what the main theoretical positions on voter apathy are. There a number of theorists who generally say that voter apathy is natural and should not be a concern in participatory democracy. They argue that voter apathy is a sign of satisfaction with democracy and therefore should be seen as a positive development in the sense that it signals the electorate’s contentment with the performance of the political system. The assumption in this line of thinking is that if people are not satisfied with the way the political system is performing, they will automatically apply pressure on the

system to change. Therefore, if people are given a chance to elect their leaders and decide not to participate, this is a sure sign that they are satisfied.

On the other hand there are those theorists, political scientists, sociologists and philosophers who argue that non-participation is a sign of serious political stalemate. These thinkers associate voter apathy with unhealthy politics, degeneration and decay (The Independent Electoral Commission, 2002). Voter apathy, as is true with any non-participation, is seen to be a sign of failure by the system to articulate its needs and mobilise resources to meet those needs. The assumption is that a system is not able to satisfy the interests of the individual members unless these are articulated. They also point out that power can be used to prevent grievances from being expressed; that culture can be such that it makes a society conservative; or that the system can be so complicated that people feel intimidated and decide not to take part in important events.

The issue about political participation is not about whether a political system would satisfy the interest of the individual if constantly pressured. The issue is that individual interests are numerous and varied and any political system is bound to experience difficulties in knowing what these interests are. Furthermore, even if it were possible, through carefully conducted surveys, to assess the numerous interests and needs and prioritise them, with scarce and finite resources, it would be a difficult task to satisfy all of them. In situations where resources are scarce and demands for the resources are numerous and varied, the system is more likely to mobilise resources and respond to those segments of society that articulate their interests and needs and pressure the system to respond. In this sense, political participation is crucial in a democracy.

2.2. Political Culture in Malawi

There is an argument that human beings are naturally indifferent to politics. On the other hand, others respond by counter arguing that political indifference is a sign of a pathogenic political system. Political indifference, they argue, is a result of long experience with authoritarianism or due to the influence of traditional power systems that instil obedience to authority and to elders. In this survey, there was no specific question to test the cultural values of Malawians when it comes to politics. Therefore, it is not possible to answer this question using the current data set. Fortunately, Afrobarometer conducted a public opinion survey on democracy and economic reforms in the same year the voter apathy survey was conducted. Some interesting results are of interest to this study.

In their Briefing Paper, Khaila and Mthinda (2006) reported that majorities of Malawians believe that they should more actively question the actions of their leaders (71 percent) and that people should be free to speak their minds on politics freely without government influence (69 percent). The implication is that if we observe political indifference in Malawi, it cannot be because the culture encourages us to be indifferent. There must be a different explanation.

Some people have suggested that political indifference is a sign that people are not interested in political affairs. But the Afrobarometer survey results suggest that this is not the case in Malawi. Rather the evidence suggests that low levels of participation occur because people do not see opportunities to participate and see the political system as complicated. The Afrobarometer finds high levels of cognitive engagement amongst ordinary Malawians. Three quarters of Malawians (74 percent) say they are interested in public affairs and slightly more than half (53 percent) say they discuss political matters with friends frequently or occasionally.

2.3. The right to vote

Section 40 of the Malawi Constitution has guaranteed political rights which include forming, joining and participating in the activities of political parties. It also includes the rights to vote, campaign, and vie for political office and to freely make political choices. The question that should be asked is: “Does the electoral process provide for these rights?” Malawi has had three Parliamentary and Presidential Elections in 1994, 1999 and 2004. Furthermore, there has been one Local Government Election in 1999 and the second one should have been held in 2005. In terms of the Parliamentary and Presidential Elections, it is fair to say that they have been held regularly. On the other hand the Local Government Elections have only been held once in 1999 since the dawn of multi-party politics in 1994. Ideally we should have had at least two elections by now.

The Malawi Constitution provides for opportunity for the effective rotation of power among a range of different political parties representing competing interests and policy options in the country. In the last Presidential and parliamentary elections there were at least ten (10) parties competing. Four of these parties have their stronghold in the northern region (Aford, Petra, Mgode and PPM), one in the central region (MCP) and five in the southern region (UDF, RP, NDA, Mafunde and CONU). In a parliament of 193 seats, forty candidates stood as independents.

2.4. The voting process

To the extent that there was no violence during the Parliamentary and Presidential Elections of 2004, it may be said the elections were free. Furthermore, the constitution provides for universal suffrage and the elections were conducted using a secret ballot and were monitored by independent electoral authorities such as National Initiative for Civic Education (NICE), PAC, Civil Liberties Committee (CILIC) and other international observers such as Management Systems International (MSI). However, what is not known is whether the elections in 2004 provided the electorate the right environment to make free choices of their leaders. This section will try to answer this question.

2.5. How many people registered at all?

There are two ways to measure the extent of non-voting: one is to look at the percentage of people who registered and actually voted. This method is fine if the percent of people who register is high. As has already been said the number of people who register for the PPE has been increasing in Malawi and is considered to be good. Therefore, looking at non-voters as a percentage of voters over those who registered is justifiable. However, it

is also just as important to know what percentage of the voting age actually registered. In the Afrobarometer, which was done in June of the same year the non-voter study was done, majority (82%) of the respondents said they registered to vote. Only 18% did not register for one reason or another.

The percentages of voters against those who registered are very high in all categories. There are several possible explanations for this. One is the possibility that people lied about their voting behaviour for fear of being accused of being unpatriotic. We think this is unlikely considering that it is already established that Malawians like to vote and that the elections were ranked as very free in 2004. Even if some may have lied, those that may have lied cannot account for 40% difference in the figures. It appears that what is accounting for this difference may be a combination of several factors. One may be that the claim that the voter roll was inflated may be true. Secondly, it may be that MEC's counting of the ballots was faulty or that the counting was really not complete at the time the results were announced. Or indeed it may be a combination of these factors. This reasoning may not be acceptable in some quarters but what is clear is that there were controversies concerning the results of the 2004 PPE.

3. The Objectives of the Study

We have already mentioned the many possible explanations for the lower voter turn-out in the 2004 PPE. Nonetheless, it was and still is unclear if these factors really mattered. If they had an impact, what was the degree of impact and what does that mean for the future of democratic elections in Malawi? With these questions in mind Nice commissioned this study to attempt to find an answer to why people failed to vote in the 2004 PPE.

It was expected that the study's results would allow the making of pertinent recommendations to all major stakeholders (e.g. political parties, MEC, NGOs, civic education providers etc.) in the upcoming election process. This study was also expected to help the Malawi Electoral Commission to become more proficient in promoting and nurturing participatory democracy in which there is a small percentage of the electorate that fails to vote. Lessons from this study would enhance voters' confidence in the electoral process by enabling MEC to ensure that all weaknesses in the electoral process have been eliminated and be seen to exercise fairness in serving and dealing with everyone regardless of their political sympathy or socio-economic status.

Consequently, the main objectives of the survey were to:

- i) Understand the reasons why a significant percentage of the electorate failed to vote in the 2004 Parliamentary and Presidential elections; and
- ii) Recommend appropriate strategies for overcoming non-voting.

4. Methodology

For MEC to understand the reasons why some people did not vote and to be able to develop strategies and activities to address the problem it was felt necessary to undertake an in-depth survey into the reasons for failure to vote in the 2004 PPE. Voter apathy studies have been conducted for other African countries (e.g. Botswana). However, they turned out to be more perception surveys of voter apathy than dealing with the actual reasons as they indiscriminately addressed voters and non-voters. In other words, in the Southern African context nobody attempted yet to focus solely on non-voters when investigating the reasons for failure to vote.

To avoid this trap, MEC decided to go a more difficult but in the end more promising route of conducting a survey exclusively interviewing non-voters. Tracing and interviewing actual non-voters would have been easier if MEC had up-to-date lists of those registered voters who actually cast their votes. As this was not the case, MEC had to go another way of identifying non-voters, which involved using the country-wide network of the National Initiative for Civic Education (NICE). With the help of NICE it was possible to individually identify and interview a sufficiently large and statistically representative number of non-voters through a series of village meetings.

NICE is well positioned to undertake such a task as it has offices in all districts of Malawi and a broad volunteer base in each of the districts. In the past, NICE has been involved in a number of empirical studies regarding policy issues and has a trained group of enumerators to deploy for such exercises.

The setting up of the survey was thus on the one hand very straight forward but on the other hand required an innovative approach. While the delineation of the districts and constituencies and the determination of the minimum numbers of interviewees followed logical and empirical standards, the identification of the sample respondents had to be organised in a special way.

The major challenge for the survey was to identify a sufficiently representative number of people who did not vote. Three options to achieve that appeared to be possible:

- i) Identifying non-voters through the voters' roll of the Malawi Electoral Commission
- ii) Conducting random interviews and only use responses from the non-voters
- iii) Conduct village meetings aimed at identifying non-voters and interview them.

The first option was impracticable as the voters' rolls did not show who of the registered voters had actually voted and who had not. Moreover, using this approach would have excluded all the people who did not even register.

The second option was also not feasible as not only the administrative and financial effort would have been quite enormous but the chance that non-voters would identify

themselves in such an approach is rather low as they might fear discrimination when admitting not to have voted.

That left the third approach which required the setting up and holding of several village meetings where the villagers received a general introduction into democracy and elections and were then asked if they had voted. That approach made it easier for the non-voters to come out and identify themselves and allowed the enumerators to approach them for interviews. During these meetings a general mistrust regarding the objective and purpose of the identification of non-voters had to be overcome. The people had to be convinced that no penalties or disadvantages would accrue for them once they had admitted of not having voted. However, as the village meetings were organised and facilitated by experienced and locally well-known NICE District Civic Education Officers (DCEO), a basic trust already existed, which helped the identification and interviewing of non-voters.

The sampling target was 3,000 interviews which would reduce the error margin to less than 2% given the total number of 5.7 million registered voters. To ensure that a representative sample for Malawi was achieved 10 out of the 42 district and town assemblies were selected. It was ensured that both urban and rural areas were represented, that all three regions of Malawi were covered and that lake-side as well as highland areas were incorporated. Roughly reflecting the population density patterns of Malawi, two districts from the Northern region and four districts respectively from the Central and Southern regions were chosen.

In each of the districts three constituencies were selected on the basis of their voter participation rates: the constituency with the highest and the one with the lowest participation rate as well as one with an average participation rate. Altogether 30 out of 192 constituencies were singled out for the study.

Through these general selection criteria for the areas in which the interviews were to be conducted, it was possible to get a representative cross-country sample regarding the non-voters. The next step was to select the villages in each of the 30 constituencies in which the identification meetings were to take place. In this respect ten villages per constituency were selected in a random approach; they were spread out through the constituency and any geographical crowding was avoided.

On the basis of test-runs in districts not selected for the sample (Dowa, Blantyre Rural and Mzimba) it was judged that it would be possible to identify an average of 5 non-voters per village meeting. That in turn led to the estimation that at least 10 villages per constituency were required to produce a sample of 3,000 interviewees.

The interviews were conducted on the basis of a questionnaire which had been developed by a joint MEC and NICE task force. The questionnaire was kept as straight forward as possible and always allowed for open and un-guided answers from the respondents. Before the final questionnaire was approved it was field-tested several times and adjusted where necessary.

While developing the questionnaire it became evident that the non-voters would have to be differentiated in four sub-groups and some questions would have to be asked specifically for each sub-group. The four sub-groups identified are:

- People who decided not to vote at all.
- People who tried to register but failed and were thus prevented from voting.
- People who decided after registration not to vote.
- People who registered but then failed to cast their vote.

To ensure that the questionnaires were administered in a professional way and that no manipulations of either the interviewees or the answers they provided was possible the enumerators were intensively trained by the MEC/NICE task team. The training sessions for the enumerators were organised on regional basis and took place in Blantyre, Mponela and Mzuzu.

The questionnaire was designed in such a way that not only the subjective reasons for non-voting would be disclosed but also a number of arguments on the reasons for the relatively low turnout, the effectiveness of civic education and the role of the MEC would be checked. As such the questionnaire was divided into six major parts:

- Part 1 tried to capture the demographic information of the respondents.
- Part 2 dealt with issues pertaining to ‘access to information about the elections’ for the respondents.
- Part 3 established further socio-economic background and perceptions of the respondents.
- Part 4 covered questions on ‘civic education’ delivery pertaining to the respondents.
- Part 5 tried to establish the reasons for non-voting in four sub-groups
- Part 6 looked at the attitude of the respondents regarding participation in the next elections

The survey was conducted in August and September 2005. The processing of data was undertaken in October and November 2005 and the interpretation of the information took place from November 2005 to February 2006. In the end, 2,897 valid questionnaires were collected and used for the study.

5. Survey Findings

5.1. Demographic Characteristics of the Respondents

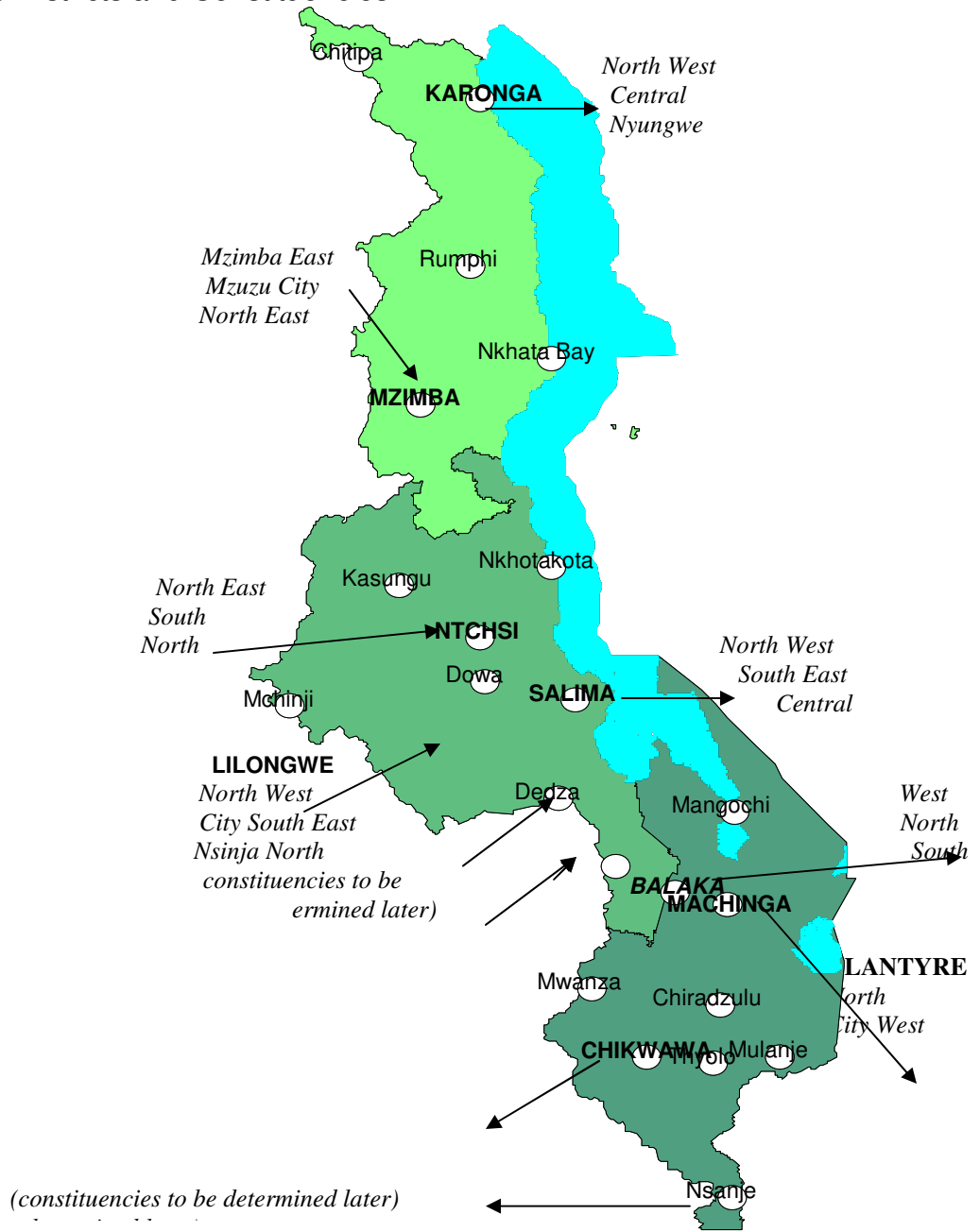
The sample was over-representing the Northern Region with approximately 22% of the respondents from the Northern region. According to the 1998 Census the population of Malawi was distributed, respectively, 12.3%, 41% and 46.7% in the North, centre and South. But as may be observed in Table 1, the respective distributions in the NICE

sample were 21.7%, 37.1% and 41.2%. Furthermore, the sample did not include the Eastern region of Zomba, Machinga and Mangochi (See Map below), the major Islamic districts and stronghold of the UDF at the time of the elections. These irregularities may have implications on the findings.

Table 1: Distribution of respondents by region and district

Region	District	Respondents	Percentage
North	Karonga	345	21.7
	Mzimba	285	
Centre	Ntchisi	211	37.1
	Salima	328	
	Lilongwe	214	
	Dedza	322	
South	Balaka	273	41.2
	Mulanje	309	
	Nsanje	271	
	Blantyre	339	
National		2897	100.0

The Sampled Districts and Constituencies¹



¹ Data of Districts and constituencies obtained from Malawi Electoral Commission

In terms of gender, out of 2897 responding non-voters 1557 (53.7%) were men and 1340 (46.3) women (see Table 2). This contrasts slightly with the figures from the 1998 population census, which established that the male-female ratio was roughly 49:5. However, it can be assumed on the basis of experiences with previous elections that amongst the registered voters there is a slight majority of men.

	Respondents	Percent
Male	1557	53.7
Female	1340	46.3
Total	2897	100.0

The majority of the respondents were between 18 and 45 years old (60.6%), with the biggest bracket being between 26 and 35 years old (see Table 3). The 1998 Census does not differentiate that finely between age brackets. On the other hand these figures are comparable to Afrobarometer Survey results of 2005. Hence, it can be safely assumed that the distribution of age groups in the sample reflects quite accurately that of eligible voters in Malawi.

	Respondents	Percent
18 – 25 Years	786	27.1
26 – 35 Years	971	33.5
36 – 45 Years	510	17.6
46 years and older	630	21.7
Total	2897	100.0

Most of the respondents were married (66.4%), followed by those who were single (15.9%). Others were widowed (6.8%), separated (3.7%), polygamous (2.1) or cohabitating (0.8%) (See Table 4). The figures from the 1998 Census were to some extent different with 55% being married and 37% never been married (NSO 2000: xvi). However, it might be too daring to establish a relationship between marriage and non-voting.

Marital Status	Respondents	Percent
Married	1893	66.4
Single, never married	455	15.9
Widowed	193	6.8
Separated	105	3.7
Polygamy	59	2.1
Cohabiting	22	.8

In terms of education, the sample shows a majority of respondents having no or only limited primary education (54.7%), while higher educational achievements were less well

represented (see Table 5). As compared to the 1998 Census (NSO 2000: xv), the figures from the current sample are showing a much higher rate of educational achievement amongst non-voters than amongst the general population in 1998. This finding might point to the fact that particularly amongst the better educated the tendency not to vote has been more pronounced than in the general population. However, statistically, there is no correlation between educational level and reasons for non-voting. In other words, educational achievement did not matter when it came to the reasons for non-voting (according to Pearson Correlation [mean value 0.269 which is greater than 0.05 which would indicate a correlation])

Education	Respondents	Percent
No formal education	362	12.7
Drop out	359	12.6
Some primary	839	29.4
P.S.L.C	518	18.2
JCE	448	15.7
MSCE	283	9.9
University	23	.8
Vocational	16	.6
Other	5	.2
Total	2853	100.0

The last variable under demographic information is religious affiliation. According to the sample the overwhelming majority of respondents were Christian (85%) followed by Muslims (9%). Agnostics, traditional beliefs and other beliefs accounted for the remaining percentages. According to the 1998 Census only about 80% of Malawi's population were Christian but 13% were Muslim (NSO 2000: xiv). The 2005 Afrobarometer Survey showed 79% Christians and 13% Muslim. This discrepancy between the non-voter study and the 1998 census and Afrobarometer data is most probably due to the sample bias. As it was observed in Table 6, the sample excluded the important Muslim districts of Zomba, Machinga and Mangochi.

Table 6: Distribution of respondents by religious affiliation

Religious Affiliation	Respondents	Percent (NICE)	Percentage (Afrobarometer) (N=1200)
Christian	2410	85	79
Moslem	266	9	13
No religion	88	3	2
Traditional	63	2	1
Other	26	1	5
Total	2853	100	100

5.2. Are Malawians indifferent to voting?

As already pointed out, this survey focused on population of the electorate who did not vote. Hence, the first question to answer is why did this electorate not vote? The results show that of the sample of 2,897 respondents, 33% did not want to vote at all while the large majority (67%) wanted to vote but failed to do so for one reason or another (Figure 5). Hence 67% of those who did not vote actually wanted to vote. This means that their failure to vote cannot be due to indifference. This is in line with other findings which show that Malawians like to exercise their right to vote.

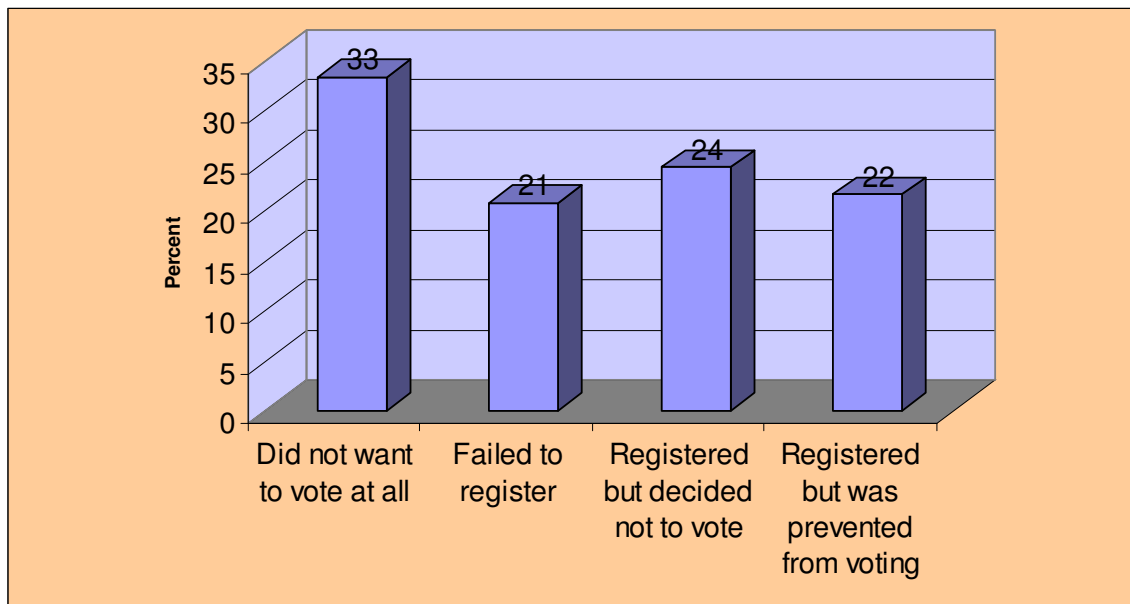


Figure 5: Reasons for not voting in the 2004 PPE

5.3. Why did some people not want to vote all?

It has been found that 964 out of the 2,897 respondents (33%) did not want to vote at all. We are interested in finding out why some people did not want to vote at all. As may be observed in Figure 6, there are two major reasons for not wanting to vote. The first is that people associate voting with improvement in the delivery of socio-economic goods in line with campaign promises made during election time. This accounts for 48% of those who did not want to vote. The second reason is inter-party politics. This includes imposition of candidates as well as violence and intimidation during elections of leaders within parties. This accounts for 31% of those who did not want to vote (See Figure 6).

Hence, a large majority (79%) of those who did not want to vote did so because they were dissatisfied either with delivery of campaign promises or inter-party politics which did not see their candidates selected as candidates. This is in line with other findings which indicate that failure to deliver on campaign promises contributes to low voter

turnout (Chinsinga, 2006). A significant minority (13%) did not vote due to religious reasons. Another group (4%) did not want to vote because they did not know the importance of voting and the rest were busy, sick or away from the country.

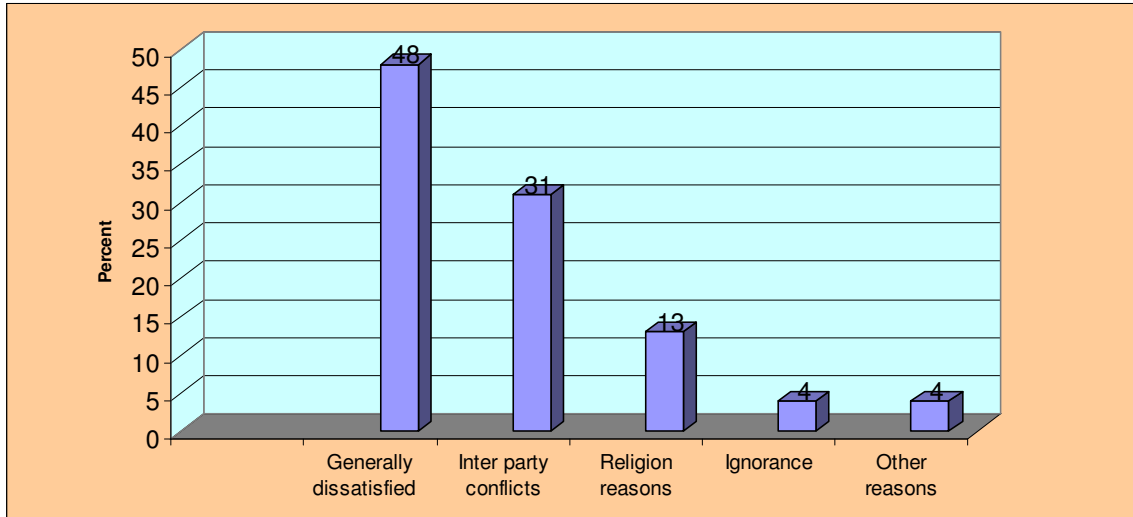


Figure 6: Reasons for not wanting to vote at all

These results point to the existence of clientelism in Malawian politics. Clientelism is an informal institution of neo-patrimonialism where people in power rely on award of personal favours to stay in power. These favours may take various forms such as public sector jobs and distribution of public resources through licenses, contracts and projects. In return for material rewards, clients mobilize political support and refer all decisions upwards in a mark of loyalty to patrons (Bratton and van de Valle, 1997). Unfortunately, the clients are too numerous and quite often the political leaders are not able to deliver what they promised to everyone and in the process the electoral become disillusioned. This has a negative impact on the consolidation of democracy.

The conclusion is that although Malawians are not apathetic to voting in comparison to voters in other countries in Africa, a significant minority is dissatisfied with delivery of socio-economic goods after elections. If not checked, this may lead to significant apathy. Furthermore, inter-party politics, religion and ignorance contribute significantly to voting behaviour.

5.4. Why did some people fail to register?

Chinsinga (2006) points out a number of failures of MEC which contribute to low voter turnout. These include insufficient voter registration materials, allegations of partisanship in the distribution of materials, non functional registration centres, the timing of the registration period and low caliber and poorly motivated registration staff.

In this report we earlier said that 67% of the 2,897 respondents wanted to vote but failed. Those who wanted to vote but failed to so were asked to explain why they did not vote. The results show that 603 (21%) did not vote because they were unable to register. The respondents were further asked to explain why they did not register. Figure 7 shows the results. Of the 603 respondents who failed to register, the majority (56) failed due to various problems with the registration process. The problems mentioned by the respondents included lack of registration materials, missing information (e.g. registration cards, voters name, picture, etc.), registration staff unable to process transfer or issue a duplicate certificate, voter being turned back by the registration staff as ineligible, or due to the fact that the registration process was considered tiresome and confusing. Close to two in every ten respondents (17%) failed to register because they were actively prevented from doing so by others. Another 11% failed because either they were ill themselves or were attending to a patient. This finding agrees with Chinsinga’s conclusions.

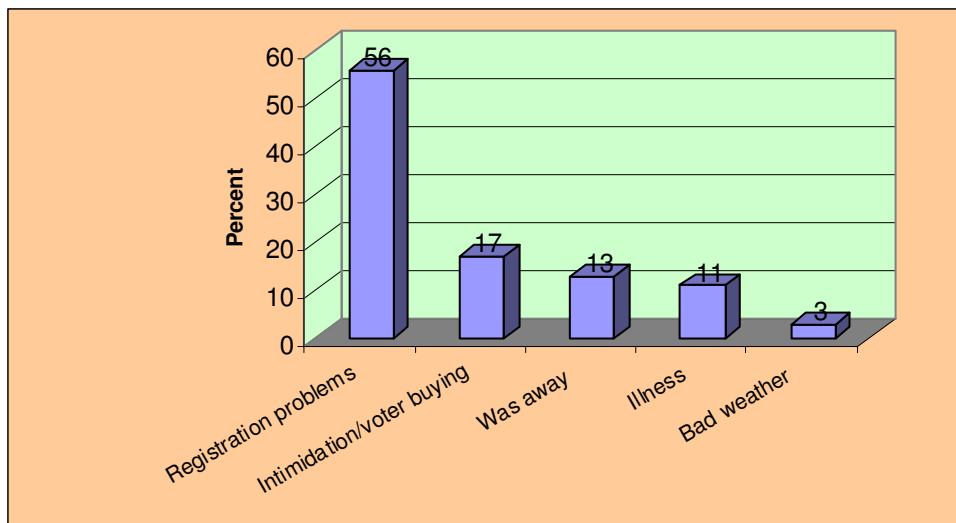


Figure 7: Reasons for failing to register

In conclusion, the study shows that the registration process was the leading cause for failure of respondents to register followed by intimidation and voter buying. Illness also affected a significant minority.

5.5. Why did some people change their minds?

The survey shows that of the 2,897 non-voters, 1,330 or approximately 46% registered but failed to vote. Of these 704 or 24% changed their minds and decided not to vote. The study was designed to get information on such non-voters regarding their decision not to vote. The results are shown in Figure 8.

A large majority (60%) of the non-voters cited the political system as the main culprit for their change of mind at the last minute. Approximately 32% said they were generally dissatisfied with the performance of elected leaders and that they feel cheated by their

MPs. They further said they were dissatisfied with the distribution of tangible benefits (e.g. handouts). In other words, people associate voting with an improvement of socio-economic conditions. Twenty-eight percent (28%) cited diminishing confidence in elected leaders and pointed out that they have no confidence in election outcomes because people vote for parties not personalities.

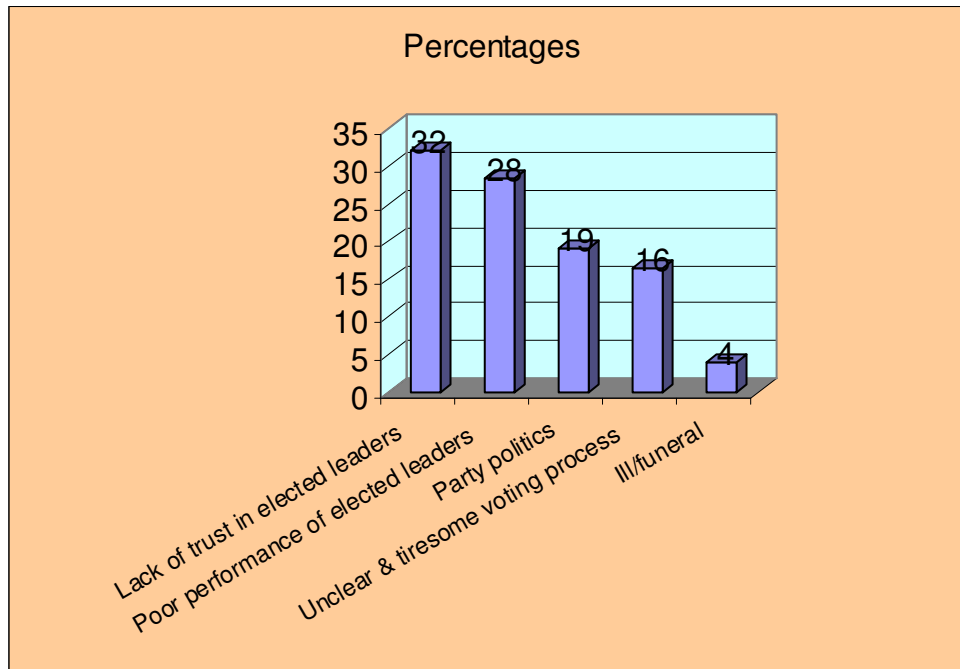


Figure 8: Reasons for deciding not to vote after registration

Much like the respondents who did not want to vote at all, the respondents who changed their minds after registration also said party politics influenced their decisions. Approximately 19% said they decided not to proceed with voting inter- or intra-party politics. In particular, they cited violence and imposition of candidates as they main problem. A good percentage said they did not think they could vote when their preferred candidate was not contesting. Furthermore, 16% of the respondents blamed the voting process saying that the process was unclear, long and tiresome. Again a significant minority (4%) changed their minds due illness or funerals.

Chinsinga (2006) citing Osei-Hwedie lists a number of functions that political parties are supposed to perform. These include recruiting people to govern, formulating policies and acting as unifying forces of the various groups of the electorate. Chinsinga laments that unfortunately parties in Malawi have failed to perform these basic functions because they lack internal democracy and are not founded on clearly articulated values and principles. Khaila and Lansner (2006) say that Malawi's political system is characterized less by competing policies or ideologies than it is by personality and patronage-driven rivalries in the framework of ethno-regional party loyalties. The results of this study confirm both

the fact that parties lack internal democracy and that politics characterized by patron driven rivalries. This situation is causing people to lose faith in the electoral process.

The concern regarding voting for parties and not the credentials of the candidate touches on the issue regarding our electoral system of first past the post. Some people argue that this system contributes to low voter turnout. In this regard there have been calls to adopt the proportional representation system (PR). The question is would the PR system solve our problems?

We are fortunate that we have experience in three types of elections, namely, the Presidential, the Parliamentary and Local Government elections. On these elections, we have sufficient knowledge of the weaknesses/problems associated with these elections. We are, therefore, competent to discuss ways of remedying these problems through the amendment of the constitution where such a solution is relevant. Of course, we know that not all the problems associated with these elections can be remedied by amending the constitution. Some problems may only be resolved through *major changes in mind sets* among Malawians. Other problems may be managed by Acts of Parliament and *mass education of the citizenry* to make them aware of the need and importance of making their demands known to the leaders of this country.

The PR system is proposed to solve parliamentary elections problems. On voter apathy, we have seen that Malawians have generally shown high interest in voting as seen from their voting behaviour in the past four elections. However, in the 2004 elections, of the approximately 5 million voters 37% did not vote. This translates into 1,850,000 Malawians who should have voted but did not vote. Could these people be a source of instability after the election? Obviously, important as this issue is, the proportional representation system (PR) will not be able to rectify this problem.

The PR electoral system is most relevant for the election of members of the National Assembly and Local Assemblies. While I agree that the current FPTP system we are using disadvantages minority parties, this is not necessarily the case in a majority of Malawi's constituencies. We should remember that elections of the members of the National Assembly and Local Assembly are at the constituency/ward level. Most of the constituencies in the country are generally ethnically and perhaps religiously homogeneous. Consequently, whether you use the FPTP or the PR system of electing the MP, it will make little difference on the outcome of the election. This is precisely because the election elects one person per constituency/ward. Hence I do not believe that the PR system will help the minority parties.

The challenges that the PR system would bring and ones which need to be addressed in this scenario are substantial. The major one is the fact that politics in Malawi is dogged by clientelism. The "Big Man" syndrome and the patron-client relationships abound.

Like in the Presidential election, the election of members of the National Assembly/Local Assembly suffers from inadequate democratization of the process for selecting candidates to represent a party in a constituency/ward. Party leaders dictate the names of those who

stand for the party in a constituency/ward; the *mock primary elections* notwithstanding. This has at least two problems. One is that voters are deprived of the opportunity to select a person they want to represent them in Parliament. Secondly, able people with integrity, vision, good character and principled are denied a chance to be voted into Parliament. The result has been an increase in voter apathy and an increase in the number of people who opt to contest as independents.

Any electoral system that denies the people the right to choose their leaders through a fair and free election and give power to political leaders to exercise power to choose leaders inherently limits people's democratic rights to elect their leaders and is therefore undemocratic and prone to abuse. The PR system has the potential to alienate people from the electoral process. Furthermore, the system has great potential to be a source of political instability in the country. Such a system may also result in increased voter apathy. Lastly, because of the Big Man syndrome, this system will inadvertently lead to selection of mediocre people to the National Assembly. This would particularly be tragic especially since there is no chance of recall in this system.

Another problem of the current Malawi electoral system is that, in an area where there are many candidates contesting in an election, the simple majority allows a person to win with 20% of the electoral votes. This of course has the potential to cause political instability. The solution to this problem does not lie in the PR. Rather it lies in devising a system which requires a candidate to win a certain percentage of the electorate for them to be declared winner.

5.6. What prevented registered voters from voting?

The results of this survey have shown that some of the non-voters actually registered and had all the intentions to go to the polls on the polling day. However, for a variety of reasons they did not vote. The total number of such voters in the survey was 626 (or approximately 22%) out of the sample of 2,897 non-voters. In the survey we wanted to know what prevented these potential voters from voting. We have valid answers from 581 respondents and the results are shown in Figure 9.

Out of the 581 respondents who had registered and were ready to go to the polls, 36% failed due to poor health. Another 20% did not vote because they lost the registration certificate. Furthermore, 20% said that there was neither assistance nor encouragement from polling staff or that they were turned back by polling staff as ineligible. In some instances voters were discouraged by others voters. Eleven percent was not able to vote because they were away.

A further 12% failed due to intimidation by political leaders or party members. Bratton et al. (2005) report that, to all appearance, Africans do not yet feel fully free. Some react negatively to the very notion of politics which they regard as a realm of lies and violence. This is the case in Malawi politics and it is negatively affecting voter turnout.

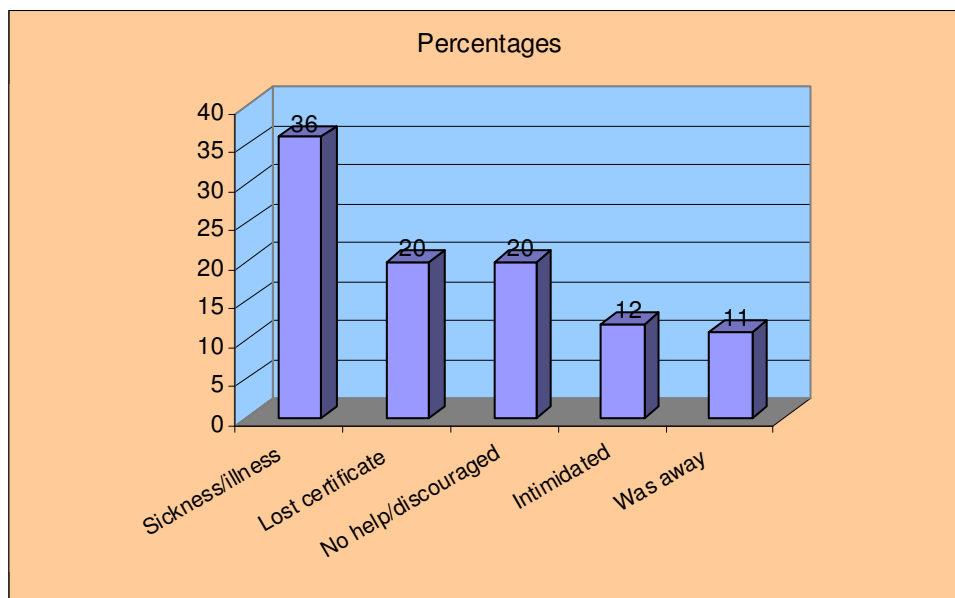


Figure 9: Reasons preventing voters from going to the polls

Clearly, sickness and loss of registration certificate influenced voter-out significantly; accounting for a majority of the respondents who were prevented from voting. One out of 5 potential voters failed to vote due to lack of assistance from the polling staff and one out of 10 failed due to intimidation. A significant minority of 11% failed to vote because they were away.

5.7. What was the information disseminated and what channels were used?

In this study the following questions were asked: “Did you know that there were elections in May 2004? Did you have access to information on the just ended May 20, 2004 PPE?” The results to these two questions have been tabulated in Table 7. As can be seen, virtually everyone (99%) knew about the May 20 elections in 2004. Furthermore, 95% of those interviewed said they had access to information concerning the elections. This result shows that none of the people interviewed could have failed to vote on account of ignorance of the elections. Furthermore, only a small percentage of people could have failed due to lack of information.

Table 7: Knowledge and access to information of 2004 PPE

<i>Item</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
Knowledge of 2004 Elections	99
Access to information on elections	95

People were further asked to state how they accessed information about the elections. Eighty-eight percent (88%) mentioned the radio as their source of information for the elections. The radio was therefore the most common means of communication about the elections. This has important implications regarding access by political parties to the radio. It is also important to note that political leaders, religious organisation, NGOs and friends also played important roles. Political leaders were mentioned by 38% of the non-voters whereas 20% mentioned religious organisations, 18.5% NGOs and 17% friends (Table 8).

Table 8: Source of information on the elections?

Source of Election Information	Number of Respondents	Percent
Radio	2521	88
Political leaders	1085	38
Church/Mosque	578	20
NGOs	527	19
Friends	485	17
Local leaders	407	14
Newspapers	325	11
Banners & posters	246	9
Malawi Electoral Commission	217	8
TV	154	5
Civil society groups	137	5
T shirts	100	4
Other	19	1

In terms of the preferred source of information, the majority (66%) of the respondents, by far, preferred the radio (Table 9). This means that people rely on the radio and therefore if the radio does not give accurate information or is monopolised, a lot of people would be misled. This is why it is important to open up the radio programmes to all political participants during the elections time.

Table 9: Preferred sources of information for elections

Preferred information Source	Respondents	Percent
Radio	1876	66
Political leaders	269	9
NGOs	196	7
Church/Mosque	115	4
Local leaders	114	4
TV	99	4
Friends	68	2
Banners & posters/T-shirts	45	2
Malawi Electoral Commission	36	1
Civil society groups	30	1
Total	2854	100

Table 10 shows the results of the type of information the electorate did not receive prior to the voting. The results show that a significant minority (29%) of the respondents who did not vote did not receive information on the registration process. But we are not able to identify the specific registration information that was missing. If they had missed information on the dates and place for registration then it is possible that this could have influenced their decision not to register despite that this is not mentioned as one of the reasons. But, as mentioned above, we are not sure what type of information was missing.

Table 10: Percentage of respondents who did not receive different types of information

Type of information not received (N=2897)	Percent of Cases
Registration process	29
Polling process	59
Importance of voting	71
Campaign process	73
Voters rights	77
Nomination process	84
Announcement process	85

Table 11 also shows that information on other processes of the elections was not available to majority of the respondents. For instance, 59% claimed that they had no information on the polling process. Information on the campaign and nomination processes was received by a mere 27% and 17% respectively. Furthermore, only one in five Malawians had information on voter rights.

What is coming out clearly is that dissemination of information on important election processes was inadequate. Many of these non-voters did not receive the information and this may have contributed to their not turning up for the elections.

There were also civic education activities carried out by NGOs. Here again we note that a significant number of the people (32%) interviewed claimed that they did not attend these civic education meetings.

Table 11: Attendance of civic education meetings

Responses	Respondents	Percent
Yes	1800	68
No	842	32
Total	2656	100.0

A question was asked concerning the organizations that conducted civic education activities. The results to this question are tabulated in Table 12. As can be observed,

most respondents (72) attended civic education meetings organized by political parties. The National Initiative for Civic Education (NICE) came second with 33% of the respondents attending their meetings. Only 16% of the respondents mentioned having attended a civic education meeting organized by MEC (Table 12). PAC and the traditional leaders were mentioned by 11% and 10% respectively.

Table 12: Organisers of civic education activities

Organiser of meetings	Number of respondents	Percent of cases
Political Parties	1356	72
NICE	621	33
MEC	298	16
PAC	210	11
Traditional Authority/Local leader	191	10
CILIC	34	2
CHRR	29	2
CCJP	29	2
Malawi Carer	20	1

What were the messages relayed in these civic education meetings. The results to this question are in Table 13. The information in the table reveals that the percentage of respondents who received information on the registration process from civic education organizers is significantly much lower (56%) than that received from the media (71%) of the respondents. Only small minorities received information on the campaign process, voter rights and choice of good leader. Similarly it is not clear what voter education they received. The good news is that most people (89%) interviewed said that the messages were clear.

Table 13: Type of messages in civic education meetings

Type of messages	Number of respondents	Percentage of cases
Registration Process	980	57
Voter education	683	39
Voters Rights	418	24
Campaign process	376	22
Choice of good leader	224	13
Civic education	147	9
Announcement of results after elections	21	1

Of the 2623 respondents who responded to the question on leaflets and brochures, forty-five percent reported to have received leaflets and or brochures from MEC and other organizations. On the other hand, only approximately 40% of the respondents were able to read the materials. The most common reason for not reading was illiteracy. Only very few (4%) said they chose not to read the material as they were confusing.

5.8. Socio-demographic variables and voting behaviour

We conducted some cross-tabulations to explore the relationship between socio-demographic variables and reasons for not voting. In order to do this we cross tabulated region, sex, education, religion and ethnic group (tribe) by reasons for failing to vote. As can be observed from Table 14, nationally 33% of the non-voters did not vote because they did not want. There are no significant differences among regions in the distribution of those who did not want to vote. Likewise, region does not appear to be related to failure to register. In terms of people who registered but later decided not to vote, the central region appears to have slightly higher percentage of such people but this is statistically not significant. On the other hand, the percentage of people who registered but later decided not to vote is significantly lower in the Northern region than the other two regions. Possible reasons for this could be that most of the voters in the region had no incentive to vote since their party (AFORD) had been weakened a great deal due to internal squabbles. In the 1994 and 1999 PPE, the Northern Region overwhelmingly voted for AFORD party but in the 2004 elections, the Northern Region had ceased to be the stronghold of AFORD.

Looking at people who registered but were prevented from voting, the Northern region had a significantly higher percentage compared to the other regions. Forty-two percent (42%) of the non-voters in the Northern region claimed they were intimidated compared to 37% and 21% in the Centre and South respectively. The major contribution to this appears to have been intimidation by other party loyalists. But it is also possible that the voters were discouraged by the internal conflicts going on in main party for the North, AFORD.

	Northern	Central	Southern	National
Did not want to vote at all	32	33	34	33
Failed to register	21	20	22	21
Registered but decided not to vote	20	26	25	24
Registered but was prevented from voting	28	21	19	22
Total	100	100	100	100

Voting behaviour is known to be influencing by sex. Worldwide men tend to be more interested in politics than women. Similarly, it was expected that the reasons for not voting should be different between men and women. The results of the cross-tabulation of reason for not voting are shown in Table 15. Contrary to common belief, a higher percentage of men (37% male vs. 29% female) did not register to vote because they did not want to vote at all. On the other hand, in term of registration, a slightly higher proportion of women (23% compared to 19% men) failed to register. Similarly, significantly more women (26% vs. 18% men) who registered were prevented from

voting (see Table 15). In general, more women than men gave the following reasons preventing them from voting.

- Turned back by the registration staff as ineligible
- Missing information (registration cards, voter’s name, picture, etc.)
- Registration staff unable to process transfer/duplicate certificate
- Registration card was snatched by traditional/political leader
- Registration process was tiresome and confusing
- Registration certificate bought by someone
- Was attending to the sick

What comes out clearly is that women need more assistance than men during the registration period as well as on the polling date. Special effort should be made to assist women. On the other hand men need more encouragement on the importance of voting as they tend to be disillusioned more easily than the women.

	Male	Female	National
Did not want to vote at all	37	29	33
Failed to register	19	23	21
Registered but decided not to vote	26	23	24
Registered but was prevented from voting	18	26	22
Total	100	100	100

We analysed the influence of ethnicity on the voting behaviour. As is commonly known, all the political parties in the country have their stronghold areas. This is expected to be reflected in the voting pattern as well. Table 16 shows a cross-tabulation of ethnic group by reason for not voting. As can be observed, there are more Ngonis² who did not vote on account of simply not wanting to vote. A closer scrutiny shows that they are more generally dissatisfied with the socio-economic delivery of development than any other group.

In terms of those non-voters who wanted to vote but failed to register, the results show that the Tongas met the greatest challenge in trying to register. Most of those who failed to register they failed due to no registration materials or were turned back by the registration staff as ineligible. Chinsinga (2006) suggests that logistical problems of registration tend to dominate in areas dominated by opposition. In this study, we find no evidence to support this claim.

There are those who registered but later decided not to vote. The Chewa, Yao and Ngoni slightly dominated this category and reasons were mostly to do with diminishing confidence in the political system and imposition of candidates. Lastly, there were those that were prevented from voting. The results show that the Nkhonde (32%), Tumbuka and Yao (27%) were most disadvantaged in this respect. The Nkhondes failed mostly due to loss of registration certificate. On the other hand the Yao and Tumbuka were prevented mostly by illnesses.

² The Ngonis in this case were from Mzimba (12%), Dedza (25%), Balaka (24%) and Blantyre (24%).

Reason	Chewa	Tumbuka	Yao	Ngoni	Lomwe	Tonga	Nkhonde	Sena	Other
Did not want to vote at all	33	34	31	37	35	33	32	30	24
Failed to register	20	19	17	21	24	39	19	24	24
Registered but decided not to vote	27	20	26	25	21	19	17	26	32
Registered but was prevented from voting	19	27	27	18	21	8	32	20	20
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100

We wanted to know the extent to which religion might have played a role in people's decisions not to vote. The results of the analysis are shown in Table 17. As may be observed in the table, in terms of religion Christians and Moslems dominated the sample. Other religions were extremely low in the sample.

Nonetheless we note more Christians claimed that they did not want to vote at all than Moslems (34% vs. 27%). In terms of those who registered but were prevented from voting, more Moslems claimed to have been prevented from voting compared to Christians. The commonly cited reasons for failing to go to the polls were loss of registration certificate and illness. There were those that were able to register but for one reason or another decided not to vote. There are no significant differences among the religions in this case even though Moslems appear to have a slightly higher representation in this group. It is possible that this statistic would have been significant if the Moslem population was sufficiently represented in the sample.

Reason	Christian N=2436	Moslem N=287	No religion N=91	Traditional N=57	Other N=26	National N=2897
Did not want to vote at all	34	27	25	39	58	33
Failed to register	21	18	32	18	4	21
Registered but decided not to vote	24	27	25	25	15	24
Registered but was prevented from voting	21	28	18	19	23	22
	100	100	100	100	100	100

In conclusion we can say that socio-demographic factors indeed affect voting behaviour and different variables affect people differently.

6. Conclusions

Are Malawians indifferent to voting?

No. Approximately 67% of those who did not vote actually wanted to vote. This means that their failure to vote cannot be attributed to indifference.

Why did some people not want to vote at all?

A large majority (79%) of those who did not want to vote did so because they were dissatisfied either with delivery of campaign promises or inter-party politics which did not see their candidates selected as candidates.

Why did some people fail to register?

A majority (56%) claimed they were unable to register due to:

- lack of registration materials;
- missing information (e.g. registration cards, voters name, picture, etc.);
- registration staff unable to process transfer or issue a duplicate certificate; and
- being turned back by the registration staff as ineligible.

A significant minority (17%) claimed they were actively prevented through:

- Being intimidated by others;
- Their registration card being snatched by traditional/political leaders; or
- Their registration certificate being bought by someone.

Thirteen percent (13%) failed to register because they were away.

Eleven percent (11%) failed because they were ill.

Why did some people change their minds?

A large majority (60%) the political system as the reason for changing their minds, specifically:

- They had lost trust with elected leaders (32%);
- They were disappointed with the performance of the elected leaders (28%);
- Violence and imposition of candidates (19%);
- Unclear, long and tiresome voting process; and
- Illness (4%).

What prevented some people from voting?

The most important reasons for failing to go to the polls were the following:

- Poor health (36%);
- Loss of registration (20%)
- Lack of assistance from the polling staff (20%)
- Intimidation by other people (12%)
- Being away on the polling day (11%)

Are socio-demographic variables significantly affecting voting behaviour?

Influence of region:

- Nationally 33% of the non-voters did not vote because they did not want.
- There are not significant differences among regions in the distribution of those who did not want to vote.
- Likewise, region does not appear to be related to failure to register.
- The percentage of people who registered but later decided not to vote is significantly lower in the Northern region than the other two regions.
- Looking at people who registered but were prevented from voting, the Northern region again had a significantly higher percentage compared to the other regions.

Influence of sex:

- Contrary to common sense, a higher percentage of men (37% male vs. 29% female) did not register to vote because they did not want to vote at all.
- In terms of registration, a slightly higher proportion of women (23% compared to 19% men) failed to register.
- Similarly, significantly more women (26% vs. 18% men) who registered were prevented from voting
- What comes out clearly is that women need more assistance than men during the registration period as well as on the polling date.

Influence of ethnicity

In terms of ethnicity we observe the following:

- There are more Ngonis who did not vote on account of simply not wanting to vote. A closer scrutiny shows that they are more generally dissatisfied with the socio-economic delivery of development than any other group.
- In terms of those non-voters who wanted to vote but failed to register, the results show that the Tongas met the greatest challenge in trying to register.
- There are those who registered but later decided not to vote. The Chewa, Yao and Ngoni slightly dominated this category and reasons were mostly to do with diminishing confidence in the political system and imposition of candidates.
- Lastly, there were those that were prevented from voting. The results show that the Nkhonde (32%), Tumbuka and Yao (27%) were most disadvantaged in this respect.

What were the major key findings on election civic education in the 2004 PPE?

Key findings on civic education indicate serious shortfalls in a number of areas. These include the fact that major issues are not covered by civic education messages; the fact that political parties dominate civic education meetings; the fact that the electorate, by far, prefer the radio as a source of election information and the fact that a majority of the electorate did not attend civic education meetings in the 2004 PPE.

What were the major sources of information on election matters?

- The radio was the most common means of communication about the elections. This has important implications regarding access by political parties to the radio.
- It is also important to note that political leaders, religious organisation, NGOs and friends also played important roles.
- The majority (66%) of the respondents, by far, preferred the radio

Was the information provided of good quality?

- A majority (72%) of the people received information on the registration process.
- Nonetheless, the information on various issues in the electoral process was not available to many people.
- The majority (59%) had no information on the polling process
- What is coming out clearly is that dissemination of information on important election processes was inadequate.

7. Recommendations

The survey has revealed some important information concerning the voting behaviour at different stages of the voting process and also concerning the influence of demographic variables on voter behaviour. Based on these findings, a number of recommendations can be made as follows.

- 7.1 In order to encourage the minority who appear to be discouraged by the socio-economic performance of the government, civil society organisations should intensify civic education to give the electorate reason to vote. Citizens should be made aware that benefits of democracy go beyond material things.
- 7.2 A key finding on civic education is that major election topics such as voter rights, choice of a good leader, the campaign process and the registration process are not covered by civic education messages. We recommend that civil society organisations prioritise these topics in the next elections.
- 7.3 The findings indicate that political parties dominate civic education meetings during the election period. In country where clientelism, character assassination and partisan politics are the order of the day, this scenario is a recipe for disaster. We

recommend the civil society organisation should intensify their efforts and emerge on top in civic education activities during election time.

- 7.4 The electorate, by far, prefer the radio as a reliable source of election information. We recommend that MEC and civil society organisation should use the network of radios in the country and use banners and posters sparingly.
- 7.5 We recommend that institutions such as the PAC, Centre for Multi-Party Democracy, CILIC etc. should develop training programmes for political parties to become more innovative in their campaign strategies and not make promises they cannot fulfil. This can be done by developing ideologies and core values within parties.
- 7.6 Intra- and inter-party politics affect people's decision not to vote. We recommend that parties democratise the processes of selecting leaders at all levels. The electoral law empowers the Commission to prescribe a code of conduct to be complied with by every political party in conducting its campaign in an election. This code of conduct should be extended to intra-party elections and should be incorporated in the PPE Handbook.
- 7.7 We have learnt that intimidation and violence is common at election times. The electoral law prohibits any person campaigning in an election to use language which is inflammatory, defamatory or insulting or which constitutes incitement to public disorder, insurrection, hate, violence or war. These provisions have been in the PPE handbook but MEC must enforce these provisions strictly.
- 7.8 MEC has developed a voters' registration procedures manual. We recommend that, in addition to the manual, civil society should pay attention to a number of things such as:
- Ensuring adequate registration materials,
 - Providing sufficient information on venues for both registration and voting,
 - Providing civic education on eligibility, and
 - Simplification of the process of registration.
- 7.9 We recommend that ways be found for dealing with:
- Those who are taken ill or are caring for the sick
 - Those who lose registration certificates
 - Lack of assistance from the polling staff
 - Intimidation by other people
 - Those who are away on the polling day
- 7.10 Considering that more women than men were prevented from voting, they need special assistance during the registration period as well as on the polling date.

- 7.11 It appears that the more remote areas had the greatest difficulty with registration. We recommend that MEC must plan to start distribution of registration materials with remote areas.
- 7.12 In terms of information provided to the voters, we recommend that the Malawi Broadcasting Corporation should be charged with the responsibility of providing more specific information to the electorate and should include:
- Names of various candidates,
 - Where the polling station is,
 - Party symbols, manifestoes, etc.
- 7.13 Looking at the radio as the most important source of information, we recommend that laws regarding access to the radio should be strictly enforced.
- 7.14 Traditional and religious leaders appear to play a significant role in dissemination of information concerning the elections. We recommend that civil society organisations pay special attention to properly sensitise and inform these leaders to ensure that they disseminate the correct information.
- 7.15 The quality of information is very important during elections. It is recommended that a study be done to evaluate the type of information that is provided during the campaign period.

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ANNEX 1: THE QUESTIONNAIRE

**MALAWI ELECTORAL COMMISSION/NATIONAL INITIATIVE FOR CIVIC
EDUCATION
VOTER APATHY SURVEY 2005**

THIS SURVEY IS BEING CONDUCTED BY THE MALAWI ELECTORAL COMMISSION/NATIONAL INITIATIVE FOR CIVIC EDUCATION. THE INFORMATION CONTAINED IN THIS QUESTIONNAIRE IS STRICTLY CONFIDENTIAL.

INTRODUCTION: Hello. My name is [ENUMERATOR NAME]. I work for the MALAWI ELECTORAL COMMISSION/NATIONAL INITIATIVE FOR CIVIC EDUCATION. We are conducting a survey looking at factors that cause voter apathy in Malawi. This survey is conducted anonymously, and your household has been randomly selected to participate in the study. Please be assured that the information obtained in this questionnaire will be treated with the utmost confidentiality it deserves

SECTION A: HOUSEHOLD IDENTIFICATION

A1.	District	
A2.	TA/STA/ Town	
A3.	Constituency	
A4.	Village / Place name	
A6.	Urban / Rural	
A7.	Date of Interview	

1.1.1.1 SECTION B: FIELD CHECK - TO BE COMPLETED BY FIELD SUPERVISOR

	NAME	DATE CHECKED
SUPERVISOR:	_____	<input type="checkbox"/>
	_____	<input type="checkbox"/>

1.1.1.2

1.1.1.3 FOR OFFICE USE ONLY

	NAME	1.1.2 DATE RECEIVED, CHECKED, CAPTURED
RECEIVED BY		
1.2 <i>QUALITY CONTROLLER</i>		
DATA CAPTURER		

Factors Affecting Voter Apathy in Malawi

These questions are about you

SECTION 1: Personal Details

1.1	Sex <i>1=Male 2=Female</i>	1.2	Age
1.3	Current marital status <i>1=single, never married 2=divorced 3=separated 4=married 5=cohabiting 6=widowed 7=Polygamic</i>	1.4	Educational Qualifications <i>1= No School 2=Some Primary 3=P.S.L.C. 4=JCE 5=MSCE 5=University 6=Vocational 7=Other</i>
1.5	Employment Status <i>1=Unemployed 2=Self Employed(Business persons, vendor,etc) 3=Industrial Worker 4=Civil Servant / statutory /Co- operation parastatals 5=Soldier/Policeman 6=Commercial Farmer 7=Subsistence farmer 8=Church/NGO/Civil Society member</i>	1.6	Tribe <i>1. =Chewa 2. =Tumbuka 3. =Yao 4. =Ngoni 5. =Lomwe 6. =Mang'anja 7. =Tonga 8. =Lambya 9. =Nkhonde 10. =Sena 11. Senga</i>

9= <i>Domestic worker</i> 10= <i>Housewife</i> 11= <i>Casual labourer</i> 12= <i>Agricultural workers</i>			12. <i>Other</i>	
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SECTION 2: KNOWLEDGE ABOUT THE MAY 2004 PARLIAMENTARY & PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS

I'd like to start by asking some broad questions about your knowledge on the last elections in Malawi

2.1	Did you have access to the information on elections on the May 20, 2004 Parliamentary and Presidential elections 1= <i>Yes</i> 2= <i>No</i> <input type="checkbox"/> SKIP TO 2.3	
2.2	How did you access the information on elections on the May 20, 2004 Parliamentary and Presidential elections 1= <i>Radio</i> 2= <i>TV</i> 3= <i>Newspapers</i> 4= <i>Malawi Electoral Commission</i> 5= <i>Church/Mosques</i> 6= <i>Political parties</i> 7= <i>Civil Society Groups</i> 8= <i>NGOs</i> 9= <i>Local leaders</i> 10= <i>Friends</i> 11= <i>Other</i>	
2.2.1	Did you access information on elections through public media? 1= <i>TV</i> 2= <i>Radio</i> 3= <i>Newspapers</i>	
2.2.2	Which organisations provided information on the elections? 1= <i>MEC</i> 2= <i>NICE</i> 3= <i>NGOs</i> 4= <i>Political parties</i> 5= <i>Church / mosque</i>	
2.2.3	Did you get information on elections through public information materials? 1= <i>Posters</i> 2= <i>T/shirts</i> 3= <i>Banners</i> 4= <i>Fliers</i>	
2.2.4	Were there any other sources of information on elections. 1= <i>Friends</i>	

	2=Local leaders 3=Political leaders 4=Others	
2.3	What information did you receive? (Allow multiple responses) <i>1=Registration process</i> <i>2=Nomination process</i> <i>3=Campaigning process</i> <i>4=Polling process</i> <i>5=Announcement of results</i> <i>6=Other</i>	
2.3.1	Did you know that there were elections on May 20 2004? 1=Yes 2=No	
2.3.2	Did you know that you had to register? 1=Did you know that you had to register? 1=Yes 2=No	
2.3.3	Did you know that you were to register and vote? 1=Yes 2=No	
2.3.4	Did you know how to vote ? 1=Yes 2=No	
2.3.5	Did you know the parliamentary and presidential candidate?	

SECTION 3 BACKGROUND

How do you rate the following issues in your community :-

1=Most Important 2=Second most important 3=Third most

important

(Important, less important, very important)

3.1	Employment	
3.2	Food	
3.3	Access to water	
3.4	Regionalism / ethnicity	
3.5	Gender Equality	
3.6	Education	
3.7	Access to Health Care	
3.8	Cost of living / communication / transport	
3.9	Corruption	
3.10	Agricultural inputs	

3.11	Crime	
3.12	Environmental degradation (explain) HIV/AIDS / Communication / transport	

Some people feel life is getting better in your community while others disagree? What do you think about life in your community?

3.13	1= <i>Much better</i>	
3.14	2= <i>Better</i>	
3.15	3= <i>No change</i>	
3.16	4= <i>Worse</i>	
3.17	5= <i>Much worse</i>	

Some people are pessimistic about Malawi's future while others are optimistic, how do you feel about the country's future?

3.18	1= <i>Very optimistic</i>	
3.19	2= <i>Optimistic</i>	
3.20	3= <i>Neutral</i>	
3.21	4= <i>Pessimistic</i>	
3.22	5= <i>Very pessimistic</i>	

SECTION 4: CIVIC EDUCATION MEETINGS & ACCESS TO INFORMATION

Now I am going to ask you about Civic Education in this area

4.1	Can you tell me what Civic Education groups or Organisations that operate in this area?	
4.1.1	Did any of the following organisations also provide civic and voter education to you? 1=Political parties. 2=Traditional Authorities 3=MEC 4=Other NGOs (explain) 5=Media 6=Other (Specify)	
4.2	Have you ever attended to any of these Civic Education meetings? 1= <i>Yes</i> 2= <i>No</i>	
4.3	If yes, who had organized the meeting 1= 2= 3= 4=	

	5=	
4.4	What message or information was being relayed to the public? 1= 2= 3= 4= 5=	
4.5	Was the message clear to you? <i>1=Yes</i> <i>2=No Skip to</i>	
4.6	If not ,how best should the message have been written and delivered to enable you to understanding it?	

Where did you predominantly get information on the previous elections.		
4.7.1	Radio	
4.7.2	News papers	
4.7.3	Television Malawi	
4.7.4	Public Meetings with Officials from DC/MEC	
4.7.5	Religious groupings.	
4.7.6	Traditional leaders	

<i>Talking about Brochures, leaflets and publications by MEC,</i>		
4.8	Did you personally receive any leaflets/brochures or any other publications by MEC about the elections? <i>1=Yes</i> <i>2=No Skip to</i>	
4.9	If yes ,were you able to read and understand the information in the publications produced by MEC? <i>1=Yes</i> <i>2=No</i>	
4.10	If not ,give reasons	

SECTION 5: GENERAL REASONS FOR NON VOTING

NOTE TO ENUMERATOR – Remind the respondent that the information they shall give is strictly confidential

9.0	Did you register / verify for the 2004 elections <i>1=Yes (If yes skip to 9.1 & 9.1b)</i> <i>2=No</i>	
9.1	Did you want to register but failed for some other reason <i>1=Yes (If yes skip 9.2)</i> <i>2=No</i>	
9.1b	-Please state the reason(s) for the answer above	
9.3	If you registered but decided not to vote? <i>1=Yes</i> <i>2=No</i>	
9.3b	Please state the reason(s) for the answer above	
9.4	Did you want to vote but failed for some reason? <i>1=Yes</i> <i>2=No</i>	
9.4b	Please state the reason(s) for the answer above	
9.5	If you voted , were you satisfied with the voting process on the voting day? <i>1=Yes</i> <i>2=No</i>	
9.6	Generally were you satisfied with the registration process prior to the elections? <i>1=Yes</i> <i>2=No</i>	
9.7	Give a reason for your answer	

SECTION 6: REASONS FOR NON VOTING

<i>You mentioned earlier on that you did not register in the 2004 Elections</i>		
10.0	What do you understand by the term Democracy?	
10.1	Are you satisfied with the socio-economic delivery of Democracy in Malawi? <i>1=Yes</i> <i>2=No</i>	
10.2	Do you feel the 2004 elections were free and fair? <i>1=Yes</i> <i>2=No</i>	
10.6	Which groups of people were these?	
10.7	<i>Did you not register because of the following;</i> <i>1=Yes</i> <i>2=No</i>	
10.7a	You were intimidated by others	
10.7b	You were generally dissatisfied with the social-economic delivery of democracy by other	
10.7c	You couldn't access the registration centre due to distance or terrain.	
10.7d	You were busy preparing the field.	
10.7e	Your preferred candidate was not standing in the elections	
10.7f	You were out of the country	
10.7g	Inter and intra - party conflicts / violence	
10.7h	Your employer did not give you a chance / time to register	
10.7i	Your religion prohibits you from voting	
10.7j	Non kept promises linked to 1999 elections	
10.7k	Imposed candidate	
SECTION 7 : People who tried to register and failed		

<i>Did you try to register and failed because of: -</i> <i>1=Yes 2=No</i>	
11.0	You were intimidated by others
11.1	There were no registration materials
11.2	You were turned back by the registration staff as ineligible
11.3	You doubted the credibility of the electoral process
11.4	Missing information i.e. registration card, voters name, voters picture, file,
11.5	Registration staff were unable to process your transfer / duplicate certificate
11.6	Bad weather conditions i.e. continuous heavy rains
11.7	Your registration process was snatched by traditional or political leaders etc.
11.8	The registration certificate was tiresome and confusing
11.9	Somebody bought your registration certificate.
11.10	Others

SECTION : 8 People who registered but decided not to vote

<i>Did you register and decided not to vote because of: -</i> <i>1=Yes 2=No</i>	
12.1	You lost your registration certificate
12.2	You were intimidated by others
12.3	Diminishing confidence in elected leaders
12.4	Your name / picture did not appear in the voter roll
12.5	Your unclear long and tiresome voting process
12.6	Intra & inter party conflicts / violence

12.7	Did not where, when and how to vote	
12.8	Lack of help and encouragement from polling staff	
12.9	Imposed candidates	
12.1 0	Preferred candidate not standing .	
12.1 1	General dissatisfaction with performance of elected leaders	

SECTION 13: GENERAL KNOWLEDGE AND ALTITUDE QUESTIONS

In May 2004, there were general elections in Malawi. What kind of memories in general do you have of those elections		
13.0	<i>1= Good memories (Explain)</i> <i>3=No specific memories (Explain)</i> <i>4=Bad memories (Explain)</i> <i>5=Very bad memories (Explain)</i>	
13.1	There are many different factors that influence how people decide who to vote for. In May 2004, what was the one main factor that influenced you to decide who to vote for?	
13.2	<i>1=Campaign promises</i> <i>2=Political party</i> <i>3=Party manifest/ideology</i> <i>4=Ethnicity / regionalism / tribalism</i> <i>5=Religion</i> <i>6=Wealth</i> <i>7=Gender</i> <i>8=Personality/Skills/experience / education</i>	
13.3	Some people thought voting was very important in 2004 general elections, but some did not. How important did you feel voting in the 2004 general elections? (
13.4	<i>1=Very important</i> <i>2=Important</i> <i>3=Unimportant</i> <i>4=Very unimportant</i> <i>5=Don't remember</i>	
13.5	Even if you haven't voted are you happy with the MP who won in your area? (Explain why)	

	1=Yes 2=No	
13.6	<p>There are many different reasons people give not to vote. What is the one main reason you think it is important to vote in the next elections?</p> <p><i>1=I won't vote because there will be long queues and I will waste my time</i></p> <p><i>2=My personal vote won't make a difference, so why should I vote?</i></p> <p><i>3=The government is doing a good job, so there is no reason to change things.</i></p> <p><i>4=I won't vote because I do not know what I will be voting for or what the candidates and parties stand for</i></p> <p><i>5=I won't vote because politicians are just interested in their own Well-being.</i></p> <p><i>6=I don't know what to do, where to go, or how to get their to vote</i></p> <p><i>7=Voting will not change anything</i></p> <p><i>8=I am afraid to vote</i></p> <p><i>9=My religion does not allow me to vote .</i></p> <p><i>10=Other (Specify)</i></p>	

END OF INTERVIEW

THANK YOU VERY MUCH FOR YOUR COOPERATION