



**PREPARING FOR ELECTIONS:  
Citizens Share Their Views on Key Issues & the 2014 Vote**

Findings from Focus Group Discussions with Men and Women Across Malawi  
Conducted January 27-February 14, 2014

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## **CATHOLIC COMMISSION FOR JUSTICE AND PEACE**

The Catholic Commission for Justice and Peace (CCJP) is the social justice and advocacy arm of the Episcopal Conference of Malawi (Catholic Church) established in 1992 to awaken Malawians, to further understanding of social justice, leading to a greater awareness of human rights and consequent duties. It also is forming a critical conscience which empowers people to challenge and act to overcome unjust situations. The mandate of the Justice and Peace Commission is to contribute to the common effort of the Episcopal Conference and the whole Catholic Church in Malawi in the creation of a just and peaceful Malawian society that promotes integral development and lasting peace.

CCJP has eight diocesan offices in Chikwawa, Blantyre, Zomba, Mangochi, Dedza, Lilongwe, Mzuzu and Karonga. These eight offices in total cover all 28 of Malawi's administrative districts. Below the diocesan offices, CCJP has 159 parish based structures across the nation in which justice and peace teams work in various projects. These lower structures are entry points into the wider communities where local chiefs, government extension workers, leaders of different faith groups make up justice and peace local committees. The Justice and Peace Commission reaches out to many people on the ground through its grassroots network that is one of the largest in Malawi. CCJP's cooperation with grassroots community-based organizations (CBOs) on governance and civic education interventions adds value in reaching out to many people that the existing CCJP structures may miss.

## **THE NATIONAL DEMOCRATIC INSTITUTE**

The National Democratic Institute (NDI) is a nonprofit, nonpartisan, nongovernmental organization that responds to the aspirations of people around the world to live in democratic societies that recognize and promote basic human rights. Since its founding in 1983, NDI and its local partners have worked to support and strengthen democratic institutions and practices by strengthening political parties, civic organizations and parliaments, safeguarding elections, and promoting citizen participation, openness and accountability in government. With staff members and volunteer political practitioners from more than 100 nations, NDI brings together individuals and groups to share ideas, knowledge, experiences and expertise. Partners receive broad exposure to best practices in international democratic development that can be adapted to the needs of their own countries. NDI's multinational approach reinforces the message that while there is no single democratic model, certain core principles are shared by all democracies. The Institute's work upholds the principles enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. It also promotes the development of institutionalized channels of communications among citizens, political institutions and elected officials, and strengthens their ability to improve the quality of life for all citizens. For more information about NDI, please visit [www.ndi.org](http://www.ndi.org).

## PREFACE

Malawi's fifth election since the introduction of multi-party democracy is fast approaching. Amidst the administrative preparations and political competition of elections, the voice of the ordinary citizen is often lost. Political party rallies, the most common party activity, almost exclusively allow only one-way communication and even candidate debates, though very valuable in giving citizens substantive information, usually do not provide an opportunity for citizens' views to be incorporated into the electoral process. This study, based on 35 focus group discussions conducted from January 27-February 14, 2014, with 420 participants across 24 districts, was designed to serve as one mechanism to ensure more citizen views, as reflected by the participants in this study, can be shared with election stakeholders and the public. The study explores what these participants deem to be key election issues as well as how they view election processes. The participants describe their frustration with poorly performing elected officials and with past and present political and electoral processes, but their responses also indicate they remain committed to, and even enthusiastic about, the electoral process. It will be up to election stakeholders to ensure that commitment is maintained by delivering a peaceful, issue-focused, well-organized and well-protected election.

**Qualitative Methodology:** The methodology included in this study is qualitative, *not* quantitative. As such it is *not* a poll or survey. The purpose of quantitative methodologies, such as polls and surveys, is to measure opinion. The purpose of qualitative methodologies, such as the focus group discussions used in this study, is to understand opinion, specifically the meanings, reasons and motivations that underlie commonly held participant opinions. This methodology also allows for the gathering of more subtle and nuanced opinions than is normally possible in a poll and also provides insight into how views may be impacted by group dynamics. This type of in-depth information helps election stakeholders better understand how participants are viewing key issues and so can provide important clues for how to address misperceptions or to build upon existing opinions. Although an effort was made to ensure the participants included a broad cross-section of ordinary Malawians, the citizens in this study were not recruited using a statistical random sample, such as is used in polls or surveys, and so the study is not generalizable to the population at large and cannot serve as a measurement of citizen attitude.

**Focus Group Discussion Structure and Composition.** Focus groups are semi-structured group discussions directed by a moderator, who follows a pre-set guideline. In this case, Malawian university students or graduates underwent training for how to lead the discussions in a neutral and non-leading manner. The discussions were conducted in Chichewa or Chitumbuka, as appropriate. To ensure participants felt as free as possible to share their opinion, the discussions were organized into peer groups, with men's and women's discussions held separately. Twenty (20) focus group discussions were conducted with men and fifteen (15) with women. The discussions were also divided into three age categories – 18-25, 26-35 and 36 and over – and to a lesser extent into different educational categories, where the primary goal was to ensure that no group had a wide range of education levels. Discussion groups were held in 24 of 28 districts, and in a range of rural, peri-urban<sup>1</sup> and urban locations. Overall, eighteen (18) discussions were held in rural areas and seventeen (17) in peri-urban or urban areas. Unless otherwise noted, the conclusions presented here represent views commonly and repeatedly cited by participants during the group discussions. Minority views exist and are communicated in this report only when they are significant or can highlight an illustrative alternate opinion. The focus group

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<sup>1</sup> For the purposes of this research, peri-urban locations were considered to be larger towns (though not the cities of Mzuzu, Lilongwe, Blantyre or Zomba), active trading centers and district bomas.

locations and participant demographic chart appearing at the end of this report should be consulted to understand the subsets of participants interviewed for this study.

**A Snapshot of Public Opinion.** Any public opinion research, including focus group discussions, is only a snapshot of opinion at the moment the research is undertaken. Public opinion is dynamic and evolves as people experience and react to major events, particularly in an election context. Therefore, the conclusions of this report only represent participant opinions when the research was undertaken. After the fieldwork for this study was undertaken, issues with the voter registration verification process emerged. As a result, some of the participant attitudes and opinions reflected in this study may have changed.

**Participant Perceptions.** The perceptions of participants in the focus group discussions, or in any public opinion research, do not necessarily reflect reality. People sometimes get facts wrong and often form their opinions based on inaccurate or semi-accurate readings of the world around them. Even if they do not represent reality, however, there is value in examining people's perceptions. Citizens make decisions based on what they believe. Without knowledge of these perceptions, election stakeholders will not be able to address them. Therefore, the goal of this research is to report the perceptions and opinions of participants, regardless of their factual accuracy, to key election stakeholders as well as the international community so they may better understand and respond to the concerns of the general populace.

This study is a collaborative effort between the Catholic Commission for Justice and Peace (CCJP) and the National Democratic Institute (NDI). The research is funded by the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) through a multi-year co-operative agreement and also includes other NDI programs to increase citizen participation in governance. The inclusion of public opinion research in NDI and CCJP's activities is intended to help policy-makers better understand the views of citizens as they make important decisions that will shape the future of the country.

Participants view elections as their greatest source of power as a citizen. They believe a credible election process that reflects the genuine will of the electorate and produces leaders who are responsive to citizen needs is critical to their future. As such, this election has great potential to either reaffirm or weaken their belief in democracy in Malawi. CCJP and NDI are pleased to share the views of participants with political parties, government officials and other stakeholders as they work to create an election environment in which all are committed to a successful, legitimate and peaceful outcome.

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This qualitative public opinion research study examines participant views on the upcoming Malawi election and the issues and processes surrounding it. The study's conclusions are drawn from 35 focus group discussions conducted from January 27-February 14, 2014, across 24 districts in Malawi. A total of 420 Malawi citizens participated in the study. Each of the findings below is explored in more detail in the *Principal Findings* section of this report, where there also are quotations from participants that further illuminate their opinions on the key issues highlighted here. It is highly recommended that no conclusion be drawn about a finding outlined below without consulting the more detailed explanation in the Principal Findings.

### I. PROBLEMS & PRIORITIES

- **A poor economy and poor development progress in key sectors drive participant discontent with the current situation in Malawi.** The economy is the top reason given for dissatisfaction, with participants mentioning high prices, insufficient jobs and the devaluation of the kwacha as primary concerns. The economy is an especially important factor for urban and peri-urban<sup>2</sup> participants, with unemployment a particular concern for youth participants in those areas. Poor development in education, health and agriculture is of almost equal concern. Problems participants cite in education include a drop in standards and inadequate learning materials and school blocks. In health, participants primarily talk of the lack of health facilities in rural areas and drug shortages in hospitals and clinics. Agriculture complaints are mostly about the accessibility and affordability of fertilizer, though access to markets is raised as a problem as well. Related to agriculture concerns, some participants give the government credit for efforts to address chronic food security problems, while others say it is not doing enough.

Other participants say their unhappiness with the state of affairs in Malawi is rooted in their belief that the country has a “bad” political atmosphere with politicians who make empty promises, do not consult citizens and use public office for their own benefit. Corruption is mentioned by some urban and peri-urban participants as a cause for dissatisfaction as is security by participants in some locations. In contrast, some participants cite positive developments in the country, such as the fuel availability, progress on safe motherhood initiatives, greater individual rights and a recent easing of the food security situation, among others.

- **Key development areas lead the list of priorities participants would set for the next president.** The next administration should focus on better development, with emphasis on rural areas, say participants with special attention paid to improving services in agriculture (affordable and accessible fertilizer), education and health care. Improvement in the economy, and more specifically in employment, should be a priority as well, they say. With development, participants urge the newly elected president to ensure attention is paid to developing the whole country, not just their home area or areas where they won the most votes, and to make sure they do not make promises they cannot fulfill.

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<sup>2</sup> For the purposes of this research, peri-urban locations were considered to be larger towns (though not the cities of Mzuzu, Lilongwe, Blantyre or Zomba), active trading centers and district bomas.

## II. ELECTION PROCESSES

- **Most participants give the voter registration exercise high marks,<sup>3</sup> saying it was a fair process and most had a chance to register.** The process is described as having been generally well-organized and well-conducted with few queues, adequate materials and a peaceful atmosphere. The exception to this view is among some of the urban groups, especially in Blantyre and Lilongwe, where participant accounts include long lines, poor organization and occasional scuffles. In other groups, there are scattered complaints but no systematic problems appear to have occurred based on participant responses.
- **Few participants are aware of rumors about attempts to buy voter registration cards, though confirmation of such would raise concern.** Participants who have knowledge of any such rumors are primarily urban or peri-urban participants who have heard media reports. Almost all, though, say if registration card buying were to occur they would worry that leaders who did not win the vote legitimately would be declared the winner.
- **The belief that rigging has occurred in past national elections is widespread among participants, who say fraud has mostly occurred during the counting and vote aggregation processes.** Although most participants admit they lack solid evidence, many recount various stories of rigging in past elections, such as ballot boxes that are thrown away, switched or stuffed with illegitimate votes either during counting, in transit from the polling station to the tally center or at the tally center. Other participants think there have been fraudulent elections in the past because they believe they can predict the correct winners by asking those around them how they voted. Many also assume rigging has occurred when there are lead changes announced by the media.
- **Participant views about the likelihood of a free and fair election on May 20 fall into three main categories: those who are confident in a good election, those who believe a good election will be dependent on many factors and those who say the election has already been tainted.** Those who say the election will be free and fair trust civil society organizations (CSOs) and community-based organizations (CBOs) to watch over the process and are buoyed by what they view as a good voter registration process. Those who say it is uncertain whether the elections will be free and fair indicate their judgment on the election's credibility will be based on whether the MEC proves to be neutral and independent, whether there are sufficient protections on voting and counting, whether there is adequate physical security during voting and whether the elections can be peaceful. Participants who have already discounted the possibility of a free and fair election cite poor primary elections, past rigging as predictive of future rigging and the competitive nature of the election with no party willing to accept defeat, among other reasons.
- **Citizen observers at polling stations, and especially those who watch and record the count to check against the Malawi Election Commission's (MEC's) announced numbers, increase the confidence of most participants in elections.** CSOs and CBOs are mostly viewed as trusted, independent organizations whose participation can raise the credibility of the elections. When participants learn that some of these organizations will witness the counting and aggregation processes and can verify MEC's count, their confidence on the credibility of the elections increases significantly.

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<sup>3</sup> The fieldwork for this study was conducted prior to the suspension of the voter verification exercise.



- **Some participants are unaware voters needing assistance may choose any person they wish to assist them in voting.** When this is communicated, these participants are more confident in the fairness of elections, since they had previously noted improper influence of polling officials on voters needing assistance as evidence of rigging.
- **There is no consensus among participants on the independence of the Malawi Election Commission.** Some participants say MEC is a neutral body independent of government control that will deliver fair elections for the country. Others say MEC cannot be independent because it is appointed by government. Few seem to be aware that political parties nominated candidates to serve on the Commission. Better communication about protections for voting and counting and demonstrably neutral actions can raise confidence in the MEC's integrity, participants suggest.

### III. VOTING INTENTIONS, INFLUENCES & CONSIDERATIONS

- **Enthusiasm to vote is high among most participants.** Many see it as their duty and right to choose their leaders and others say they will vote because they want to cast a ballot either for or against a candidate based on their past performance and/or their judgment of their leadership ability. Some participants express concern that, though they are enthusiastic, they fear others may not be. At least some participants in two of the 35 groups indicate they will not vote; both of these are youth groups.
- **Participants strongly contend that no one, including traditional leaders, will unduly influence their vote. They also say that handouts, while accepted, are ineffective, though there is no strong consensus on whether those who do not provide handouts could win election.** Confidence that the vote is secret in Malawi is a primary reason why participants say they feel fully comfortable in making their own voting decision and will not be pressured into voting for someone they do not genuinely support, even if their traditional leaders instruct them to do so. Such an instruction from a traditional leader would raise suspicion of corruption in any case, they note. Handouts from parties and candidates are willingly received, but most participants understand they are meant to influence voting choices and do not approve of them. Most also say the handouts will have no impact on how they vote, as they feel no obligation to the giver and the vote is secret. However, some participants indicate that a party or candidate cannot win election in Malawi without offering handouts. These participants believe handouts are too ingrained in the election culture and parties or candidates who do not give them would be viewed as 'stingy' and/or likely unable to deliver benefits to the community if elected. Others disagree, saying a candidate or party could win election without handouts as long as their ideas are good.
- **Gender, religion and age will not be significant factors in their voting decisions, most participants say.** They indicate a person's wisdom, leadership qualities and ability to deliver development are the primary criteria by which candidates, including presidential candidates, will be judged. Most say there is no difference between men and women in terms of ability to serve, and they believe the consideration of religion in voting decisions is not appropriate. The same is true of age: most say the age of a candidate is not a relevant factor voting. However, some participants who fall within younger age ranges report they may think more seriously this time about voting for someone who is younger to bring 'new blood' into the political system.

- **Independent candidates, according to participants, will not face significant obstacles in getting elected due to the lack of party affiliation.** Most participants say they would have no difficulty in casting a ballot for an independent candidate if they feel that person is the best choice. They note independent candidates are fairly common and say many of these candidates have been affiliated with political parties in the recent past, with some losing in political party primaries and others being encouraged by the community to contest.
- **Most participants say in deciding how to vote they will consider candidate before party in the presidential race, will not automatically vote for the same party for all three positions on the ballot and do not view the choice of a vice presidential running mate as a significant factor.** Candidate is more important than party because participants consider a presidential candidate to be the primary decision-maker in his or her party. Straight ticket voting is not viewed as a logical action by most because a candidate's qualities are a more important factor in their voting choices than party affiliation. The vice presidential running mate's reputation among participants as a helper rather than a decider is the primary reason they will be mostly looking to the presidential candidate when making a choice in that race. However, there are some participants who indicate the experience of having a president die in office has taught them to consider more carefully the candidates who may become vice president.

#### IV. ISSUES & INFORMATION

- **Issues related to development are the primary topics participants would like to see political parties and candidates discuss during the campaign period.** Agriculture (including food security), education and health are of particular importance, they say, because these are the areas where the needs are greatest. The participants also note they do not care to hear parties and candidates insulting each other and are tired of the usual empty promises.
- **Participants say candidate debates help voters make well-informed choices, and non-participation by a candidate would raise questions.** They say debates are an efficient means of gathering substantive information and helping differentiate between candidates and parties. Because they find them useful, participants say they would question the motivations of a candidate who chose not to attend, though views are mixed on whether non-participation would be a significant factor in voting decisions.
- **The corruption case known as Cash-Gate is especially troubling to participants because they say the stolen money could have been used to address the poor quality of critical services, like health.** The apparent extent of the corruption frustrates participants who say that they do not yet have enough information about how such a theft could happen, what is being done to recover the money and what measures are being implementing to ensure it never happens again. Although the arrests made in connection with Cash-Gate are generally known, some object to what they view as the quick release of those arrested and others say the true culprits have yet to be caught because no "big fish" have been arrested.

#### V. POLITICAL PARTIES & CANDIDATES

- **Many political party primaries were marked by irregularities, say participants, and as a result, some indicate their confidence in general elections has been reduced.** The problems with the

primaries participants cite include poor vote security and unfairly staged primaries – for example, in the location of voting centers or in the limiting of information about those locations. In areas where a party did not hold a primary, some participants complain that parties “imposed” candidates. The general confusion and poor procedures in the primaries cause frustration among participants, some of whom say the conduct of the primary election has made them feel the general elections can no longer be fair.

- **Comments from participants about the four political parties that either currently or in the past have held the presidency demonstrate parties are judged almost exclusively on their time in power. Based on that, participants hold both positive and negative opinions about the four parties.** The current policies or positions of the four parties – DPP, MCP, PP and UDF – are mostly unknown among participants, who instead focus on the parties’ record when the party held the presidency (now for PP and in the past for DPP, MCP and UDF). Participants particularly focus on a party’s record on the economy, food security and individual rights and freedoms when in power. A party’s record in education and health is important to some as well. As a result, participants overall indicate each of these four parties have performed well in some areas and poorly in others.
- **Participants’ description of the presidential candidates for UDF, PP, MCP and DPP highlight distinct profiles and strengths of each.** The biggest selling points for Atupele Muluzi, say participants, are his youth and potential to offer fresh ideas as well as UDF’s skill at managing the economy and delivering free primary education. For incumbent president, Joyce Banda, participants say her strengths are her ability to connect with the public and understand their concerns as well the PP’s success in ending critical shortages. Those who want to promote Lazarus Chakwera should focus on his religious background, according to participants, because it is an indication he is likely to be honest and hard-working. They also believe his not having served in government will be a positive with voters, as will the MCP’s capable past management of certain sectors, like agriculture. Participants say Peter Mutharika’s supporters should highlight his educational background and his professorial and overseas experience. It will be important to note as well, they say, the DPP’s accomplishments in areas such as improved food security and reduced crime.

## VI. MISCELLANEOUS ISSUES

- **Participants fear the lack of a government salary will make newly elected local councilors ineffective and unmotivated.** They have hopes that local councilors will be the link to government they feel has been missing but are discouraged by the lack of salaries for those councilors. Without salaries, the participants say local councilors will not work as hard as they want and will be more vulnerable to corruption.
- **There is strong support among participants for legal mechanisms that would prevent Members of Parliament (MPs) from ‘crossing the floor’ and would give citizens the power to recall poorly performing elected officials.** Participants say MPs who switch parties prior to an election are damaging the political system in Malawi. They feel a party switch betrays the choice they made when voting and believe almost all make the switch only because of greed for money or power. Participants also support a recall provision to ensure better performance from their elected officials or when that fails, to remove them. They believe it is their right as a citizen to demand this accountability and do not want to wait five years to exercise that right.

- **The chieftaincy system is broken, according to most participants.** Many believe chiefs have become corrupt, especially in regards to the distribution of government benefits, such as fertilizer coupons. They also say the elevation of traditional leaders has been confused by governments and political parties usurping the process and ignoring traditional succession lines through family lineage. These participants indicate improvements could be made to the chieftaincy system by removing traditional leaders from benefits distributions or providing oversight of them through independent groups, like NGOs, and by establishing elevation and succession guidelines.

## PRINCIPAL FINDINGS

The findings outlined below are based on 35 focus group discussions conducted from January 27-February 14, 2014. The discussions were conducted in rural, peri-urban,<sup>4</sup> urban locations across 24 districts in Malawi, and a total of 420 Malawian citizens participated in the study. Group discussions were conducted with men and women of various ethnicities, age groups and education levels. Consult the location and participant demographic chart in Appendix A for further information on group composition.

### I. PROBLEMS & PRIORITIES

- 1. Most participants express concern and discontent with the current situation in Malawi. The primary drivers of this view are what participants describe as a poor economy – high prices, insufficient jobs and devaluation of the kwacha – and poor development in agriculture, education and health. Another reason for dissatisfaction is ‘bad’ politics, according to some participants.**

The economy is mentioned most by participants when discussing their displeasure with the state of affairs in Malawi. Two aspects of the economic situation concern participants most. The first is the rising cost of living, specifically the increase in prices for basic goods, like soap and sugar. They blame most of the rise in costs on the devaluation of the Malawi kwacha. The second is high unemployment, especially among the youth. The concern about the lack of jobs was particularly prominent among the peri-urban and urban participants. A few participants concerned about employment also highlight nepotistic hiring practices, saying that only those with connections are able to find employment.

*In terms of the economy of this country, things are not okay, and we people from the villages are suffering a lot. (Middle-Aged Rural Women, Dedza)*

*Things are not good in Malawi. The price of goods is changing every day. The same amount of money you used the previous year to buy basic things is not enough to buy the same basic things nowadays. (Younger Peri-Urban Men, Chiradzulu)*

*Prices are skyrocketing...When we go to the grocery store, we find that the kwacha has been devalued and the cost of things has gone too high. For example, the [1kg] packet of sugar is selling at MK550, so things have really gone worse. (Older Peri-Urban/Town Men, Chitipa)*

*Things are not good as there are no jobs available for us despite that some of us are mechanics and others have driving licenses. But there are no jobs available, so we are just staying doing nothing. (Middle-Aged Peri-Urban Men, Mulanje)*

*Many youth are not employed soon after their education, and this problem has made a lot of young people to go astray...Many of us are 26 or 27 years old and still living with our parents because we have no jobs. (Middle-Aged Urban Men, Lilongwe)*

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<sup>4</sup> For the purposes of this research, peri-urban locations were considered to be larger towns (though not the cities of Mzuzu, Lilongwe, Blantyre or Zomba), active trading centers and district bomas.

*Bosses consider their relatives for the job, even if they do not qualify for the job. If you do not have relations with people in high rank, you will have a slim chance of being employed. (Middle-Aged Peri-Urban Men, Balaka)*

Of almost equal concern as the economy for participants is the lack of progress in key development sectors, especially agriculture, education and health. There are several aspects of agriculture that trouble participants. They say they have few markets for their produce and when they do sell the produce it is a low price that cannot keep up with their expenses. A bigger agriculture worry for participants, though, is fertilizer. The participants complain about problems in accessing fertilizer and in the distribution and use of the coupons for subsidized fertilizer. Fertilizer is an especially important issue for rural and peri-urban participants, some of whom say the subsidy program should be ended in favor of affordable fertilizer for all. Related to problems in agriculture is the food security situation. A few participants say that hunger is a problem and more complain about either ADMARC<sup>5</sup> markets having no maize or the rationing of maize, allowing only 10kgs per family, in those markets.<sup>6</sup>

*Things are not well especially in the villages because there are some things that do not go well with us as farmers. Our produce is bought from us at a very low price. This makes us not to make any profits. (Older Peri-Urban/Town Men, Chitipa)*

*Things are not on going on very well in this country in terms of farming. We are not being offered good prices on our farm produce that we sell to people. (Middle-Aged Rural Women, Dedza)*

*Things are not fine in this country. For example in terms of agriculture, we had problems in accessing the subsidized fertilizer and the issue of distributing fertilizer coupons did not go well also...Our farming practices were hit hard by the high price of fertilizer. (Younger Rural Women, Ntcheu)*

*This fertilizer subsidy program is not helping us the poor. Instead, it is benefiting the ones who are already rich. For a poor person like me to access that fertilizer, the salesmen at ADMARC depots are demanding bribes from me, so on these side things are not okay. (Older Rural Men, Ntcheu)*

*Hunger has also hit the country, so we fall sick often because food is insufficient. (Older Rural Women, Blantyre)*

*We experience dry spells here, and we don't harvest [enough] food, so we rely on buying from ADMARC. But when we go to ADMARC they tell us, 'we have no maize.' So we are suffering. (Older Rural Men, Chikwawa)*

*Most things are not moving. For instance, there is no maize in most ADMARC markets, and the government is rationing the product to 10kgs per family. So what do you think one can do with it with a large family? (Middle-Aged Urban Women, Mzimba)*

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<sup>5</sup> ADMARC is an acronym for Agricultural Development and Marketing Corporation.

<sup>6</sup> The data on participants' perceptions of whether there is now maize in ADMARC markets is not definitive, as some participants indicate maize is now available.

In the education and health fields, participants point to multiple shortcomings. Education problems include a significant drop in standards, unaffordable school fees, too few school buildings or ones that are in disrepair, inadequate learning materials, too few and/or unprofessional teachers. Some participants in the Northern region also complain about the university quota that they feel keeps qualified students in their area from reaching university. Health problems participants cite include too few clinics and hospitals, especially in rural areas, and no drugs in the health facilities.

*In today's life, you need an education if you are to live a happy life. But the problem is that many of us failed to complete our education because we lacked school fees, so it's very hard. (Younger Peri-Urban Women, Salima)*

*Education standards have completely gone down. There are too many pupils in government schools with no learning materials, such as books, and there are inadequate numbers of qualified teachers. Can you imagine a Standard 7 pupil can hardly write a single simple sentence in English? (Middle-Aged Urban Women, Mzimba)*

*The education sector is not all that is desired, as there is not adequate teaching staff. You will find that the whole primary school with only three teachers, so there is problem for pupils to concentrate well...The standard of education is continually going down. There are unprofessional teachers. (Younger Rural Men, Nkhata Bay)*

*When our children write Standard 8 examinations, they are faced with the [university] quota system challenges, while other children in some districts are not affected by this quota system. (Middle-Aged Rural Women, Karonga)*

*We are not fully helped when we go to government hospitals because we are the needy. We are told to buy Panado on our own...We die of curable diseases because we are needy. (Older Rural Women, Blantyre)*

*When you go the hospitals, they tell you 'we don't have such medication for your sickness.' Go and buy at the pharmacy. (Middle-Aged Peri-Urban Men, Karonga)*

For some participants, there are other factors besides the economy and development that contribute to a bleak outlook. Some participants link problems in the country to "bad" politicians who make empty promises, do not consult or work for the citizens and use public office to benefit themselves. They view this as a recurring, persistent problem and one that applies to all parties and politicians. Other participants, mainly from urban and peri-urban locations, say their view of the situation in Malawi is colored by what they term as "too much corruption," which in turn has an adverse impact on development. Comments about corruption referenced politicians becoming rich while ignoring citizens and the recent corruption scandal known as Cash-Gate. Security is a concern affecting the views of participants in select areas, and some younger participants feel youth are neglected.

*In terms of politics, we only get some help during the campaign period, such as money. The rest is empty promises like promising to help the poor and the elderly, but once the campaign period ends, we don't see anything. (Younger Rural Women, Rumphi)*

*These leaders want people during campaigns, but when they get into government, they do not consider their people...It is difficult because when most of them win, they are going to Lilongwe and leave people suffering. They don't come to see their people here. This is very worrisome. (Older Rural Men, Chikwawa)*

*Things are not going on well. On issues of politics, the politicians we have in this country do not have a heart of developing the nation or the youth but only benefit themselves when they are in government. For example, we have opposition parties that argue on different issues the government is doing, but when they get to that position they fail to change such things and keep on doing them. Politicians are down-pressing the nation instead of developing it. (Younger Urban Men, Blantyre)*

*Once they [politicians] have been voted into power and they are in government, they start messing up things. They perform their duties as if they don't want to work for us, and they want us to be praising them. (Middle-Aged Peri-Urban Men, Nkhata Bay)*

*The problem in this country is corruption. Politicians pretend to have heard our concerns whenever they visit us, but all they want is to vote for them and when they get to office they forget us. They use the [government] money for luxuries, forgetting that it is us who put them to office. (Younger Urban Men, Blantyre)*

*There is too much corruption and in this issue of Cash-Gate, a lot of money was stolen which would have used in hospitals. (Younger Urban Women, Zomba)*

*Things are not going on well because people are killing one another frequently. There are a lot of murderers, so we are afraid to move, especially with maize this season. (Middle-Aged Rural Women, Mwanza)*

*The government is not showing much interest in the youth. The strategies they use do not necessarily benefit the youth, but instead those who are initiating the projects. (Younger Urban Youth, Blantyre)*

Not all participants had negative views of the current situation in Malawi. Some participants, either spontaneously or when prompted by a moderator, were able and willing to cite positive developments. These developments encompass a number of areas, but the ones participants most commonly cite are: fuel availability, fertilizer coupons, safe motherhood, maize in ADMARC and better human rights/freedom of speech. For those that received fertilizer coupons, they were a clearly positive experience, though as noted above that was not the experience for others. In addition, some participants, as noted above, say there was no or little maize in ADMARC markets, while other participants indicate maize is available in ADMARC and use that fact as an example of a positive development in Malawi. As such, it appears the views on maize in ADMARC markets may be specific to a participant's location.

*There has been fuel availability, unlike in the recent past when we could see queues of cars in filling stations. (Younger Peri-Urban Men, Mchinji)*

*The government has been helping us with coupons. People have a chance to buy cheaper fertilizer. (Younger Peri-Urban Men, Neno)*



*Maize is available in ADMARC depots at cheaper and fair prices. (Middle-Aged Rural Men, Dowa)*

*Safe motherhood is another area that has improved. They are encouraging women to take safe motherhood seriously. (Middle-Aged Urban Women, Mzimba)*

*Right now things are much better as compared to the previous years when we used not to have freedom of speech...Today people free are to speak and express whatever they speak. (Older Rural Men, Ntcheu)*

**2. There is no consensus among participants on whether the government is trying to address the food security situation in Malawi: some say they see the government working this direction; others say they do not.**

Participants who say they see evidence of the government's effort to address chronic food insecurity talk mainly about the development and implementation of government agriculture programs, such as irrigation, soil erosion, organic manure and farm input initiatives. Fertilizer credit clubs are also seen as a sign the government cares about resolving food security issues. Some participants indicate their belief that government is working on food security is based on either the current availability of maize at an affordable price or on recent maize and cattle distribution programs.

*The government is doing everything to end these hunger problems. (Middle-Aged Peri-Urban Women, Mangochi)*

*The government is trying [to reduce food insecurity] by encouraging irrigation farming and providing coupons...[The government] trying because of low prices in farm inputs. (Middle-Aged Peri-Urban Men, Mulanje)*

*The government is trying because it has introduced many irrigation projects as well as subsidized fertilizer. (Older Rural Men, Ntcheu)*

*The government has introduced clubs where people can get fertilizer on credit, which is a good way of fighting hunger. (Middle-Aged Rural Men, Dowa)*

*I think the government is ending hunger because we are buying at maize ADMARC. Maize is also cheap in the markets because it is found in ADMARC. (Middle-Aged Peri-Urban Men, Nkhata Bay)*

*The government is trying [to address food insecurity] by giving us maize. (Middle-Aged Rural Women, Karonga)*

Participants who question the government's effort to address food security issues focus primarily on their frustration with the lack of access to affordable fertilizer. Some of the participants have the impression that the total number of coupons available for the fertilizer subsidy was reduced this year. A few participants say the lack of maize, or the rationing of maize, in ADMARC is proof the government is not working hard enough to address food security issues. There are also some participants who believe the government is doing some good things but not performing well enough to resolve the issue adequately.

*The government is not ending hunger because for crops to prosper, it needs fertilizer so if they were giving 10 coupons per village and now they have reduced it to six, does this mean ending hunger? (Older Rural Men, Chikwawa)*

*Fertilizer prices continue to increase; coupons are never enough [so the government is not trying to address food security issues]. (Older Peri-Urban Men, Chitipa)*

*In previous years, coupons were many, and nowadays there are only a handful, [so the government is not trying to address food security issues]. (Younger Peri-Urban Men, Salima)*

*The coupon program only benefits those who are already rich and not the local poor people in the villages, [so the government is not trying to address food security issues]. (Younger Peri-Urban Men, Mchinji)*

*The government is not helping enough because it could not be restricting [the sale of maize in ADMARC] to 10kgs per family. This shows there is no maize. (Younger Rural Men, Nkhata Bay)*

*I can say the government is doing something in a sense that it is giving loans through MADEP. But on the other hand, I can say the government is not doing anything because only a few people are the ones benefiting from the program. (Middle-Aged Rural Men, Kasungu)*

**3. Participant priorities for the President elected on May 20 center primarily on actions they believe will improve agriculture, education, employment and health care.**

Participants were asked to imagine a short conversation with the person who will be elected president on May 20 and provide that person with their best advice. The responses provide a good picture of what participants view as priorities for the next administration. That begins with better development, especially in the rural areas, delivered in an equitable manner. Participants believe the rural areas continue to lag behind, and some say that history has taught them that most presidents of Malawi embark on development only in their home areas or in areas where they received many votes. They want that to change with the next president.

*I can advise him or her to focus much on our development...Development should not go backwards. (Middle-Age Rural Women, Mwanza)*

*We would advise the president to carry on more development projects in the rural areas because in rural areas people are suffering. (Younger Peri-Urban Men, Salima)*

*If I can have a chance, I would remind the president that many people participated in voting for him or her. When promoting development projects, the president should consider all places across the country, not only his or her home village. (Older Rural Men, Ntcheu)*

*What I have seen is that most presidents do not want to develop areas where there is an opposition MP, so I would tell him or her that if you are president, you are president of the nation and you should not select areas [in a discriminatory manner] to develop...I would advise the president that he or she must level development programs to all regions. (Older Rural Men, Mzimba)*

*[The president] should not take sides or favor on where he or she is distributing development. He or she should not leave other side because they did not receive votes from that side. (Younger Peri-Urban Women, Mangochi)*

Many categories of development are mentioned by participants as priorities for the next president, but the most common are agriculture, education and health. With agriculture, the participants want the next president to ensure food security through a focus on agriculture and a plan to resolve the fertilizer issue. They say fertilizer must be accessible and affordable for Malawians to survive and thrive. More participants believe the subsidy coupon program should be ended and the price of fertilizer lowered to make it affordable to all, though some would continue the program and expand the number of coupons available. If the fertilizer coupon program is ended, the participants, on average, indicate a reasonable price for fertilizer would be MK5,000. The food security and fertilizer issues are most important to rural and peri-urban participants. The priority areas participants identify for education are increasing standards, building schools, providing adequate materials and teachers and reducing fees. Some participants in the Northern region would also like the next president to end the university quota system. On health, participants want the next president to address the shortage of drugs in hospitals and to build additional hospitals to reduce the distance needed to travel to find health care.

*The first advice is that for life you need enough food...I can advise him or her [the next president] that for one to survive, one has to eat. (Older Rural Women, Blantyre)*

*[The next president] should focus much on farming. As we all know, Malawi depends on farm products so we want food security again. (Younger Peri-Urban Women, Mangochi)*

*He or she [the next president] should reduce the fertilizer price, and fertilizer should be made available everywhere. (Middle-Aged Rural Men, Phalombe)*

*The [next] president shouldn't continue with the fertilizer subsidy program. There should just be an optimum price of fertilizer that would enable everyone to purchase. (Younger Rural Women, Ntcheu)*

*It is difficult to buy a bag of fertilizer, so if the coming president makes it possible to have one coupon per person that would help reduce hunger. (Younger Peri-Urban Men, Neno)*

*There are schools where children sit on stones literally on the floor so they [the next president] have to improve the quality of education. (Middle-Aged Peri-Urban Men, Karonga)*

*School fees should be reduced [by the next president] because most Malawians fail to go to school because we think the money spent on fees can be spent somewhere else to benefit our lives. (Younger Urban Men, Blantyre)*

*I can advise [the next president] to focus on development projects, most especially education. In schools there are very few reading materials, even the blocks are not in good condition. (Younger Peri-Urban Women, Mangochi)*

*[The next president] should end the quota system. Some our friends got 9, 10, 11 points but no access to higher learning. They are just sitting with their certificates at home because of the quota system. (Younger Rural Men, Nkhata Bay)*

*[I would advise the next president] to make sure there is the availability of drugs in government hospitals as nowadays there are no drugs in government...Some health centers are closed due to shortage of drugs. (Younger Peri-Urban Men, Chiradzulu)*

*I would advise the president to construct more hospitals in this village because people are suffering. (Younger Rural Women, Ntcheu)*

Many participants, especially in urban and peri-urban areas, want the president elected on May 20 to prioritize employment. They see an urgent need for jobs programs and especially ones that focus on youth and recent graduates. Some participants point to the need for the next government to recruit more companies and industry to Malawi. Others would like for the next president to help resolve nepotistic hiring practices. In lieu of, or in conjunction with jobs programs, some participants suggest a loan program for youth to start small businesses.

*There is a high level of unemployment so they [the next president] should try to employ people. Back in the day, a person could be employed immediately after finishing school or go up only to JCE level, but not these days. A person completes education and finds no job. (Middle-Aged Peri-Urban Men, Karonga)*

*We can tell [the next president] to provide us jobs because a lot of us here have different talents and others have proper qualifications. (Younger Peri-Urban Men, Mangochi)*

*I can advise the [next] president to create jobs for our youth who completed their secondary education. (Older Rural Women, Ntchisi)*

*[I would tell the next president] to consider opening more companies so they create job availability to youth. (Middle-Aged Peri-Urban Men, Mulanje)*

*I would advise the [next] president to carefully investigate how some people are getting employment. Some employers are not employing people on merit but because of their relationships with those people. (Middle-Aged Urban Men, Lilongwe)*

*I would advise the [next] president to give out small business loans to the young people so that we will be doing business. (Middle-Aged Urban Women, Lilongwe)*

The remaining priorities mentioned by multiple participants cover a variety of areas. Some insist a priority for the next government must be stabilization of the kwacha, which they believe in turn will help control prices. Other participants, mainly from urban or peri-urban locations, believe the next president should begin with tackling corruption and improve the management and security of government finances. Reference is made to the need to address the Cash-Gate by several of these participants. Security and clean water are priorities for participants in certain locations.

*I would advise the [next] president to strengthen our Malawian currency. Our kwacha is weak; sometimes we even failing to purchase all the goods we want because the kwacha is very weak. (Younger Peri-Urban Men, Salima)*

*[The next president] should stabilize the Malawi kwacha to ensure a better and fair cost of living. (Younger Peri-Urban Women, Kasungu)*

*I would tell the [next] president to improve the management of the finances. Everyone who misuses the finances should face the justice because we have seen that many people are misusing or stealing money from government. (Older Rural Men, Ntcheu)*

*They [the next president] should try the best they can do in order to put an end to the stealing of government money, like that one that just happened recently. (Middle-Aged Peri-Urban Men, Karonga)*

*I would advise the [next] president to tighten security because these days people are just killing each other anyhow. Sometimes people are afraid of passing through certain places because of fear of being attacked. (Younger Peri-Urban Men, Salima)*

*I would advise the [next] president to renovate all boreholes that are not in good condition...Many people here do not have safe water anymore. (Older Rural Men, Ntcheu)*

Some participant comments are better categorized as a request. These participants want the next president to be different than previous presidents who they feel have overpromised and under-delivered. They ask that the winner of the 2014 election change course and fulfill the promises he or she made during the campaign.

*I could advise the [next] president to be someone who is going to fulfill all the promises he or she made during the campaign. (Older Rural Women, Ntchisi)*

*I can advise [the next president] to fulfill what they speak during the campaign. Most of our leaders make empty promises, and this discourages voters. (Middle-Aged Peri-Urban Men, Balaka)*

## **II. ELECTION PROCESSES**

### **1. Most participants praise the voter registration as well-organized, well-conducted and fair. Responses from participants indicate no serious, systematic problems with registration.<sup>7</sup>**

There are many accolades for the voter registration process among the participants. They say the process gave everyone a chance to register and was efficient, with few queues and adequate materials so that delays were not an issue. Most report that people had a fair chance to register in their areas. Some applaud the extension of registration in certain areas as a good move to ensure that all who wanted to register had that opportunity. Others are appreciative of a peaceful process that allowed free choice on whether to register or not. Several also comment on their confidence in the process because

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<sup>7</sup> The fieldwork for this study was conducted prior to the suspension of the voter verification exercise.

of good procedures to prevent underage or double registration. Overall, the voter registration process is deemed to have been a fair one.

*The registration exercise was good. Everyone registered, and there was not any problem we encountered at the registration stations...Many people were attending that registration process. (Middle-Aged Rural Women, Dedza)*

*Registration was good because we were given enough materials and time, and I believe those who wanted to register did that. (Middle-Aged Rural Men, Phalombe)*

*The process was good, and there was no quarrelling and fighting. (Younger Rural Women, Mulanje)*

*The process of voter registration went on very well...They extended the duration of the registration process, so everyone was free to go and register anytime...In some cases, people who wanted to register twice were easily being noticed, which means security was also good. (Younger Peri-Urban Men, Salima)*

*Registration was good. There was no shortage of registering materials...The process was fast...No problem, it [voter registration] was fair. In the past we were forced [to register] but not this time. (Older Rural Men, Mzimba)*

*It [the voter registration process] was good because only those eligible were the ones registering. There were no underage [registrants], and there were no people who registered more than once in our areas. (Middle-Aged Rural Women, Mwanza)*

*The voter registration process went on very well. There were no corruption cases during this year's registration process as compared to previous years. (Older Rural Men, Ntcheu)*

In just under half of the groups, there is at least one participant who has a complaint about the voter registration process. However, there is no pattern to the complaints, and most are voiced by single individuals within a group and are not the opinion of the group as a whole. Some are relatively minor, such as a participant in Chitipa who was unhappy with the quality of the photographs, one in Lilongwe who complained of the aggressiveness of other people in line or one in Karonga who is concerned the misspelling of his name on his voter registration card will prevent him from voting. Some participants in two groups in the Northern region complained that MEC had hired workers from Lilongwe instead of using people from the area. More significant complaints detail various problems in the process that the participants say infringed on citizens' right to register or register of their own accord. Some participants in three groups indicate that short people of voting age were refused registration because their height made them appear younger. Some participants in a group in the Northern region say fewer people were able to register there because there was no extension of the time for registration there, unlike in the Southern region. A participant in a Zomba group claims people were told they had to register to receive fertilizer coupons. Several participants in a Mulanje group made serious allegations about registration being biased in favor of the ruling party.

The most common theme among the complaints voiced by participants is related to the actions of registration workers. Participants in seven different groups report problems with registration workers; however, the action with which they are concerned differs. Some say the slowness of the workers and

the resulting long queues discouraged many from registering their area. A participant in a Mangochi group says the workers running out of materials caused some in his area not to register. Some participants in three groups indicate that workers either opened registration centers late or closed early, thus preventing some in their area from registering. A Lilongwe participant is disturbed that many people were in line on the last day of registration but not allowed to register. Taken together, the relatively small number of complaints and the disparate nature of complaints suggest that while there were some glitches in the registration process in certain areas, there was no systematic failure.

**2. Rumors about attempts to buy voter registration cards are mostly unknown by participants. Any confirmation of such rumors would cause them to be concerned about the legitimacy of the election, and some would consider voting for parties that have not pursued such a course.**

Most participants say they have not heard rumors about political parties or others buying registration cards. Some participants from urban or peri-urban areas have heard about it from the radio or read about it in the newspapers, but they are unaware of any such activity in their area. A few participants say they have heard rumors of registration card buying either in their area or other areas but have not encountered it personally. Some participants in the Kasungu groups report they have heard of voter registration card buying for the purpose of accessing credit for fertilizer, and a participant in an Nkhata Bay group claims the practice is common.

*In our area, we haven't heard of such a thing [voter registration card buying], but we have been hearing on the radio that in some areas people are doing that illegal act. (Middle-Aged Urban Men, Lilongwe)*

*Not in this area, but I have read in the newspaper about this issue [buying of voter registration cards]. (Younger Urban Women, Zomba)*

*I heard that rumor [of the buying of voter register cards] yesterday when I was in town that there are some people who are buying voter registration cards at MK3,000. They are also giving the seller a bag of flour. (Middle-Aged Rural Women, Dedza)*

*I heard that through my friends, but I haven't met anyone asking for my registration card. (Younger Peri-Urban Men, Chiradzulu)*

*People are buying the registration cards to access the credit for fertilizer. (Middle-Aged Rural Men, Kasungu)*

*That [buying voter registration cards] is much common here, and there is tangible evidence here. A lot of people lost their voter certificate. (Younger Rural Men, Nkhata Bay)*

Although most participants have not heard about rumors of voter registration card buying, many express concern that if such an activity were to occur it would bring into office illegitimate leaders and would infringe upon their right to choose the leaders they want. Some of these participants say that if they discovered a party they supported was involved in voter registration card buying, they would no longer vote for that party. Their rationale is that a party that is cheating prior to election is corrupt and that corrupt behavior will continue into office.

*[If voter registration card buying were to occur] it can be painful because the candidate people wanted to win may end up losing because someone bought the registration cards. (Middle-Aged Rural Men, Kasungu)*

*It [voter registration card buying] is like stealing our vote and adding onto the votes of the candidate who they want to win...The winner will be the one the buyers of the cards want and not us. So it is wasting your right for five years. (Middle-Aged Rural Women, Mwanza)*

*[If voter registration card buying were to occur] it means our effort to vote and choose who can help us will be of no use. It is a violation of our right to choose who we want. (Middle-Aged Rural Men, Dowa)*

*I can't vote for that party [that is buying voter registration cards] because what it may have done is corruption. (Older Rural Women, Ntchisi)*

*We will lose trust in the particular party [that is buying voter registration cards]...We cannot trust them because if it [corruption] has begun now, what about when they will be in government? Then it will be worse. (Middle-Aged Peri-Urban Men, Nkhata Bay)*

*I cannot have the interest to vote for that party [that is buying voter registration cards] because it has started to bribe even before it gets into power. Now if it gets into power, it means corruption will be everywhere. (Younger Urban Men, Blantyre)*

### **3. Most participants believe rigging has been commonplace in past elections. Counting and vote aggregation are viewed as the most vulnerable parts of the process.**

There is a widespread belief among participants that fraud has been a regular part of elections in Malawi. Most of these participants readily admit this belief is based on unsubstantiated rumor, but nevertheless, the belief is strongly held. Some participants say Malawi's electoral history is the only proof needed to confirm the existence of rigging, since only ruling parties have won elections. Others come to the conclusion that elections are rigged based solely on what they believe should have been the correct outcome. These participants assume they can know the correct outcome of an election by asking others around them how they have voted. If those around them all or mostly indicate votes have been cast for one candidate, they determine that candidate is the rightful winner. When the announced result is different, these participants judge the election to have been rigged. There appears to be little understanding that voters in other areas of the district or the country may have different preferences and when added to their votes could legitimately change the outcome.

Relatedly, many participants also assume that changes in who is leading an election are the result of rigging and not the result of votes coming in from different areas that may have different preferences. Thus, any announcement of candidates leading a race who are reporting as having lost in the final result cause these participants to declare the election has been rigged. This belief is exacerbated when these leads are announced through media, especially radio, and the belief is reinforced to an even greater extent if the participants believe the media has made a prediction or declaration of a winner that later proves to be incorrect. Again, there appears to be a lack of knowledge that lead changes can be legitimate.

*We just think they are rigged, but we have no evidence. (Middle-Aged Peri-Urban Men, Balaka)*



*We heard they were rigged, but we don't have the evidence. (Older Rural Men, Chikwawa)*

*We cannot know how those votes were stolen. We are just ordinary people. All we heard was the some votes were stolen. (Middle-Aged Rural Women, Dedza)*

*Here in Malawi we believe that the ruling party doesn't lose, so for it to win the ruling party rigs. (Younger Urban Women, Zomba)*

*We knew that votes were rigged because the candidate of our choice did not win, despite us voting for him. (Middle-Aged Rural Women, Blantyre)*

*You may ask several people who they have voted for and they give you the same name, and you have confidence that candidate will win but come two three days later you hear that they have lost. That shows us that there was rigging. (Older Rural Women, Blantyre)*

*Rigging is there as you could find that a candidate who was leading the votes is left behind and the one who was behind is put in front. (Older Rural Women, Ntchisi)*

*Rigging is there because when it goes to the end, you will find the one who is leading in the number of votes and is expected to win, goes down in the number of votes all of a sudden...so rigging is there definitely; there is no doubt. (Middle-Aged Peri-Urban Men, Karonga)*

*I can say they were rigged because I sometimes follow the counting, and most of the time those who lead in the figures are not those who win the presidency, so we feel there is rigging. (Middle-Aged Peri-Urban Men, Balaka)*

*We listen to the radio...Most of the time when we follow the figures we find that the parties that lead are not the ones that win at the end, so we wonder how that happens. That is when we know that votes have been rigged. (Older Rural Men, Chikwawa)*

*BBC announced Chakwamba was winning, and then the next minute we heard Bingu was leading. So we think the elections didn't go well; the government rigged. (Older Peri-Urban Men, Chitipa)*

*In 2009, one name was broadcast as a winner and then it was changed later to another person's name and that made me suspect the election was not fair. (Younger Peri-Urban Men, Salima)*

A few participants say their belief that rigging has been prevalent in Malawi elections is based on more solid information. They relate such instances as a friend who witnessed rigging as a polling official or the discovery of some discarded ballots.

*We have the evidence [of rigging]. Some votes were thrown somewhere, a place where votes were not supposed to be found. This is an indication that there was rigging. (Younger Urban Men, Blantyre)*

Rigging occurs primarily during the counting process and vote aggregation, according to participants. Participants describe various scenarios in which these two processes are said to be abused. Polling

officials, they say, are bribed to alter the vote, either through adding votes to the ballot box, removing ballots or changing the vote total. The bigger concern they express, however, is in the transport of the ballots to the District Commissioner's (DC's) office or other central vote aggregation location and the care of the ballots at those locations. Participants relate stories they believe to be true of ballot boxes being thrown away or switched with boxes with illegitimate votes, of extra votes being added to boxes and of vote counts being changed either during transport or at the tally centers. There appears to be little understanding among participants that political party monitors and citizen observers from civil society organizations (CSOs) may observe the counting and aggregation process at the polling stations and at the tally centers. There is also no apparent knowledge that political party monitors obtain copies of the polling station results or that any citizen, including citizen observers, may record the polling station result, which is posted at the station, to compare it to the final MEC-released results.

*I believe that those helping in counting the votes are being bought by a certain party, so that they add already written votes in the boxes. (Middle-Aged Peri-Urban Women, Mangochi)*

*We heard people brought ballots that were already voted to where they wanted to rig and combined them with the [legitimate] votes there so they can increase the number of votes for their favorite candidate. (Middle-Aged Rural Women, Karonga)*

*We heard that there was changing of figures by those who conduct the elections process. For example, if there was a 100 they could add one more zero. (Older Peri-Urban Men, Chitipa)*

*They rig during the transferring of ballot papers to the main center. Instead of bringing in the actual ballots paper that people have voted, they change the boxes with those ballot papers with the one with their favorite president and present those to the counting center. (Middle-Aged Peri-Urban Men, Mulanje)*

*They rig the vote. It happens that sometimes the votes do not reach tally centers because they say the road is in bad condition yet time is passing, so some votes are not counted. (Younger Peri-Urban Men, Neno)*

*I don't think rigging occurs at the polling station, but once the votes go to the DC's office, they start changing numbers. (Younger Peri-Urban Men, Chiradzulu)*

*Rigging occurs after the votes have been cast, and the votes are being taken from the polling station to the tallying center and that is where they start playing their dirty game of rigging. (Older Rural Women, Ntchisi)*

*I think there has been rigging because the polling station monitors are not involved in the calculating process of the votes at the District Commissioner's office, so we are asking the government to make sure that the polling station monitors are also around when calculating the votes at the district level at the DC's office because that is where rigging occurs. (Older Rural Men, Nkhotakota)*

A few participants highlight two other ways in which they think rigging occurs. Some of these participants say that voters who need assistance are misled by polling officials to vote in a different way than they intended. Others believe the Malawi Election Commission (MEC) is bribed to ensure the election result is in favor of the briber. There are also a few participants who disagree with the general

perception that rigging has occurred in past elections. They say there have been no significant problems with elections in Malawi, and the protests of rigging come mainly from losing candidates upset at the result.

*Those who are not able to vote on their own, the [polling officials] could make them vote for a candidate they do not like or want. (Younger Peri-Urban Men, Mchinji)*

*To be honest, in Malawi corruption is everywhere. The MEC officials are offered a large sum of money. When they compare their salaries [to the bribe] they can't resist the bribe, so they help the candidate who offered them money to rig the election. (Younger Urban Men, Zomba)*

*I have never heard that elections were rigged. All elections have been going well. (Older Peri-Urban Men, Chitipa)*

*I think there hasn't been rigging; only that the losers like to cry that the government rigs the votes. (Younger Peri-Urban Men, Mchinji)*

#### **4. There is no consensus among participants on whether the 2014 elections will be free and fair.**

Opinion among participants on the ability of the country to conduct a free and fair election is mixed. Some participants feel confident it can. These participants believe the election processes have gone well thus far, especially the fairness with which the voter registration process was conducted, and see no reason for that to change. They also are buoyed by the involvement of CSOs, whom they trust to observe and protect the fairness of the electoral process.

Other participants take the opposite view. The elections, they say, have no chance of being free and fair. These participants offer a number of reasons they believe this to be true. One is their lack of faith in a system in which they think a ruling party in Malawi has the power to ensure an election result that maintains its power. Past elections, they say, are proof of this. Another reason given for the thinking the election will not be free and fair is the tense, competitive nature of the election. Participants who bring up this aspect say several parties contesting this time are powerful, and all of the parties will do whatever it takes – including rigging – to win. They also say they see no sign that any of the parties are willing to accept defeat and they fear this raises the potential for conflict. Some participants who do not believe a free and fair election is possible point to the political party primaries. They say the primaries were rigged and so that proves the election has already been rigged or will be rigged.

*It [the May 20 election] will be free and fair because the registration process went well. So I think that when the time comes to vote, things will be fine, like it was when we were registering. (Middle-Aged Women, Karonga)*

*I think there won't be rigging because CSOs will be involved in the whole electoral process making sure everything goes just fine. (Middle-Aged Rural Men, Dowa)*

*The elections will be free and fair because there will be [CSO] observers monitoring the whole process of the elections. (Older Rural Women, Ntchisi)*

*When a party is ruling, it doesn't want to lose, so it will do everything in its power to win the elections including rigging, so I don't think the election will be free and fair. (Younger Peri-Urban Men, Chiradzulu)*

*I think the elections will not be free and fair because it has been like that before. (Middle-Aged Rural Men, Dowa)*

*Rigging will be done because every competing party will try to do what it can to help them win the elections, so it is difficult for the elections to be free and fair. (Middle-Aged Rural Men, Kasungu)*

*I don't think the coming elections will be free and fair...There will be confusion and chaos during the elections because all the political parties contesting are powerful. It will be very difficult for them to accept defeat. (Older Rural Men, Ntcheu)*

*It is true there will be rigging. It has already started with primaries; it means the habit is permanent. (Older Rural Women, Blantyre)*

*In areas where the primaries did not go well, people said there was corruption, that some candidates took people from other districts to vote for them, which makes us say yes rigging [of the elections] is there. (Younger Peri-Urban Men, Mangochi)*

Most participants hold opinions that are somewhere in between those who say the elections will be fair and those who say the elections will not be fair. These participants say it is unknown at this point whether the elections will be free and fair and the final determination of that will be based on many factors. They say the behavior of the MEC is the most important factor: if MEC is independent and neutral, the election can be free and fair. MEC's ability to ensure the legitimacy of the counting process in this regard is particularly important to participants. Other factors by which these participants will judge the election include MEC's ability to ensure physical security during the election and the degree to which tensions between candidates and parties escalate.

*The elections will be free and fair if MEC does what it is supposed to do by being neutral and working to help all Malawians. (Middle-Aged Rural Men, Kasungu)*

*It can be free and fair if those conducting the elections will practice some justice. (Younger Peri-Urban Men, Mchinji)*

*I think they will be free and fair if what MEC is saying is true: they will be counting the votes right at the polling station, and after they will be burning the votes. (Older Rural Men, Ntchisi)*

*If MEC can make sure there is enough security, the elections will be free and fair. (Middle-Aged Rural Men, Kasungu)*

*It may be free and fair if the tension is resolved. To be honest, people are castigating each other. (Middle-Aged Rural Women, Blantyre)*

**5. The presence of citizen observers at polling stations increases the confidence of most participants in elections, though some remain skeptical. Observers who record the polling station count and later compare that to MEC official results raise the confidence of the participants in the elections to a significantly greater degree.**

Citizen election observers from CSOs and community-based organizations (CBOs) will play an important role in validating the credibility and legitimacy of the elections, according to most participants. Most have great faith and trust in the CSOs and CBOs and view them as neutral and independent organizations. They also see these organizations as an important check on MEC and the polling officials, who they think would be tempted or bribed to cheat if there is no independent oversight. These participants, though, want to ensure that there is a diversity of CSO and CBO organizations involved in observation so if one or two are bribed it would not have a significant impact on the elections.

Some participants have less faith in the CSOs and CBOs to protect the electoral process. These participants see CSOs and CBOs as just as vulnerable to bribery as anyone else or as lacking enough power to prevent fraud. Some also point out that citizen observers have been present in the past, when – in their view – elections have been rigged.

*It [the presence of citizen observers] will bring more confidence because NGOs and CBOs do not take sides. They don't back any political party or independent candidate. (Younger Rural Men, Nkhata Bay)*

*That [citizen observers] will be very good because if there will be only government workers [polling officials] there, they will definitely rig. But if these independent organizations are present, we will be confident that the elections will be free and fair. (Younger Rural Women, Mulanje)*

*Elections can be fair if NGOs are present...They can represent us while we are not there where they count the votes. They are our eyes. (Younger Peri-Urban Men, Neno)*

*It [the presence of citizen observers] can make us feel confident because they act like watchdogs to make sure that everything is fine and no corruption is involved. (Middle-Aged Rural Men, Kasungu)*

*If the CSOs are many, my confidence can be increased because not all of them can be bribed to rig the elections. (Younger Peri-Urban Women, Kasungu)*

*It [the presence of citizen observers] cannot change anything because the people working for NGOs can be bribed as well. (Middle-Aged Peri-Urban Men, Balaka)*

*I feel even if these organizations are present, the government can still find a way to rig. (Middle-Aged Peri-Urban Men, Mulanje)*

*It will not make us believe elections are free and fair...because it is the government that has greater control over the elections than the NGOs. (Older Rural Men, Ntcheu)*

*CSOs will change nothing because they have been there all along; yet rigging has never stopped. (Younger Peri-Urban Men, Mchinji)*

As noted above, concern about rigging during counting and vote aggregation is high among participants. For this reason, the presence of observers who record the polling station count and later compare that to the MEC's official result is reassuring to participants and raises their confidence in the integrity of elections significantly. In fact, some of the participants who initially say that citizen observers will have no impact on the election reverse course and say neutral observers who record and compare election results will contribute greatly to their belief in a free and fair election.

*It [neutral observers who record the polling station count and compare it to MEC official results] can make me feel confident the election can be fair for once in Malawi. (Middle-Aged Rural Men, Phalombe)*

*That [neutral observers who record the polling station count and compare it to MEC official results] can give us confidence in the sense that MEC would try to be as accurate as it can be in calculating the votes, so that their results are equal to what the CSOs have found. (Older Rural Women, Ntchisi)*

*I think this [neutral observers who record the polling station count and compare it to MEC official results] can bring confidence because no man is an island. So we will check if the figures from either side are matching; we will know that there is justice. (Younger Urban Men, Blantyre)*

*That [neutral observers who record the polling station count and compare it to MEC official results] will be good because we will be able to compare the MEC counting and that of independent organizations...If both are announced on the radio and if both are similar, then we will know the elections will have been free and fair. (Younger Rural Women, Mulanje)*

**6. There is a lack of awareness among some participants that voters who need assistance may ask a person of their choice to help them cast their ballot.**

Participants in just under half of the discussion groups believe that only a polling official may assist a voter in casting a ballot. That belief is incorrect: voters needing assistance have the option of asking any person to assist them. This misperception is important because, as noted above, one of the ways participants believe elections are rigged is through polling officials steering voters needing assistance to vote for candidates that are not their preference. Once participants are informed that voters have this option, almost all see it as an important part of improving the credibility of the election. Many also urge MEC to make this provision more well-known.

*We don't know [that voters needing assistance may ask any person of their choice to help]. Here, someone working at the polling center is the one mandated to assist those who need help. We have never heard of this arrangement [of bringing someone from outside to help]. (Younger Rural Men, Nkhata Bay)*

*It is not clearly and widely known that a person can bring someone from home to help in voting...There is a need for the Malawi Electoral Commission to go around and tell the people clearly on this because most people in the village do not know about this. And it is important that the poll workers should avoid playing a big role in trying to assist a person to cast their ballot. (Older Peri-Urban Men, Chitipa)*

*It is a very good thing to choose people who are within your village to help you during the voting process because sometimes the people that we find at the polling station may decide to cheat us on the person who we want to vote for. (Older Rural Men, Ntcheu)*

*This [the option to bring a person of your choice to assist with voting] is good because if you use the poll worker they may direct you to vote for their favorite candidates but if you take a person you trust, they will do as you advise them. (Younger Peri-Urban Men, Chiradzulu)*

**7. There are mixed views on the Malawi Election Commission (MEC): some participants describe it as an independent, trusted body, while others believe it is an organization controlled by government. Communication and education, involvement of parties and CSOs and guarantees of protections on counting and vote aggregation will increase confidence in MEC's integrity.**

Participants are divided in their opinion of the Malawi Election Commission. Some believe MEC is neutral and independent and can be trusted to conduct elections fairly. Female participants, in particular though not exclusively, have confidence in MEC's integrity. Other participants say that MEC could never be truly neutral and independent since it is chosen by the government. There appears to be little knowledge among participants of the full process for choosing commissioners and especially of the presence of political party representatives on the Commission.

*MEC is a well-established organization and is trusted by a lot of people. (Middle-Aged Peri-Urban Women, Mangochi)*

*It [MEC] is an independent organization that does not take any sides with any political party...We think that MEC will help us vote properly during the elections. (Younger Rural Women, Rumphu)*

*MEC treats all political parties in the same way. It doesn't side with any party. (Younger Peri-Urban Men, Salima)*

*I think MEC is an independent organization because every time there are elections, they are always trying to make sure the elections are conducted well. (Middle-Aged Rural Women, Karonga)*

*It [MEC] is not independent because the government is the one that chooses the people who work there, so how can it be loyal to the people who did not give them jobs rather than the ones who gave them jobs? So I believe that MEC is loyal to the government since it's the one that hired them to run the organization. (Younger Peri-Urban Men, Chiradzulu)*

*The [Malawi Election] Commission is not okay. The people who work there change depending on who is ruling. Every leader is imposing the people they want, so they do things to make those that put them there happy. (Middle-Aged Peri-Urban Men, Balaka)*

Participants suggest several ways in which MEC could strengthen belief in its neutrality and independence. The first is through communication and education. They want to hear from MEC on its commitment to neutrality and understand from MEC how it will protect the integrity of the election, particularly in relation to the counting and vote aggregation processes. They also want MEC to ensure that people are educated well enough to vote correctly. The second is through tight security to prevent electoral fraud, again especially as it relates to the counting and vote aggregation process. The strategy

most often mentioned by participants is for MEC to ensure and to publicize the involvement of the various political parties,<sup>8</sup> and more importantly the CSOs, in the electoral process.

*They should move around to educate people about the coming elections for people to have confidence in them...They should move around informing people they won't take sides...They should organize radio programs. (Middle-Aged Peri-Urban Women, Mangochi)*

*[The MEC] should hold community meetings to tell people how they work, like how they count the votes so that people are aware of the processes. We just shout, 'votes have been rigged' because we don't know the process. (Younger Urban Men, Blantyre)*

*MEC should produce a statement about how they are going to handle the whole electoral process, especially the results announcement, so the public can have confidence in them. (Middle-Aged Urban Women, Mzimba)*

*MEC should hold meetings with people frequently to sensitize them on what to do at the polling station because others do not know how to vote. If they make them aware, things will go on well. (Middle-Aged Rural Women, Mwanza)*

*In the past people cheated, so this time around the security should be tight so people will not cheat...They should tighten security when counting votes. (Middle-Aged Urban Women, Lilongwe)*

*MEC should ensure enough security in order to reduce fraud. (Younger Rural Men, Nkhata Bay)*

*When they will be counting the votes, all political party members should be present to act as witnesses. (Younger Peri-Urban Men, Salima)*

*MEC should have all the political parties represented. (Middle-Aged Peri-Urban Men, Nkhata Bay)*

*If a lot of independent organizations are so much involved in the elections that will put a lot of Malawians minds at peace. (Younger Peri-Urban Men, Chiradzulu)*

*They [MEC] should work with independent organizations so that there is no corruption involved. (Middle-Aged Rural Men, Phalombe)*

*When they gather the results, the CSOs should play a part in the election...They should compare figures to know they are in the same line...If there is only a slight difference, then we shall be convinced MEC has done a good job. (Middle-Aged Peri-Urban Men, Karonga)*

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<sup>8</sup> As noted above, there is little apparent knowledge among participants that political parties will be present during counting of votes or that political parties nominated candidates to serve on the MEC.



### III. VOTING INTENTIONS, INFLUENCES & CONSIDERATIONS

#### 1. Almost all participants declare their intention to vote in the upcoming election.

The enthusiasm for voting in the May 20 election is high among participants. Most state without hesitation they will be voting. Their reasons for voting vary. Some simply see it as their duty and right as a Malawi citizen to choose the leaders they want. Some participants view the vote as their primary power and so want to exercise that power in voting for or against candidates based on their personal judgment of that person's performance or on their assessment of that person's leadership ability. Some participants believe if they do not vote, people they do not want to be elected will be victorious and conversely, if they do vote they can elect leaders who will be responsive and help solve their problems.

*I will vote because as a citizen of this country, I have a right to choose whom I want to vote for.* (Middle-Aged Rural Women, Karonga)

*It is our right [to vote]. We want to exercise our right so that we choose who to lead us.* (Middle-Aged Rural Women, Mwanza)

*We are going to vote because we have the power to let someone continue leading us or removing someone out of office who is not helping us.* (Younger Peri-Urban Men, Chiradzulu)

*I will vote because I want to change those things that are not going good or continue with what is going well.* (Middle-Aged Rural Men, Kasungu)

*I will vote because if I don't then the bad person will win and be the president. So it is good that I go and cast my vote rather than just sitting home and doing nothing.* (Older Peri-Urban Men, Chitipa)

*If I do not vote, it might happen that the one who will win might be the one I didn't want because my vote was not there, so I need to vote because I will need my particular party to win.* (Middle-Aged Urban Women, Lilongwe)

*We want to choose a good leader who will work for us and do things to our wishes.* (Middle-Aged Rural Men, Phalombe)

*[I will vote] to choose a person who will help us with our problems.* (Middle-Aged Rural Men, Dowa)

Despite the strong response from participants that they would vote, several express concern that others may not. Participants mostly, but not exclusively, in urban areas hold this view. They feel voter apathy will be especially acute among youth. Of the participants in this study, only those in two groups indicated they may not vote. Both groups are youth groups, one in an urban location and one in a peri-urban location. A view that there is nothing of value in voting is the reason given by these participants for abstaining.

*There is huge voter apathy because they are tired of voting for people, electing them into power, but nothing is happening.* (Middle-Aged Urban Women, Mzimba)

*The only problem is that many people were just interested in getting the ID card; they will not vote...Youths will not vote because the government does not help us meet our needs, so voting is of no importance. (Middle-Aged<sup>9</sup> Urban Men, Lilongwe)*

*When we vote our Members of Parliament into power, they don't come back to us and help us once they win, so many people in this village are saying they will not vote during the upcoming election because they don't see its importance. (Older Rural Men, Ntcheu)*

*I doubt [I will vote]. I registered the very last day. I thought of not registering because we youth don't see the difference of voting or not...I will not vote; it's a waste of time. (Middle-Aged<sup>10</sup> Peri-Urban Men, Balaka)*

*I will not vote because I wanted the registration card to use it at the bank and anywhere in need of an ID. (Younger Urban Women, Zomba)*

**2. Participants indicate no person or group can unduly influence their vote, in part because the vote is confidential. Traditional leaders who attempt to direct citizens' votes will be ignored, they say.**

Participants display a strong belief in the vote as a personal choice and strong trust in their own judgment to make that choice. Most say they cannot and will not be influenced by any other group or person. Community leaders, such as traditional authorities, religious leaders and local activists in CSOs and CBOs, they claim will not be significant factors in their consideration of appropriate voting choices. Even many married participants, including some women, say their spouse cannot influence their vote except through a shared vision of what is important to the family. As such, voting is very much viewed as an individual right that must be protected from undue influence. It is clear this is buttressed by a widely held belief that the vote is truly secret in Malawi. This provides the participants with the freedom and confidence to make a personal choice without consequences from local leaders, friends, family or even spouses.

*One votes according to oneself; the way things are going to you. Everybody has different ideas about different things, so you cannot take somebody's idea saying 'vote for such a person'...The important thing is just to go by one's thoughts. (Middle-Aged Peri-Urban Men, Karonga)*

*There is no one who can influence my vote. I will make my own choice. There is no one who can say vote for this person...I have got the right to choose who I want. Nobody can tell me who I should vote for. (Older Peri-Urban Men, Chitipa)*

*My vote is not their [the TA's] vote...Everyone has their choice to make. What I can like may not be what the TA may like. (Younger Peri-Urban Men, Salima)*

*A religious leader's job is to preach to people, not helping them in their voting decisions. (Older Rural Men, Ntcheu)*

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<sup>9</sup> This group is made up of participants aged 26-35. In the Malawi context, they term themselves youth, although we have chosen to categorize them as middle-aged for stratification purposes.

<sup>10</sup> This group is made up of participants aged 26-35. In the Malawi context, they term themselves youth, although we have chosen to categorize them as middle-aged for stratification purposes.

*I cannot be influenced by anyone because the vote is confidential. I can tell someone that I will vote for the person of their choice, but I will be alone in the polling booth and can choose a different person. (Middle-Aged Rural Women, Blantyre)*

*No one [can influence my vote] because a vote is a secret. Only the owner knows. (Middle-Aged Urban Women, Lilongwe)*

*There is no one that can influence me to vote for a party because the vote is confidential. I will be voting depending on why I want such a president. Even if it were my husband telling me, I would not be influenced. It is me and my vote alone. (Middle-Aged Rural Women, Mwanza)*

A few participants indicate that religious leaders or CBO/CSO activists could prove influential on their voting decision because they tend to be neutral parties and can provide good advice on how to choose a candidate wisely. More participants indicate that the most important influence on their vote will be close family members, particularly a spouse. However, almost all male and female participants talk about this influence being the result of family conversations where it is decided which candidate or party is best for the family and do not refer to spousal influence in any coercive way. The exception to this is the view among some older female participants, who feel their husbands have a right to tell them how to vote. Participants in only two groups, both in rural areas, say traditional authorities, chiefs or village headmen will be a factor in their voting decision. Participants in these groups say chiefs are well-informed about parties and candidates and local problems and so are best placed to determine who should receive their vote.

*[The CBOs could influence my decision because] the CBOs don't take sides...They don't represent any party, and they offer civic education to people on the voters' choice of a candidate. (Older Rural Men, Mzimba)*

*CBOs are helpful in guiding the selection of candidate. They may say if you want development, this is the guideline you may use to choose the right candidate. (Younger Rural Men, Nkhata Bay)*

*Church leaders are a neutral body. They can guide me on the choice and quality of a leader and manifesto. (Middle-Aged Urban Women, Mzimba)*

*Religious leaders [can influence my vote because they are neutral...They are independent of government...They stand on justice. (Middle-Aged Rural Men, Dowa)*

*As a family you sit down and discuss a lot of things together, including issues to do with elections, so as a family you may decide who all of you should vote for because you feel that once that person is in power your life together with your family will change. (Middle-Aged Peri-Urban Men, Mulanje)*

*The chiefs may have an influence because they are the ones who stay with people in the village and tell us how to vote. (Older Rural Women, Ntchisi)*

When the question moved from influence to instruction, almost all participants report that a directive from a traditional authority, a chief or a group village headman would have no impact on their voting decision. There are two main reasons participants cite for ignoring an instruction from any traditional

leader. The first is that they would view such an edict as a violation of their right to make their own choice, especially if their judgment differs from the leader's. The second is that any instruction by a traditional leader to vote for a party or candidate raises immediate suspicion that the leader has been bribed. Participants believe that such bribery will lead to bad leaders being elected and only the traditional leader, and not themselves, will benefit from such bribery. A few participants disagree and say people can be influenced by a command to vote as prescribed by a traditional leader because they trust the leader to be more informed than they are.

*These people [traditional leaders] cannot move me from my choice, even an inch. (Middle-Aged Rural Women, Karonga)*

*Even if the chief tells me that I will be chased from the village, I still can't vote for that party...You cannot stand by someone else's opinion or wishes. When it comes to voting, everyone wants to vote for a candidate or party of his or her choice. (Middle-Aged Peri-Urban Women, Mangochi)*

*I cannot be forced to vote for a party that I don't want. I have a right to vote for a party of my choice. (Middle-Aged Rural Women, Blantyre)*

*I cannot allow someone to decide my vote for me....What I see in the candidate can be totally different than what the chief may see, so I will follow what my mind tells me. (Middle-Aged Rural Women, Mwanza)*

*With the way the issues of corruption are if the chiefs start talking about voting for a certain party, it means they have been given something. (Younger Urban Women, Zomba)*

*It might happen that people come to bribe the TA...We are loyal to the TA, but the vote is confidential. We are free to vote or not [based on the TA's instructions] because with that influence you may end up voting for a candidate who may not be helpful. (Older Rural Women, Blantyre)*

*You want to receive the coupons and everything that comes to your village, so if they [a traditional leader] tell us to vote for the party, maybe they see its importance. So you vote for it in order to be the beneficiary of things. (Middle-Aged Rural Women, Blantyre)*

*It [an instruction by a traditional leader] can affect people's votes in typical villages that are not educated; hence they just follow everything that they are told. (Older Rural Men, Ntcheu)*

**3. Handouts are ineffective campaign tools, according to most participants who say they will not influence their voting decision. However, there are more mixed views on the chances of a party or candidate winning an election if handouts are not given.**

The role of handouts intending to influence voting behavior in elections is a complicated issue. Participants readily acknowledge they accept handouts if offered by parties or candidates seeking their vote, primarily because they cannot afford to refuse any gift. For the most part, however, they view handouts as perversion of the system. Handouts are described as bribes and deception that confuse the electorate. Participants say they understand handouts are one-time benefits that do not equate with true development, and some believe winning candidates repay themselves for the handouts with government money.

*They are there to be eaten...We can't deny a handout. (Older Rural Women, Blantyre)*

*We cannot refuse a handout. I will take everything right away. (Middle-Aged Peri-Urban Men, Karonga)*

*Handouts are more or less like a bribe that is aimed at making us vote for that political party. (Younger Rural Women, Rumphu)*

*These [handouts] are bad. They just want to spoil people in order to vote for them. Where were they before? This is just like buying votes, and they just want to confuse the electorate on their choice of candidate. (Older Rural Men, Mzimba)*

*The things that they distribute to us are there just to deceive us. After we vote for them, they go and stay in Lilongwe and never come back, and they forget all the problems that people are facing. (Younger Rural Women, Ntcheu)*

*What [handouts] politicians share has no meaning because they are not what make development. (Older Rural Men, Chikwawa)*

*I think handouts are not helpful. What we want in our country is development. They can come and give MK1,000.00 notes to one hundred people, what about others? Politicians should learn to do long-term solutions to meet people's needs. You can't give maize today and think you have solved the problem. (Younger Urban Men, Blantyre)*

*People are aware nowadays that when a candidate is giving so much, when he or she is elected, they will reclaim what they have used on the campaign leaving us with no development. (Younger Peri-Urban Men, Chiradzulu)*

Most participants state strongly that handouts will have no effect on their voting decision or on the choice of others. They do not see any conflict in accepting handouts while voting as they wish for several reasons. The first is that voting is a significant personal choice that cannot be influenced by something small like a handout. Another is that handouts do not erase participants' experience of poor performance of elected officials over the years. A small handout is simply not enough to convince most to trade their vote for a small gain when what they need and want is genuine development. As a result, many of the participants talk about the importance of voting based on a candidate's ideas and abilities. A few participants also point out that, as a practical matter, they cannot vote for every candidate from whom they accept handouts. Most comments, however, focus on the fact that participants are able to accept handouts and still vote for anyone they wish because the vote is secret. This frees them up, they say, to vote for the person or party they feel will serve them best without having to reject the much needed handouts.

*We cannot vote for someone because he has given us handouts, be it maize or money...Everyone's vote is in their heart. (Younger Peri-Urban Men, Mangochi)*

*They [politicians] aim at influencing you to vote by giving you soap or salt, but we just receive it and use it. We will vote for the one we want. (Middle-Aged Rural Men, Phalombe)*

*A handout cannot have any effect on my vote...Handouts are just mere campaign tools. I will vote for whom I like and want. (Older Rural Women, Ntchisi)*

*They [handouts] can't make us vote for that party because we know that they give us those things in order to persuade us to vote for them and yet when they win, they don't come and help us. (Middle-Aged Rural Women, Dedza)*

*It is difficult for handouts to influence your decision to vote. They target the last three months before elections. That's the time they give handouts, but they stay in government for five years. So it is good for you to look at what they have done in five years rather than the three months. That [handout] cannot change your mind. (Middle-Aged Peri-Urban Men, Balaka)*

*I don't think handouts have much effect on elections because nowadays people are more interested in what a candidate will do for them than the handouts...We don't vote because of handouts but based on the ideas of a candidate if they are convincing enough. (Younger Peri-Urban Men, Chiradzulu)*

*The handouts have no effect on voting. What he or she is doing is just giving something to use, but we look for the person's activities and developments plus their ideas. That's what we want. If he or she gives us clothes to wear, we will wear them, but we will not be influenced to vote for him or her. (Middle-Aged Peri-Urban Women, Mangochi)*

*It cannot be possible to vote for all those who distributed things to us, we can only vote for one person at a time. (Younger Rural Women, Ntcheu)*

*I don't think handouts have any role in elections. When the time for voting comes you are alone in the voting booth and no one knows what you have voted for. The handouts are just benefits. They have no part in a choice of voting. (Younger Urban Women, Zomba)*

*Even if they give us [handouts], I will be alone when voting. They won't come to cross-check who I have voted for. It would be a different case if the voting was publicized, but since the voting is confidential, we can receive handouts and make a different choice. (Middle-Aged Rural Women, Mwanza)*

Only a few participants say a handout could change their voting decision. These participants indicate they would feel a sense of obligation and/or the handout would signal the candidate would remain concerned about their problems following the election. Some other participants say while they would not personally be affected by handouts, they fear others may, especially those in rural areas or the elderly.

*It [getting a handout] will affect me because I can feel guilt if I receive a handout and vote for someone else. (Younger Peri-Urban Women, Kasungu)*

*When we receive handouts, we want to give thanks for the kindness. Also, we think that if one is able to give from his or her pocket, then we will get more if we vote for him or her. (Middle-Aged Rural Women, Blantyre)*

*It may happen that those politicians help the elderly people and then they [the elderly] may think that if they don't vote for that person those good things may not continue. (Middle-Aged Rural Women, Karonga)*

*The main problem in the villages is poverty...The problem of poverty makes people get easily carried away with the small things they receive. They can easily change their decisions for that. (Older Rural Men, Ntcheu)*

The views on handouts become more complex when participants are asked to judge the chances of a party or candidate winning an election if they forgo handouts. As noted above, most participants feel strongly that handouts do not impact voting choices. Overall, more maintain that stance in response to this question, but many also disagree, saying a party or candidate has no hope of winning without handouts. Those who believe the handouts will not impact the chances of winning an election argue that voters' primary consideration is ideas, not handouts, and that handouts are not indicative of performance. Some also say that those not giving handouts can have more credibility than those who do, since those who provide handouts may be trying to cover up deficiencies or may try to recover the handout expenses when in office.

Participants who say a party or candidate cannot win without providing handouts offer several arguments. The primary reason is that handouts are too ingrained in the election culture for a party or candidate to forgo them without significantly hurting their election chances. Handouts, these participants say, also convey a status of importance for the party or candidate and make some people feel their generosity will continue after the elections. Conversely, they believe a party that does not give handouts will be viewed as 'stingy' by the populous. A comment by one participant perhaps clarifies why some in the discussions say handouts would not affect their vote but then also indicate handouts are essential to improving election chances. This participant explains that he will be making his voting decision only from among the those who provide handouts. He details that calculation as follows, "If I see a politician holding a rally, I will rush to receive a t-shirt. The next week when another politician comes, I will receive a different t-shirt. I will not vote for both of them, but if another one comes empty-handed, I won't go close to the rally [at all]."<sup>11</sup>

*It [a party that does not give handouts] has a chance of winning because of where it stands. People go for issues, not handouts. (Older Peri-Urban Men, Chitipa)*

*The party has a chance to win according to its manifesto, even if it does not give out a spoon of sugar...We are looking for the parties' manifestoes and good leadership, so it does not matter if handouts are given or not. (Middle-Aged Urban Women, Lilongwe)*

*It [a party not giving handouts] can win because people have realized that giving handouts does not mean that the party is good. (Middle-Aged Rural Men, Kasungu)*

*If a person is coming out with strong issues and has a good background, it is not difficult to win. The people who give out money have their problems which they want to hide so that we don't see the future, but the people who come empty-handed will speak the truth of who and what they are. (Older Rural Women, Blantyre)*

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<sup>11</sup> Quotation is from a middle-aged peri-urban men's group in Balaka.

*If I see a politician giving MK200 notes to people, I will think that they might have taken a loan and if they win they will be busy paying back the loan first before doing development, while the one who is not giving handouts will start giving us development the moment they get into power because they do not have any bills to pay. (Middle-Aged Peri-Urban Men, Balaka)*

*I don't think that party [which doesn't give handouts] could win because Malawians are used to receiving [handouts], so if that party comes without giving anything, they can't win. (Middle-Aged Rural Women, Karonga)*

*I don't think a party could win [without handouts] because a lot of people are used to receiving [handouts] so if the party comes and makes their speeches and goes, I don't think people will like that. (Younger Rural Women, Mulanje)*

*Nowadays it is difficult for a party that does not give handouts to win because people feel that a party that gives handouts to people is the most important party, and they believe that it will continue giving handouts to them. To them, they think a party that does not give handouts is a stingy party of no help to them. (Middle-Aged Peri-Urban Men, Nkhata Bay)*

*Malawians love handouts, so if the party cannot give a thing, we will think that even if it gets into government, it will not help us because it does not share. (Middle-Aged Urban Women, Lilongwe)*

#### **4. Most participants say gender is not an important consideration when electing a president.<sup>12</sup>**

Men and women are equally capable to serve Malawi as president, according to most participants, both male and female. These participants see no difference between men and women and say the only necessary qualities a president must possess are good ideas, wisdom, development skills, maturity and intelligence. Some participants also say that women have a right to govern as much as a man or that woman may make even better chief executives than men.

*There is no difference [between men and women]. Everyone has a right to govern regardless of gender. (Younger Peri-Urban Men, Salima)*

*Men and women are both human beings. They are both important and can serve as the president of Malawi equally. (Middle-Aged Rural Men, Dowa)*

*A woman has got the right to run this country as well. (Younger Peri-Urban Men, Mchinji)*

*It is our freedom. If she is standing as a president and is matured and has good ideas and has a desire to develop our nation, then why not? We will vote and elect her president. (Middle-Aged Peri-Urban Women, Mangochi)*

*I think a woman can serve this nation with no difference, and even much better than a man...I think it is all about wisdom, qualifications and maturity. I see no difference between a man and a woman. (Younger Urban Women, Zomba)*

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<sup>12</sup> Moderators of the discussion groups made clear this was not a question about the current president, but rather a hypothetical one based on people's consideration of gender in electing a president.



*Women can rule a nation. What is needed is developing the country, so if a female president can develop a country then there is no difference between a woman president and a male president. (Younger Peri-Urban Men, Mangochi)*

*Women can rule this country the same way men can. Sometimes women can even be better in their leadership than men because some women are so powerful and they think like men, while there are other men who are weak. (Older Rural Men, Ntcheu)*

Some participants disagree with the prevailing view that there is no difference between men and women serving as president. These participants tend to hold stereotypical views of women as the weaker gender. They say that women are not as intelligent as men, women are not as wise as men and women lack the strength to stand firm when needed. Some with this view also have religious objections to a woman serving as president. Participants who do not believe men and women can be equally capable presidents tend to be male and over age 25, though not exclusively so.

*There is a very big difference between a man and a woman in terms of their thinking capacity. Even though a woman can have advisors, she still can be tricked by men. (Older Peri-Urban Men, Chitipa)*

*Men and women cannot serve in the same way because women are weak and can be easily misled. (Middle-Aged Rural Men, Kasungu)*

*They say every woman has a weak mind. She is easily taken up so she is not a person to leave the country in her hands. (Middle-Aged Rural Women, Blantyre)*

*It is difficult [for a woman to be president] if we go to the bible. The first person to be created was a man. (Middle-Aged Peri-Urban Men, Balaka)*

**5. There is widespread support for women to contest for lower positions in government, and many participants say they would willingly vote for women Members of Parliament (MPs) or Councilors.**

Both male and female participants believe women should be encouraged to run for elective office, such as for parliament or a local council position. Most participants see it as a basic right for women to have an opportunity to be elected for these positions and believe women can bring some unique qualities to these offices. Women running for elective office, they say, can promote and improve the status of women overall and can serve as a role model for young girls. Women are likely to better understand conditions and needs at the local level and as a result may be a better representative, they also note. These qualities and the belief of many that gender is irrelevant are the reasons almost all of the participants say they can consider voting for women for MP or councilor. Even some participants who object to a female president say they can support women candidates at these levels.

*It is good [to encourage women to run for MP or Councilor] and it's their right. They have the freedom to run, and we will be happy for them. (Younger Peri-Urban Men, Mangochi)*

*Women should be encouraged [to be candidates for MP and Councilor]. It's a good thing because the gender issue will be promoted and leadership issues will be balanced as well. (Younger Rural Women, Ntcheu)*

*It is good [to encourage women to run for MP or Councilor] because it is one way of uplifting women. (Younger Rural Men, Nkhata Bay)*

*They [women candidates] know the kind of problems people go through in the villages...A woman is listening and considerate [so it is good to encourage women to run for MP or Councilor]. (Middle-Aged Rural Men, Dowa)*

*If there is a chance [for women candidates to run for MP or councilor], they have to be given it because there are some who are wiser than men, so there is no reason to stop them from contesting on different positions. (Younger Urban Men, Blantyre)*

*I can vote for a woman because it is a matter of ideas, not one being a woman or a man. (Middle-Aged Peri-Urban Men, Mulanje)*

*A woman is the one who struggles a lot to ensure everything is fine, and I think that they can make good leaders while men are always drinking beer in other places. (Older Rural Men, Ntcheu)*

*I can vote for a woman MP or councilor because these positions are simpler than that of being president. (Younger Peri-Urban Men, Mchinji)*

A few participants maintain they would refuse to vote for women as MPs or councilors. Their reasons are the same as why they would refuse to vote for a female as president: women are weak and not as competent as men.

*I cannot vote for a woman because she lacks wisdom and a lot of them don't have a mind on their own and follow what others are doing. (Younger Peri-Urban Men, Chiradzulu)*

## **6. Religion will not be a significant consideration in choosing a president, most participants say.**

Very few participants indicate religion will factor into their vote for president. In fact, participants state strongly that religion and politics are separate and consideration of religion in voting is not appropriate. Ideas, character, performance and other leadership qualities are the only measuring sticks by which the candidates will be judged, they say. They also note that the performance of elected officials, including presidents, depends on their abilities, not their religion. Several participants point out that Malawi has already had a minority religion president, and so religious affiliation is not a significant issue in the country.

*Religion will not affect my vote. We will be voting for a candidate with good issues. (Older Rural Women, Ntchisi)*

*It will not affect me because politics and religion are two different things. We can vote for a person so long as they have got helpful issues, whichever religion they may belong to. (Middle-Aged Rural Men, Dowa)*

*I think religion cannot affect our vote because we have been voting for presidents who have different religions. All we want is the development agenda of that candidate, not the religion of the person. (Middle-Aged Rural Women, Karonga)*

*We have tried the Muslim and the Christian, and we have reached a point where religion cannot affect my vote because I have realized that Islam does not bring development nor does Christianity. It is the person who brings development. (Middle-Aged Peri-Urban Men, Balaka)*

*When voting, we will look at the behavior or works of the candidate not their religion...Like myself, I am a Catholic, but I will not vote for a candidate because they are my fellow Catholic. (Younger Rural Women, Ntcheu)*

*We already had a president who had a different religion than us, but we still voted for him without looking at their religion, so this time around we will do the same by voting for a person not the religion one has. (Younger Peri-Urban Men, Chiradzulu)*

**7. Most participants say the age of a candidate is not relevant to their voting choice. However, some younger participants indicate age could be a factor for them because they want Malawi to have a fresh start.**

The age of a candidate is a relatively weak factor in voting decisions, according to most participants. They insist both young and older candidates could rule equally well as long as the person has a good vision for the country and has the ability to carry out that vision. The exception to this view is among some, though not all, participants in the younger age ranges in the groups. These participants say age will be a key consideration for them. They believe younger, or at least 'medium' age, candidates may bring different ideas and a different approach that will result in change and progress for the country. Conversely, some other participants warn that candidates should not be too young because a certain level of maturity is needed to govern well.

*Age, whether young or old, does not matter as long as he or she has good ideas...It might be that the young candidate has good ideas and we will vote for that person, and if the older candidate has good ideas, we will vote for that person. (Younger Peri-Urban Men, Mangochi)*

*The age does not define the qualities of a good person, and if we are to vote based on age, we will get it wrong. (Younger Peri-Urban Men, Salima)*

*Age will not affect my vote but wisdom and the ideas of the candidate are what will make me vote for them. (Middle-Aged Rural Men, Kasungu)*

*I will vote considering the age of a candidate because I believe these younger ones are fresh and have fresh ideas for developing the nation. (Younger Peri-Urban Men, Chiradzulu)*

*We the youth will vote for our fellow youth, so that they may bring new ideas for us. (Younger Rural Men, Nkhata Bay)*

*Age will matter this time around because we want to see young and new blood running this country. (Middle-Aged Peri-Urban Men, Mulanje)*

*I will vote for a younger candidate because their thinking is still fresh and the young candidates will be working towards seeing change in the country. (Younger Urban Women, Zomba)*

*If a person has reached 60 years of age, it means that person has seen a lot more than the one who is 35 years of age...Age therefore can really affect my voting decision to the extent that I cannot vote for a young person. (Older Peri-Urban Men, Chitipa)*

**8. Independent candidates are widely accepted by participants, who mostly say they could support such candidates.**

Candidates who do not represent a political party will not face significant obstacles to election due to their lack of party affiliation, according to most participants. These independent candidates, they say, are not unusual in the Malawi context and their right to contest is protected and respected. The participants insist that the judgment of independent candidates will be made on the same criteria as party-affiliated candidates: ideas, character and ability. They note as well that some independent elected officials in the past have performed better than party-affiliated elected officials. For this reason or because of a person's potential, independent candidates are sometimes encouraged to run by the community. In addition, participants say they do not view many of the candidates who choose to contest as independents as truly without party ties. Instead, they say these independent candidates often are people who have lost a party primary. Therefore, the participants indicate people often associate them with a party, even though they are on the ballot as an independent, and expect them to re-join that party or another party if they win. Most see this act of an independent joining a party following an election as normal and even advantageous, though there are some who describe it as opportunistic behavior.

*People have got a right to run as independent candidates, and they will be voted for depending on their manifesto. (Younger Peri-Urban Men, Mchinji)*

*I think the independent candidates are just fine if they have valid issues. Others can be in political parties, yet they are people who cannot help us...So the independent [candidate] can be just as good if they have got valid issues. (Older Rural Men, Chitipa)*

*I think they [independent candidates] have a right to stand as we voters are the ones to choose who to vote for and sometimes these independent candidates are the ones who bring development rather than political party candidates. (Younger Rural Women, Mulanje)*

*What normally happens with an independent candidate is that if within a party there are certain issues that are aiming at stopping the candidate, we advise that person to stand as an independent candidate and if the candidate wins, he is advised to rejoin the party again. (Middle-Aged Urban Men, Lilongwe)*

*Sometimes these independent candidates might have belonged to a party and become independent because they have lost primary elections. They get back to their party when they win. (Younger Urban Men, Blantyre)*

*These politicians stand as an independent and rejoin [the party] later when they win. It is corrupt politics. (Younger Urban Women, Blantyre)*

**9. Voting choices for president will be made more on the qualities and abilities of the candidate than on party affiliation, according to most participants.**

Party loyalty will not be a significant factor in choosing a president for Malawi on May 20, say most participants. Participant comments indicate they believe the presidential candidate is the leader in developing a party's positions and manifesto and is more important in that regard than other party members. Participants also believe that the party loses importance once a president is elected since it is the president who rules the country. For all these reasons, most participants believe it is better to make a voting decision based on the president rather than the party.

*We look into the personality of a [presidential] candidate, not a political party. (Older Rural Men, Mzimba)*

*We consider more on the president [candidate] than on the party because the president is the one who creates facts for the party. (Younger Peri-Urban Men, Salima)*

*I look at the [presidential] candidate because that person is the one deciding the ideas of helping us Malawians. The party is formed by people, but the leader is the president, so the president is the one we look at. (Rural Older Men, Chikwawa)*

*We consider the person and his wisdom... We don't consider much about where the [presidential] candidate is coming from [which party]. (Middle-Aged Rural Women, Dedza)*

*We don't look at the party because it's not the party that is going to rule us but the [presidential] candidate. (Middle-Aged Peri-Urban Women, Mangochi)*

Participants who say that party will be an important factor in their voting decision generally believe the party has more influence on a [presidential] candidate. These participants believe the party provides the main ideas which that candidate will follow if elected and say it is important to consider the party because many of its members will serve as advisors in the administration.

*I will vote for the party because ideas are made in the party, not by a [presidential] candidate. (Middle-Aged Peri-Urban Men, Mulanje)*

*The President rules us, but there are also people in the party who advise the President... That is why we chose the party. (Younger Peri-Urban Men, Neno)*

*I think I can look at both because if the candidate represents a party that candidate does not rule on his own; they have other big heads who will back them up. (Younger Urban Men, Blantyre)*

**10. Most participants say they will not automatically vote for the same party for all three positions on the ballot.**

Voting a straight ticket, whereby ballots are cast for the same party for all three positions, is not a priority, according to most participants. Instead, they say consideration will be given to each candidate's qualities and ideas and a decision will be made on that basis, rather than party affiliation. Thus, each decision they contend will be made individually and may or may not result in straight ticket voting. A

few of these participants also say in the past when they have voted a straight ticket it has not worked out well for the country because it gives too much power to one party.

*I will vote for a president, MP and councilor based on their facts, not their party. (Older Rural Men, Ntcheu)*

*It all depends on which candidate has strong issues. We will be able to vote for a president from this party and an MP from another party. (Middle-Aged Rural Women, Blantyre)*

*We can vote for different people from different parties, no problem...We cannot consider this person is from PP or MCP or DPP. We will consider the ability of the person to help us. (Middle-Aged Peri-Urban Men, Karonga)*

*If I like that president of a certain party and it happens that the MP [of the same party] didn't please me, I would vote for the president only and I would vote for MP from another party, not the same party. (Younger Peri-Urban Men, Salima)*

*It won't be like when we start with a [party] candidate then the rest to be ticked will be all the [party's] candidates in all the three positions. You can be impressed maybe by a president from one party, by an MP from another [party] and by a councilor from another [party], so we will vote based on the candidate's ability. (Older Peri-Urban Men, Chitipa)*

*When people come from one party, they will agree on everything even if it is bad, but if we choose different parties, it will mean one of them will be able to oppose some decisions...In our politics when the majority of MPs are opposing the president, the president rules well. (Middle-Aged Peri-Urban Men, Balaka)*

Some participants hold a different opinion, believing that voting a straight party ticket can pay dividends. The primary benefit they associate with straight ticket voting is cooperation between different levels of government. These participants say development requires cooperation and so they think it will be much easier to bring development to their area if their elected officials are from the same party.

*I think it's good to choose from one party because people of different parties tend to work differently. They do not agree on one thing...It is very difficult for these two people [MP and councilor] to work together if they don't belong to one political party. (Middle-Aged Urban Men, Lilongwe)*

*I will not mix [parties] because it will not be possible for the MP to get development from the president of another party. (Older Rural Men, Chikwawa)*

*If you vote for people from different parties, they may end up not in agreement or coordinating on certain development issues because of their differences. (Younger Peri-Urban Men, Salima)*

*I will vote for all from one party because if my president wins, my MP will beg from the president easily. (Younger Peri-Urban Men, Neno)*

## **11. The selection of a vice presidential running mate is not an important voting consideration for most participants.**

Most participants say in making a decision about which presidential candidate deserves their vote, the vice presidential running mate will not be a significant factor. These participants see the presidential candidate as the only important consideration, since that is the person who will be running the country. The vice president is primarily viewed as a helper and not a significant role player by this group. Some also mention that if they like the presidential candidate, they trust that person to choose a good running mate.

*If you love the presidential candidate, you just go for them. You don't care who their vice president is. (Middle-Aged Rural Men, Dowa)*

*This [vice presidential running mate] cannot change me because this one is just his or her friend whom he or she has chosen to campaign. I will focus on the works of the president when voting. (Middle-Aged Rural Women, Mwanza)*

*I choose a presidential candidate because I have confidence in him or her. That [vice presidential running mate] cannot affect our vote in any way because the one who will be ruling this country will be the president, not the running mate. (Older Rural Women, Ntcheu)*

*The president is the one who rules the country, not the vice, so their choice [of running mate] can't affect us...The presidential candidates themselves are in a position to know the vice president they choose the best. So if we love the president, we automatically love the vice. (Younger Peri-Urban Men, Mchinji)*

Some participants will look at the vice presidential running mate more seriously, however. They give various reasons for why the vice president would be an important factor in their voting decision. Some say they could not vote for a president that chose a running mate they felt was not good. Some say the vice president is important because they intermittently run the country when the president is away. Others think for government to work well the president and vice president must work well as a team. And some who believe it is important to consider the running mate in presidential voting decisions indicate they have learned from the recent past, when the president died and the vice president assumed power. This, they say, proves the critical importance of the vice president.

*It [the choice of a vice presidential running mate] can affect me. I cannot vote for a presidential candidate whose vice president has a bad reputation. (Older Rural Men, Nkhotakota)*

*I may say this [the choice of a vice presidential running mate] will affect me if the running mate is weak in many areas. I will know that this one will disturb the work of the president. (Younger Urban Men, Blantyre)*

*The choice of vice president will affect my vote because when the president is away the vice president is the one leading the nation; so if the vice president does not have leadership skills then we have a problem. (Middle-Aged Peri-Urban Men, Mulanje)*

*The combination [of president and vice president] will give us a good picture as to whom to vote for because these two work hand-in-hand; so yes, the vice president [running mate] will affect the way I will vote. (Middle-Aged Peri-Urban Women, Mangochi)*

*It [the choice of vice presidential running mate] will affect me because I will be interested in knowing the running mate and see if it's a perfect combination. (Older Rural Women, Blantyre)*

*If you asked me that question in the 2000s, I would say it can't affect me because I thought leaders don't change. But for our generation, the vice president will have an impact. We should know that everything can happen to the leader and the vice can take over. (Middle-Aged Peri-Urban Men, Balaka)*

*In the past it was not affecting the vote, but now it will affect us very much. It is possible for a president to die and his running mate to take over. Now we are looking at this angle, should this happen, is this running mate going to lead us properly? Now we can see that the choice of running mate will have an impact. (Middle-Aged Peri-Urban Men, Nkhata Bay)*

## **12. There is little expressed concern among most participants about a president of Malawi winning office with less than 50 percent of votes.**

Most participants find it normal and acceptable that the next president of Malawi could be elected without getting a majority of votes. Many take the view that the person with the most votes wins, regardless of the percentage of votes overall and regardless of the margin of victory. Typical comments include references to winning by only a few or even one vote. Winners of these types of elections are viewed as legitimate as ones who win by larger margins or with a majority of the vote. In discussing the current presidential election, there is recognition among some participants that the race will be close and that the number of presidential candidates will mean it is unlikely any candidate will receive more than 50 percent of the vote. Some are also aware that the law in Malawi only requires a presidential candidate to receive the most votes to be declared the winner.

*If one of the candidates has gotten more votes than other candidate, then [that presidential candidate] is the winner. (Younger Rural Women, Ntcheu)*

*If he or she won with one vote, that's winning...That means he or she has won. All we want is someone to win with more votes than the other. (Middle-Aged Rural Men, Phalombe)*

*It [a presidential candidate winning with less than 50 percent of the vote] means the candidate has won. It can simply show that Malawian politics is going good because of good competition so that person should be declared the winner of the elections. (Younger Peri-Urban Men, Mchinji)*

*The president will still be a winner even if he or she has not hit the half number of counted votes...Victory means you have defeated your opponents regardless of the magnitude of victory...We have so many presidents who are contesting, I don't think it will work if they can start considering the half scenario. (Younger Peri-Urban Men, Salima)*

*We Malawians should just be accepting the candidate as a winner even if [the presidential candidate] may not get as much votes as 50 percent or more because there are a lot of political*



*parties here in Malawi. This means the votes are shared among all of these parties so it is difficult for a person to obtain 50 percent of the total votes. (Older Peri-Urban Men, Chitipa)*

A president assuming power with less than a 50 percent mandate bothers a few participants, however. These participants say it would concern them because the majority has not chosen the president or because so few have chosen the president. Some in this group also would view such as result as illegitimate because they do not understand the current law.

*That [a presidential candidate winning with less than 50 percent of the vote] will show the majority does not want the candidate, so if we say the majority rules, it will mean the rules did not win. (Middle-Aged Peri-Urban Men, Balaka)*

*We can have some doubts that this person [a presidential candidate who wins with less than 50 percent of the vote] is fit to be president...if you only have a little number of votes. (Middle-Aged Peri-Urban Men, Karonga)*

*It [a presidential candidate winning office with less than 50 percent of the vote] means that the presidential candidate hasn't won the elections. If that person will be declared the winner, then it means that the elections were rigged. (Younger Rural Women, Rumphi)*

#### **IV. INFORMATION & ISSUES**

##### **1. Most participants have basic information on the upcoming election. However, their requests for more information from CSOs and CBOs about the process and about political parties and candidates indicate they want and need to know more to cast informed ballots.**

Participants report they have received a variety of basic election information from several sources. The election date is well-known as is the tripartite nature of the elections. Most participants understand they will be voting on the offices of local councilor, Member of Parliament and president. Information about when, where and how to register to vote was also readily available, according to most participants. They say they felt reasonably informed about that process. Radio is the most common source for election information among participants. Other sources include CSOs/CBOs, churches, NICE, chiefs, television and text messages from MEC. A few participants feel their knowledge is lacking and are surprised they have not received more election education and information to this point.

*We have received the information that everybody should come and vote on May 20, 2014, and we have heard this from the radio. (Older Rural Women, Ntchisi)*

*Through the media, such as the radio station, [there was] information about the voter registration process and also the upcoming tripartite elections...[The information said] that we will vote for three candidates: President, MP and councilor. (Older Rural Men, Ntcheu)*

*I saw NICE once telling people about registration and that people should go register. (Younger Rural Men, Nkhata Bay)*

*We were given some tracks [pamphlets] at church, which were talking about what it means to have a tripartite election. (Younger Peri-Urban Men, Mchinji)*

*We have heard from the radio, TV and the chiefs telling us to vote. (Middle-Aged Rural Women, Karonga)*

*I received a text saying that I should vote. (Middle-Aged Urban Women, Lilongwe)*

*They have not even come to tell us the process of voting in our area. It is something you could be studying so that you don't make mistakes on polling day. Most information we get from radios, but it is difficult even to see a poster. (Younger Urban Men, Blantyre)*

While radio is the most wide reaching source of election information, face-to-face civic and voter education efforts by CSOs and CBOs are highly valued by participants. They believe CSOs are uniquely placed to help them understand the voting process in a way that media cannot through hands-on education and instruction and uniquely qualified – because of their trusted neutrality – to encourage electoral participation and to help citizens understand how to make an informed decision. Increasing Malawians' confidence in how to cast a ballot is an important task for CSOs and CBOs, say participants. They express some concern that the tripartite elections will be a new experience and want more instruction for how to vote in order to feel confident going into the polling station. Some participants fear apathy among voters and want CSOs to ensure their efforts include exhortations to citizens to vote and explanations about why voting is important. Even more, though, participants feel CSO and CBO activities should focus on educating citizens on how to make an informed choice. Specifically, they want the CSOs and CBOs to help them better understand the qualities of a good leader and how to choose a candidate based on issues rather than handouts, regional affiliation or other non-substantive criteria. At the same time the CSOs and CBOs are fulfilling their traditional role in educating voters, some participants urge CSOs/CBOs not to give up their role as watchdogs. These participants view CSOs/CBOs as a critical component to ensuring fair elections.

*With this tripartite election a lot of people don't know a lot about [it], so they [CSOs] should civic educate a lot of people about what they should do on the voting day. (Younger Urban Women, Zomba)*

*The CSOs should be educating us on how to vote correctly for all three positions. (Younger Peri-Urban Women, Kasungu)*

*They [CSOs] should be teaching and encouraging people to vote. They [CSOs] should make sure that people know how to vote...This time around we will voting for President, MP and councilors for the first time in Malawi, so there is really need to conduct massive civic education. (Middle-Aged Rural Women, Karonga)*

*These [CSO] organizations should conduct civic education to the public about the need to vote and the danger for citizens not to vote...NGOs and CBOs should tell people that if you don't vote, you are also the ones choosing bad leadership. (Older Rural Men, Mzimba)*

*Encourage us to go and vote because some others registered, but they now say they will not vote. They don't know if they don't vote, they will not see the change they want...There is need to intervene because most people do not know the importance of voting. (Older Rural Men, Chikwawa)*

*They [CSOs] should teach us the characteristics of good candidates; many people can like that. (Middle-Aged Peri-Urban Men, Balaka)*

*I would love if these organizations [CSOs/CBOs] were teaching people how to vote for good leadership, and how they can know the right candidate for them. (Older Rural Men, Ntcheu)*

*CSOs, NGOs and CBOs should take a leading role in civic education on how to vote and on how to choose the right candidate. For example, should they vote for someone who was giving handouts or should they vote for someone with issues of development? (Middle-Aged Peri-Urban Men, Nkhata Bay)*

*We want them [CSOs] to ensure the elections will be free and fair because we look to them when it comes to elections. (Older Rural Men, Ntcheu)*

*They [CSOs] should be acting as watchdogs, stopping any kind of corruption done by anybody. (Older Rural Men, Nkhotakota)*

**2. Issues participants want political parties and candidates to discuss during the campaign mainly relate to the development areas they believe are lagging behind: agriculture, education and health. They also make clear what they do not want to hear: insults of other candidates and parties and empty promises.**

Development policies and programs are what participants are most keen to hear from political parties and candidates during the campaign period. A variety of development issues are of interest to participants but the ones they mention most often are in the fields of agriculture, education and health. In agriculture, the accessibility and affordability of fertilizer and food security policies are of primary interest to the participants. In education, participants would like to hear how candidates and parties will improve the quality of education through better standards, more schools and learning materials and more and better quality teachers. In health, participants want to hear how candidates and parties will address the lack of drugs in health facilities and the need for more hospitals close to the rural population. The economy is another important issue to participants. They want to know how candidates and parties propose to tackle the rising cost of living, the devaluation of the currency and the lack of jobs available, especially for the youth.

*I think the main issue we would like to hear from them [parties and candidates] is the issue of development because it improves our welfare. (Younger Peri-Urban Men, Salima)*

*They [parties and candidates] should be talking about development issues, the fertilizer issue, roads and school block construction...That they [parties and candidates] will improve the quality of education...That they [parties and candidates] will create jobs for our youth...They [parties and candidates] should be talking about reducing the cost of living. (Older Rural Women, Ntchisi)*

*I would love if people [parties and candidates] will concentrate on discussing issues of how our nation can be developed...They [parties and candidates] should be discussing issues of improving agriculture because that is the backbone of our economy...I would love it if issues of improving the welfare of the young people in Malawi could be discussed. (Middle-Aged Urban Men, Lilongwe)*

*I want to be told about development [by parties and candidates], like 'we will build schools, there will be drugs in hospitals, and we will dig boreholes,' so that we will be free in the villages. (Older Rural Men, Chikwawa)*

*They [parties and candidates] should be talking about education improvement, as well as job creation for all Malawians, regardless of tribe...They [parties and candidates] should be talking about restoring the Malawi kwacha...They [parties and candidates] should be talking about the things they will do to improve agriculture, education and other sectors plus reducing the cost of living. (Younger Peri-Urban Women, Kasungu)*

*They [parties and candidates] should discuss food security, health care services...Drug availability in hospitals. (Middle-Aged Peri-Urban Men, Nkhata Bay)*

Participants are just as clear about what they do not want to hear from candidates on the campaign trail. Many say they are tired of hearing candidates insult each other and view it as useless. These participants contend they are much more interested in what the candidate or party has to say about issues impacting their quality of life, rather than hearing about the deficiencies of other contestants. Other participants warn parties and candidates that they are tired of empty promises and only want to hear about policies and programs that are realistic and that they are committed to implementing.

*They [parties and candidates] should talk about development issues and not castigating each other in front of us old people. We hate that. (Older Rural Men, Mzimba)*

*They [parties and candidates] should not be insulting one another but should talk about issues that can build our nation: issues of development. (Younger Peri-Urban Men, Mchinji)*

*The political parties should be telling us what they would do for Malawians if they get elected into the government, but the sad part of it is that leaders of political parties become very busy castigating other parties and that disappoints a people a lot. (Younger Rural Women, Ntcheu)*

*I think they [political parties and candidates] should talk about issues that will help people instead of talking about other political parties. We should vote for them because of their manifestos not because they castigated somebody...Whenever they come, they should talk something sensible, no de-campaigning the others. (Younger Urban Men, Blantyre)*

*They [parties and candidates] should talk about development issues they will manage to carry out and not just making false and empty promises for the sake of winning public votes. (Middle-Aged Urban Women, Mzimba)*

*They [parties and candidates] should speak only those things they can fulfill; not make empty promises...When some of us are promised, we have hope, so it is like taking us for granted. Let them fulfill what they speak. (Middle-Aged Rural Women, Blantyre)*

*They should speak the truth. Most of those I have seen speak lies so that we vote for them, but they do not fulfill what they have promised. (Middle-Aged Peri-Urban Men, Balaka)*

### 3. Some issues have particular resonance for certain groups, such as women, youth and the disabled.

The female and youth participants share many of the same views and care about many of the same issues as their male and older counterparts in the discussions.<sup>13</sup> However, the youth and female participants in this study highlight several issues that are particularly important for them, and all participants suggest there are some issues likely to be of particular importance for the disabled. The female participants say general issues of development are important to them, but they would also want to hear political parties and candidates talk about safe motherhood and related health initiatives, programs to improve women's status, guarantees of women's rights and policies that can improve food security. Women, they note, are usually responsible for getting food on the table, so food security is an especially key issue for them, even though it may not appear to be related to gender.

*The first issue [we care about as women] is development...Development and safe motherhood [is what we want parties and candidates talking about]...There currently are more deaths of expectant women because there are no strategies for delivery. (Middle-Aged Rural Women, Mwanza)*

*They [parties and candidates] should be talking about promoting safe motherhood...about building health center centers. (Younger Peri-Urban Women, Kasungu)*

*I would love to hear [from parties and candidates] about the issues of the health sector, such as the building of hospitals, because many of us women suffer when we are expectant. (Younger Rural Women, Ntcheu)*

*[Women want to hear] how they [parties and candidates] will empower women both at work and at home. (Middle-Aged Rural Women, Karonga)*

*I would love to hear [from parties and candidates] about our rights and that there will no longer be any [domestic] violence. (Middle-Aged Peri-Urban Women, Mangochi)*

*They [parties and candidates] should talk about food security because it is the woman who feels the heat when there is not food in the household. (Middle-Aged Urban Women, Mzimba)*

Youth participants highlight three main areas they would like parties and candidates to discuss during the campaign period. They say they will be especially looking for parties and candidates that can offer realistic solutions to increase opportunities for youth in education, jobs, skills training and small loans.

*[Parties and candidates] should encourage youth about education and say they will help them with school fees. (Younger Rural Women, Mulanje)*

*They [parties and candidates] should be talking about helping us in education, such as providing learning materials...They [parties and candidates] should be talking about reducing school fees. (Younger Peri-Urban Women, Kasungu)*

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<sup>13</sup> This study did not organize a group of disabled participants only, but presumably, disabled persons care about issues other participants say affect all Malawians.

*[Youth want to hear from parties and candidates] that a lot of us will be given opportunity to go to the university. (Younger Urban Women, Zomba)*

*We would like them [parties and candidates] to tell us that they will create jobs for us, the youth. (Younger Peri-Urban Men, Mangochi)*

*We are just moving around because we have nothing to do. If they [parties and candidates] can offer us employment opportunities, I think most youth can feel happy. (Younger Peri-Urban Men, Neno)*

*They [parties and candidates] should talk about the construction of a youth skill center. The whole of this area has no such kind of thing. Those school leavers should be able to be trained in vocational skills. Should one mention this during the campaign, then we are going to vote for him. (Younger Rural Men, Nkhata Bay)*

*We should be hearing [from parties and candidates] that there shall be training centers to equip us with technical skills so we can end up being self-reliant. (Younger Peri-Urban Men, Mchinji)*

*If they [parties and candidates] can be telling them they will be given small business loans, the youth will be happy. (Younger Rural Women, Ntcheu)*

*The youth would be very pleased to hear [from parties and candidates] that organizations will be established to give out loans to the young people to help themselves. (Younger Peri-Urban Men, Salima)*

Although there were no specific groups of disabled participants organized for this research, other participants feel there are several issues disabled citizens would find important for political parties and candidates to discuss. These include education opportunities and skills training, job opportunities and equal treatment. Some participants believe mobility issues would also be important to the portion of the disabled population who cannot walk or have difficulty walking.

*They [the disabled] would love to hear about issues [from parties and candidates] like giving them an opportunity to go to school. (Middle-Aged Urban Men, Lilongwe)*

*[The disabled want to hear] that parties and candidates will increase the number of schools for the disabled. (Younger Urban Women, Zomba)*

*Disabled people would be happy if they were told [by parties and candidates] that they will have job opportunities to sustain themselves. (Middle-Aged Rural Women, Dedza)*

*They [parties and candidates] should be talking about creating jobs for them [the disabled] according to their disabilities...that they [the disabled] will be taught various technical work in order to improve their living standards. (Older Rural Women, Ntchisi)*

*There are things that can help the disabled, such as vocational training, to be financially independent. [Parties and candidates telling them] this I think can make them happy. (Older Peri-Urban Men, Chitipa)*

*The disabled feel discriminated against, but they are people like us. So if the politicians say the disabled are people like us, they have the same rights, they can hold every position, even that of a president or MP, I think they can feel happy to hear about this. (Middle-Aged Rural Women, Mwanza)*

*I think they [disabled] would be happy to be told [by parties and candidates] there would be equal treatment between them and normal people in Malawi. (Younger Urban Men, Blantyre)*

*Those people who have difficulties in walking would be happy if they hear [from parties and candidates] that they will be given wheelchairs to ease their traveling. (Younger Peri-Urban Men, Salima)*

**4. Most participants say candidate debates are helpful tools that help citizens make informed decisions. Most also say they would have questions about a candidate who chooses not to participate in debates.**

Candidate debates are not an unfamiliar concept to most participants. Those who did not understand the term reacted positively when a short description was provided. All but a few of the participants view candidate debates as important because it helps them differentiate between candidates and parties and gives them useful, substantive information about a candidate's or party's positions as well as a candidate's more intangible qualities, such as the ability to govern and lead. The few participants who do not believe debates are useful tools say candidates will only insult each other or feel that debates will only bring confusion and conflict.

*It [debates] helps us in noting weaknesses of some candidates and strengths of other candidates and from there we decide who to vote for. (Younger Peri-Urban Men, Chiradzulu)*

*Debate is a good thing because it gives us an idea of what the person will do for us if voted into power. (Younger Rural Women, Rumphi)*

*Political debate is a nice thing because all [of the candidates'] ideas are put in one place and people are given a chance to choose which ideas they feel are good ones and that might even affect who they will vote for. (Older Rural Men, Ntcheu)*

*Debate is very good because it makes [us] hear what a candidate is speaking and see if they have got all it takes to manage government business properly. (Older Peri-Urban Men, Chitipa)*

*Debates are important because this is where and when we hear about candidate ideologies, which help us make an informed decision on whether to vote for a particular candidate or not. (Older Rural Women, Ntchisi)*

*These debates do not benefit us...Here in Malawi, people just castigate each other. (Middle-Aged Peri-Urban Men, Balaka)*

*Debates are not good; they bring confusion. (Younger Peri-Urban Women, Kasungu)*

For the same reasons participants say debates in general are good, they also see great value in the presidential candidates participating in a debate or debates. Debates, they say, help them better understand the presidential candidates' ideas and determine which ideas they like and which candidate they believe will be most likely act upon those ideas. These participants also see value in having debates in which presidential candidates are required to answer questions posed by others, rather than during campaigns where others speak on their behalf or they speak to a crowd without interaction or feedback. Participants, particularly rural and peri-urban participants, say having presidential debates broadcast on radio will add to their value, since many will not have an opportunity to see the presidential candidates speak during their campaigns. The few participants who do not see presidential debates as important believe there can be no productive discussion between presidential candidates or worry such a discussion could lead to violence.

*Presidential debates are important because they give us a chance to differentiate the presidential candidates and sample their ideas; who is telling us what we want to hear or the one who might do the thing he or she is saying. (Younger Peri-Urban Men, Chiradzulu)*

*It [presidential debates] will help me to choose a president based on their ideologies and things that they will do...It helps people to know the kind of person to vote for. (Middle-Aged Urban Women, Mzimba)*

*It [presidential debates] is important because in this way the candidate displays their vision as well as how they will be managing the government's business. All this happens through the candidate themselves during the debate and not through someone else. (Older Peri-Urban Men, Chitipa)*

*It [presidential debates] is really important because we hear their views other than during the campaigns, where they just talk without anybody asking them questions. (Middle-Aged Peri-Urban Men, Nkhata Bay)*

*It [presidential debates] is important because we hear their ideologies through the radio because it is not everyone who will be able to reach us physically, and this will give us a chance to hear what is in their mind. (Younger Peri-Urban Women, Kasungu)*

*I don't think they [presidential debates] are important because I don't like the way the presidential candidates talk to each other. (Middle-Aged Rural Men, Phalombe)*

*They should not participate [in presidential debates] because this can cause violence. For example, if the DPP president speaks his views the UDF will want to speak something different, so this will end up in arguments. (Younger Urban Men, Blantyre)*

The refusal of a candidate to participate in a debate raises questions for many participants. These questions include whether the candidate is trustworthy, has confidence or can offer good ideas. Some participants also worry that a candidate's decision not to participate in a debate will leave them less informed about that candidate and their party and thus will force them to make a voting decision without full information. There are mixed views among participants about whether participation in a debate would be a definitive criterion for support for a candidate. Some say they would have to think carefully about whether they would vote for such a candidate, some say they would definitely not vote



for a candidate who did not participate in debates and others say participation in a debate would have no effect on their voting decision.

*It would be surprising [for a candidate not to participate in a debate], and I would have to think about him or her. (Younger Peri-Urban Men, Chiradzulu)*

*It will mean that there is something he or she is hiding if he or she is not participating in the debate...How can we trust him or her with leadership when he or she doesn't want to come out into the open and tell us what he or she will do for us? (Younger Peri-Urban Men, Mangochi)*

*It can make us think that the one who did not come [to the debate] does not have a good manifesto, and [the candidate] is scared. (Middle-Aged Urban Women, Lilongwe)*

*We will not know what [the candidate] has for us, so that we can have examples of what [the candidate] is. (Older Rural Men, Chikwawa)*

*If it happens that the candidate who has refused to attend the debate was my favorite candidate, I would change my mind and not vote for him or her anymore. (Older Rural Men, Ntcheu)*

*If I want to vote for a candidate, I will vote for them not because they attended the debate but because I want them in power because they are capable of helping people. (Older Rural Men, Nkhotakota)*

*[A candidate's] absence [from a debate] cannot affect my vote. It will depend on what the person was doing in politics. There could be many reasons for [the candidate's] absence. (Middle-Aged Peri-Urban Men, Balaka)*

Participants provide numerous ideas and topics for questions they would like asked during a presidential debate. Most are related to development sectors that do not meet their expectations and match their stated concerns and priorities they highlight in response to the initial questions in this study. Participants want presidential candidates to outline realistic policies to improve these sectors, such as agriculture (specifically food security and fertilizer accessibility), education and health. Development of rural areas in these sectors is of particular interest to participants. The state of the economy (especially employment and cost of basic goods), management of the country's finances and the security situation in certain locations are also topics that participants want presidential candidates quizzed about during debates. For some participants, there is only one question that is important: whether the candidate will fulfill their promises.

*What mechanism will you put in place for the development of Malawi as a new president? (Younger Rural Men, Nkhata Bay)*

*They [presidential candidate] should be asked [during debates] how they will help Malawians once they get elected in terms of food security. (Younger Rural Women, Rumphi)*

*What will you do [as president] with fertilizer and the price of seeds? Will subsidized fertilizer continue or will the price of fertilizer be reduced in the shops? (Middle-Aged Rural Women, Mwanza)*

*How will you [as president] improve the agriculture and health sector plus fuel availability?  
(Middle-Aged Rural Men, Kasungu)*

*My first question is if you become president, what will you do for the people? On development, security and welfare? (Older Rural Men, Chikwawa)*

*How shall they [the presidential candidates] help the people in the villages in terms of employment and education? (Middle-Aged Peri-Urban Men, Karonga)*

*What are you [as president] going to do about the high cost of living that has hit our country?...Will you ensure drug availability in our hospitals throughout the country? (Middle-Aged Rural Women, Mwanza)*

*What will you do to ensure citizens of their safety [as president]? (Middle-Aged Urban Women, Lilongwe)*

*The question I would like to ask [presidential candidates] is how are you controlling the money? How are you addressing issues of corruption? (Younger Urban Men, Blantyre)*

*They [debate moderators] should ask them [the presidential candidates] if they shall fulfill their promises once elected into power. (Middle-Aged Rural Men, Dowa)*

## **5. Participants express disappointment, sadness and frustration at the government corruption case, known as Cash-Gate.**

Most participants are familiar with Cash-Gate. While government corruption is not a new concept to these participants, they find it hard to comprehend the extent of corruption this case appears to have exposed. They draw a direct connection between Cash-Gate and the poor quality of their lives and find it almost unfathomable that government money is being stolen while they face so many significant challenges. The amount of money reported lost also causes participants to contemplate what could have been if the money had been put to good use, especially in critical areas of development. They believe the acute shortage of drugs in hospitals could have been prevented, for example.

*We are so disappointed with the scandal because the money could have been used to help poor people. (Middle-Aged Rural Women, Dedza)*

*Malawi is a poor country with lots of problems. The country is struggling and yet a group of people are stealing the money...This issue has brought poverty to Malawians because the money could have reached all of us in different ways as government money. (Younger Rural Men, Nkhata Bay)*

*We are surprised, how has this money been stolen? How did the money come out to such an extent when there is a shortage of drugs in hospitals, no food in ADMARC depots? Why did they not buy maize using that money? (Older Rural Women, Blantyre)*

*It [Cash-Gate] is a very sad thing. To me it feels like Malawi is lost because now we don't have medicines in hospitals; yet the money which we Malawians gave as tax has been plundered by some selfish people. (Middle-Aged Urban Women, Lilongwe)*

*This [Cash-Gate] is slowing down development. One person cannot steal a hundred something million when there are no drugs in hospitals. You go in schools, there are no teaching materials, but somebody is eating the money...The scandal of a few people is putting 15 million people at risk. (Younger Urban Men, Blantyre)*

Participants cite several frustrations with the investigation of the Cash-Gate case. A top complaint is that they do not feel well-informed. Many participants say they have not been given sufficient information about why and how Cash-Gate happened and do not understand what measures are being taken to ensure the guilty are prosecuted, to recover as much money as possible and to guarantee such wide-scale corruption cannot happen again. Participants generally acknowledge that some arrests have been made as a result of the Cash-Gate investigation, but many also voice two main concerns about those arrests. First, these participants feel that those arrested have been released very quickly from detention. This makes some think either that there has been some malpractice or that those arrested will not be prosecuted. Second, some participants feel that the investigation has not yet revealed those who are truly responsible for Cash-Gate. This group talks of “only juniors” being arrested and about “big fish,” who they feel must be behind the corruption case, escaping punishment. Lack of information and lack of understanding of the judicial process and timelines also cause some participants to be frustrated by what they perceive as a lengthy and drawn out process that has not yet produced significant prosecutions or significant recovery of money. In addition, a few participants question whether the government can effectively investigate Cash-Gate since government officials were involved in the corruption.

*The issue of Cash-Gate has affected us people living in the village, and we have no idea what is going on since the news broke...Everyone knows about this issue of Cash-Gate, but the problem is we don't know what the story is now. (Younger Peri-Urban Men, Mangochi)*

*We only heard that money has been stolen, but we're not aware of the efforts that the government has taken to fight it...[The government] should inform us whether the stolen money was recovered or not, not just that it was stolen. (Younger Peri-Urban Salima Men)*

*We were told that the people involved are being arrested. We want more than this. We need to be told every step of the investigation. We should be updated daily because this has affected us a lot. (Middle-Aged Rural Women, Blantyre)*

*When people are arrested [in the Cash-Gate case], it all ends when they are given bail. The person is then set free. (Middle-Aged Peri-Urban Men, Karonga)*

*The investigations on the Cash-Gate scandal do not get down to the roots. There are some big fish that are connected to this scandal, but there is nothing...Only the juniors are being implicated leaving out the big fish. (Older Peri-Urban Men, Chitipa)*

*It is only juniors who are arrested [in the Cash-Gate cash]. Do you want to tell me that a watchman can be found with cement when the store clerk is not involved? It means there was someone big who told these juniors these directions. (Middle-Aged Peri-Urban Men, Balaka)*

*I'm not satisfied because the investigations [in the Cash-Gate case] are taking too long to be completed and still that stolen money has not been recovered. (Middle-Aged Rural Women, Dedza)*

*They said they were still investigating [the Cash-Gate case], but we Malawians want to see things moving. (Middle-Aged Urban Women, Mzimba)*

*We are not satisfied because we haven't heard any conclusion of a single investigation on this [Cash-Gate] issue. (Older Rural Women, Ntchisi)*

*I feel if we leave it in the government's hands alone there is nothing that is going to happen since a lot of people in government are involved in Cash-Gate. We need non-governmental organizations to help the government and that way the truth will be known. (Younger Peri-Urban Men, Mangochi)*

## **V. POLITICAL PARTIES & CANDIDATES**

### **1. Most participants report significant problems with the various political party primaries. These problems adversely impact confidence in the elections, with some participants that unfair primaries have already tainted the elections.**

Overall, participants give the political party primary process poor marks, but the parties responsible for the poor processes as well as the reasons the participants are judging the process to be poor vary by district. Four parties are most commonly mentioned by participants as having held primaries in their areas – MCP, DPP, PP and UDF – although some participants report that not all of those parties held primaries in their constituency. The quality of the primary process was not uniform either, according to the participants. For example, participants in one group would cite one of these four parties as having had good primaries and another as having had bad primaries, but participants in a different location would say the reverse. Therefore, there is no political party or parties that are said to have held better or worse primaries across the groups.

Participants say all of the four political parties they most commonly cite had various problems in their primaries, depending on the area. Across parties, several complaints about the primaries are shared by participants. The first is that the primaries had poor controls for protecting the vote count, allowing the vote to be easily corrupted in some areas. These participants say there was double voting, underage voting, stuffing of ballot boxes and/or changing of the results. Similarly, some participants believe parties unfairly staged the primaries through actions such as limiting information about the primaries, bringing in people from outside the constituency to vote and placing voting centers in locations that favored one candidate. All of these actions, they say, resulted in candidates being nominated who had not fairly won the primary election. In other areas, participants are upset that some parties named candidates without a primary. These participants object to what they call 'imposed' candidates. A few participants are also concerned the primaries in certain cases resulted in conflict between candidates.

Based on participant responses, there appears to have been no common procedures across political parties, or in some cases even within parties, for conducting primary elections. Overall, participants seem to find primary elections confusing and frustrating, and a few suggest that NGOs or the MEC should become involved to remedy the situation. It is also evident from participant responses that the

political parties' conduct of the primaries has reduced confidence in the 2014 elections. Although the primaries are a party process and not a MEC one, participants describe them as an integral part of the electoral process, and so some believe the poorly conducted primary elections have already tainted the general elections. A quote from a participant on rigging in the elections reflects this view, "It is true there will be rigging [in the general elections]. It has already started with primaries."<sup>14</sup>

*Every year we have problems with the way preliminary elections are conducted.*

*The issues [problems with primary elections] were happening in all parties.*

*They [the parties] were not fair in the way they conducted the primaries. The candidates that people loved were not declared winners, though we believe they are the ones who were winners.*

*The primaries did not go well. They [political parties] endorsed a lot of candidates that did not win the primary elections.*

*A person could vote as many times as they wanted [in the primary election], making someone to win corruptly...Some parties have the candidates already in mind, and they could make such a candidate win at all costs.*

*They [the primary elections] were not free and fair; they were mixed up. People could vote three times...These problems were with most parties where primaries were conducted.*

*Some candidates were bringing children who are underage to vote for them.*

*It was discovered that the MP took a three tonner and took students from [another area to our area] to just make him win.*

*In my area, the party had nominations without proper publicity to its members. It was like a whispering kind of information to avoid people knowing about the primaries.*

*In some areas, primaries were not conducted and yet they announced names of candidates who will represent the party, which we feel was unfair.*

*There are other parties which could set their candidate in advance and conduct primaries just for formality's sake having the knowledge of the winner already.*

*There were a lot of conflicts during the preliminary elections... I have heard the issue is now in court, so sometimes these preliminary elections bring confusion and conflicts among the people.*

*Some of the candidates [in the primary elections] won just because the voters were threatened...Those who have won the primaries have not won genuinely.*

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<sup>14</sup> Quotations are not attributed in this section because the reaction of one participant may not be representative of the conduct of primary elections in a specific constituency or district. However, the quotations listed here provide an overall sense of the problems participants identify with primary elections in various constituencies and districts.

*There should be other strategies [for the primary elections] or the MEC is supposed to be conducting these primary elections.*

*I think the NGOs should also try to come in to help in setting up the voting procedures as well as the place where people can go and cast their votes.*

*I don't think [the general] elections will be free and fair because we have seen how primaries were conducted that some parties were just imposing candidates; that clearly shows the election will not be fair.*

- 2. The political parties participants mention most often – DPP, MCP, PP and UDF – are primarily judged on how they performed while in power and not their current policies or party leaders. Overall, all four of these parties receive both positive and negative comments from participants.**

Participants do not appear to have well-formed opinions about the current policies or positions of the political parties who have held the presidency in Malawi. Instead, almost all opinions about these parties are based solely on their time in office, even for MCP, which last held the presidency twenty years ago. This suggests the political parties have not done a good job at defining themselves outside government. As a result, overall, participants cite both strengths and weaknesses for the four parties, and participants in the same group would often have both positive and more negative comments about a party.

Most opinions of the four parties revolve around their performance while in office in three areas: the economy, food security and rights and freedoms. Therefore, in general terms, a participant is likely to have a positive assessment of a political party if the economy was good, if the food security situation was good and/or if there were individual rights and freedoms during that party's administration. Less often but still important, participants base their opinion of the parties on the performance of the party in delivering quality education or in reducing crime.

Using that criteria, participants offer generally mixed views of the four parties overall. UDF is praised by participants for having presided over a good economy, introducing free primary education and allowing for greater rights and freedoms when the party was in power. Yet, there are also criticisms of the party's food security policies, especially during the 1999 food shortage crisis, and of increasing crime during its reign. For MCP, participants still remember the rule of Hastings Kamuzu Banda, or have heard about it from their parents, and so often associate the party with lack of freedom, the forced buying of party cards and various forms of oppression. At the same time, they also say that under MCP the quality of education was higher, crime was virtually nonexistent and basic necessities were affordable.

Participants describe DPP as having had several notable accomplishments in during its first term, including improving the food security situation, reducing crime and initiating important development projects. They also, however, indicate the party had notable problems, especially in its second term. These included severe shortages (fuel, medicines and foreign exchange) and a seeming unwillingness to listen to citizens. Participants appreciate the relatively freer environment that was ushered in under PP and the actions of the PP to end the acute shortages in fuel, foreign exchange and to a lesser extent, medicines. Nevertheless, they believe in some areas PP has fallen short of their expectations, especially the economy and in certain areas, security. Some participants also talk of PP as now being associated with the Cash-Gate case.

*To me, DPP, UDF and PP,<sup>15</sup> all seem as one party.* (Middle-Aged Peri-Urban Men, Nkhata Bay)

*The problem with our political parties is that all of them are thieves. You will find that the people who are ruling are the same people who were in Kamuzu's administration.* (Younger Urban Men, Ndirande)

*Every party has its weaknesses.* (Middle-Aged Rural Men, Dedza)

*Every political party has both good and bad things we can talk about.* (Older Rural Men, Ntcheu)

*In UDF's time, youth had a lot to do in terms of jobs and businesses...In that time things were good, especially for us youth.* (Younger Peri-Urban Men, Mangochi)

*Money was in people's pockets [when UDF was in power].* (Middle-Aged Peri-Urban Men, Karonga)

*To me, UDF did good things. For me to go to school and know how to read and write was all because of UDF. They removed the fees so to me; they did something good.* (Middle-Aged Rural Women, Mwanza)

*To me, UDF was a good party because people were free in expressing their views without being arrested.* (Middle-Aged Rural Women, Dedza)

*UDF is not a good party, people suffered from severe hunger during that time.* (Middle-Aged Rural Men, Dowa)

*I also think UDF did not rule well because during that time, [our area] was bad; people were attacked in daylight.* (Younger Urban Men, Blantyre)

*In its [MCP's] time, there was no freedom of anything.* (Younger Rural Women, Mulanje)

*If you failed to buy a card, they [MCP] could catch you or even take away your property. So it felt like oppression as well as theft.* (Middle-Aged Rural Women, Mwanza)

*When I think of this party, I think of going back to Kamuzu Banda's leadership style, which was somehow bad.* (Middle-Aged Rural Women, Karonga)

*There was quality education during MCP's time.* (Older Rural Women, Ntchisi)

*I don't find any mistake with MCP because during Kamuzu Banda's rule basic goods were cheap.* (Younger Urban Men, Blantyre)

*It had some good things going for it. For example, during its [MCP's] era, there were no cases of murder or theft.* (Middle-Aged Rural Women, Dedza)

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<sup>15</sup> In a separate response, a participant in this group also indicated that MCP would be similar to these parties as well.

*With DPP, we were never faced with food shortage, and fertilizer coupons went to the intended beneficiaries. (Middle-Aged Peri-Urban Men, Mulanje)*

*DPP was very good at improving national security...In terms of cases of crimes and theft, there were less crimes reported. (Younger Peri-Urban Men, Salima)*

*In terms of development, the DPP government tried its best. (Middle-Aged Urban Women, Lilongwe)*

*DPP should not come back in power because we had shortages of fuel, medicine and money. (Middle-Aged Peri-Urban Women, Mangochi)*

*DPP started on a good note but messed up at the end by not listening to anyone. (Middle-Aged Rural Women, Karonga)*

*We know PP because of availability of other things, for example, fuel. We believe PP made alliance with some donors...I think they are trying because of what my friend has said that fuel is available and also drugs are available in hospitals. (Middle-Aged Rural Women, Mwanza)*

*Many organizations [NGOs] came in [when PP came into power that had] disappeared during Bingu's time...We can see some goodness [in PP] we hear [they] distributed cows, maize, building houses. (Older Rural Women, Blantyre)*

*In the PP government, our businesses have not been progressing because people are finding it hard to access money...[also the] high rising of prices of commodities. (Younger Rural Women, Ntcheu)*

*Security has gone down [under PP]...Thieves have found freedom. (Younger Urban Men, Blantyre)*

*[PP is] the party associated with Cash-Gate. (Older Rural Men, Mzimba)*

### **3. Participants hold various opinions about the strengths of the presidential candidates from MCP, UDF, PP and DPP.**

Participants were given a scenario in which they had to convince someone to vote for each of the presidential candidates from DPP, PP, UDF and MCP. Their responses indicate the participants have distinct views on the personality traits and the strengths of each candidate. Participants say they would advocate for others to vote for DPP presidential candidate, Peter Mutharika, by promoting him as being well-educated and well-qualified to lead the country. They say his status as a professor who has taught overseas will be admired and believe this experience will demonstrate he has knowledge of the various alternatives for accomplishing development goals. The participants say, in asking people to vote for Mutharika, they would also promote the positives of the party. These would include the party's accomplishments in the areas of development, food security and crime. Promoting PP presidential candidate, Joyce Banda, would primarily focus on her personal attributes and her ability to use these to connect to the people's needs and desires, according to participants. Some female participants also say they would encourage women to vote for the incumbent president because it would improve their



status. Other participants say they would speak about her ending shortages of critical items to convince citizens to vote for Joyce Banda.

The main area participants say they would promote about the MCP presidential candidate, Lazarus Chakwera, is his religious background. They believe his religious credentials will be attractive to voters who will see them as an indication he will work hard, be honest and understand people's problems. They also say they would promote Chakwera's lack of previous political experience as a positive, especially against the backdrop of other politicians who have been in government through multiple administrations. Some participants say they would highlight the MCP as a plus for Chakwera, focusing on the areas of life that were better under MCP. For UDF's presidential candidate, Atupele Muluzi, participants say their plan for convincing voters to cast their ballots for him would begin with his age. They believe voters will be attracted to a younger politician who can perhaps offer fresh ideas and a new direction for Malawi, where older politicians in the past have failed. Younger participants say they would also tell younger voters that since he is one of them, Atupele Muluzi will try to help resolve their problems. Other participants say it would be wise to bring up the accomplishments of UDF when the party was in power to convince voters to support Atupele Muluzi, especially UDF's work in managing the economy and in delivering education.

*[I would tell voters] he [Peter Mutharika] is well-educated, and he has traveled to many developed countries and hence he knows what development means. (Younger Rural Women, Rumphi)*

*[I would tell voters] if we vote for Peter Mutharika, there will be enough food and security will enhance. This is what it was with Bingu so he can continue from there...Promises are fulfilled, for example, our road project was approved that time. (Older Rural Men, Chikwawa)*

*[I would tell voters] his [Peter Mutharika's] brother was a development-minded person, and he ended hunger, so Peter will do the same...He is well-educated and he will bring ideas from abroad like development and education. (Middle-Aged Rural Women, Karonga)*

*I would tell people to vote for her [Joyce Banda] because of what she is doing like distributing maize to poor people, and she is also listening to people's complaints...[I would tell voters] Joyce Banda has tried in terms of fighting against hunger and she is not a selfish president. (Older Rural Men, Ntcheu)*

*[I would tell voters] she [Joyce Banda] is a kind woman, and the first president to visit people in their homes...She is promoting girl child education...She is encouraging women to be in a better position...She is building houses for poor people. (Middle-Aged Rural Women, Karonga)*

*I will influence others to vote for her [Joyce Banda] as she is a woman, and as a woman she can easily understand us. (Middle-Aged Peri-Urban Women, Mangochi)*

*[I would tell voters] petrol is now available. Drugs are in hospitals and also she [Joyce Banda] is doing development projects. Let's vote for her for another five years. (Older Rural Men, Mzimba)*

*[I would tell voters] he [Lazarus Chakwera] is of a Christian background, so he will be truthful and lead this nation as a God fearing country. (Middle-Aged Peri-Urban Men, Mulanje)*

*[I would tell voters] he [Lazarus Chakwera] cannot mismanage this country because he is a man of God and he knows the problems that people in this country are facing. (Younger Peri-Urban Men, Salima)*

*I can tell people to vote for Chakwera because he is not a recycled politician. He has never been in any other government of the past. He is not connected to this Cash-Gate scandal; vote for Chakwera, therefore. (Older Peri-Urban Men, Chitipa)*

*[I will tell voters] he [Lazarus Chakwera] will restore security and our currency will regain its powers as it was during Kamuzu's time. (Older Rural Women, Ntchisi)*

*[I would tell voters] he [Autpele Muluzi] is young, and other candidates are recycled politicians. We should see how he is going to bring change to this nation. (Middle-Aged Peri-Urban Women, Mangochi)*

*[I would tell voters] he [Autpele Muluzi] is young, and we need to see change as there have been older people as president in the past, so we have to try a young person. (Middle-Aged Rural Women, Karonga)*

*[I would tell voters] he [Autpele Muluzi] is a youth and will try to help the problems the youth are facing. (Younger Peri-Urban Women, Kasungu)*

*I will tell people to vote for Atupele because he will ensure the availability of money in people's pockets. (Older Rural Women, Ntchisi)*

*[I would tell voters] there will be more schools [if Atupele Muluzi is president] like in Bakili's time. (Older Rural Men, Chikwawa)*

## **VI. MISCELLANEOUS ISSUES**

### **1. Participants are dismayed and discouraged when they learn that the local councilors to be elected on May 20<sup>th</sup> will not receive a government salary.**

The election of local government representatives for the first time in twelve years gives participants hope that this closer link to government will translate into a better understanding of their needs and ultimately, more needed development. However, when told local councilors will not be receiving a government salary, most of that hope fades. The participants feel strongly local councilors must be paid in order to be effective to the degree they wish them to be. They believe without salaries the councilors will have little motivation to perform well and even if they were motivated, the councilors would have little time to devote to the work since they would need to be working to provide for their families. Several participants point out that traditional leaders and MPs receive government salaries and say local councilors are as deserving of salaries as these officials, perhaps even more so. Some participants also raise the issue of corruption. To these participants, it is foregone conclusion local councilors will engage in corrupt practices if they do not receive salaries. They fear this will adversely impact funds available to the community. Almost all participants agree that without salaries for local councilors, development in their areas will stall.

*CSOs have fought hard to get our councilors back and now if councilors will not be on the payroll, it is just as good as not having councilors...Councilors stay with people in the village and know the problems people are facing and for him to deliver well, he must get something for upkeep. (Middle-Aged Peri-Urban Men, Nkhata Bay)*

*They [local councilors] won't be hard workers because they are not getting something. They will not be motivated, and their services will be bad. (Younger Urban Women, Zomba)*

*The councilors should get something. If the government can manage to pay the chiefs, how can it fail to pay the councilors as these people will be coming in our villages and asking us the type of developments we need. If they are not paid, our villages will remain undeveloped. (Middle-Aged Peri-Urban Men, Mulanje)*

*[If local councilors do not receive a government salary] they will be putting in their pockets part of the development funds when they are given it because they are not on the payroll. (Older Peri-Urban Men, Chitipa)*

*If they [local councilors] don't receive a salary, they will be paying themselves by the development funds that will be coming to their areas. To reduce that corruption, they should be paid. (Middle-Aged Peri-Urban Men, Balaka)*

*That's not good [that local councilors will not receive a salary] because the councilor will be communicating with people in the village, and they will be getting our ideas to the DC and the MPs, so if that person is not paid, there will be no development. (Middle-Aged Rural Men, Phalombe)*

*They [local councilors] were supposed to be considered because it is a lot of work that they do...If they don't receive money, development will not go smoothly in the village. (Middle-Aged Rural Men, Mwanza)*

## **2. There is strong support among participants for a legal mechanism that would prevent Members of Parliament from changing parties prior to an election without resigning their seat.**

Most participants believe the political system would benefit from preventing Members of Parliament from crossing the floor to another political party prior to an election. They say allowing party switching has created 'recycled politicians' in Malawi, whereby the same people stay in government by jumping from one party to another. Another issue participants raise is the feeling that their vote is being circumvented when an MP switches their political party affiliation prior to election. As such, betrayal is a word some participants use to describe crossing the floor. Most participants also believe that MPs have no reasonable motivation to switch parties and only do so for personal gain. For these reasons, some participants believe anyone who crosses the floor should be removed from office. In the future, they would like to have a law or constitutional provision to prevent crossing the floor. Some participants disagree with preventing MPs from crossing the floor because they believe it is the right of the MP to affiliate with whichever party they want and also think some party switching may be appropriate if the current party to which the MP is affiliated is not performing well.

*I am tired of recycled politicians. If they belong to a party, they should stay there until their term ends. (Younger Urban Women, Zomba)*

*There is need to have this law to stop anybody from crossing the floor...This is why we say there is no democracy in Malawi. All these people are from MCP. They just move from UDF to DPP to PP. (Younger Rural Men, Nkhata Bay)*

*When they [MPs] change parties, it shows that they lied to us...It [a legal mechanism prohibiting changing of parties prior to election] is needed because we trusted that person when we voted for them; if he changes his party, it is a betrayal to us. (Younger Rural Women, Mulanje)*

*People vote for them [MPs] because of where they are [which party they belong to]. Changing political parties angers us, the voters. (Older Rural Men, Nkhotakota)*

*We choose the candidate while in their party; now if they are changing parties, it is killing our rights. (Younger Peri-Urban Men, Neno)*

*It is so painful to vote for a person and that person should later dump you for another party. It's more like cheating...I think once an MP has changed political parties, the post should be declared vacant. (Middle-Aged Rural Women, Dedza)*

*The changing of parties from MPs is hunger for money, so a law is needed to stop that habit. (Younger Peri-Urban Men, Chiradzulu)*

*Most of the time these MPs change parties because they are hungry for money, so they usually join the ruling party to be given positions and make money so that law [to prevent party switching after election] is needed. (Younger Peri-Urban Men, Mangochi)*

*There is no need for this law [to prevent crossing the floor] because it will be like violating the MPs' rights...I think this law should not be there because there may be certain problems in a certain party, and the best thing an MP can do is leave the party and go where things are good. (Younger Peri-Urban Women, Kasungu)*

### **3. Most participants believe citizens have the right to recall an elected official and would like a legal mechanism to do so.**

Participants say they believe a recall mechanism is necessary because their experience is of politicians who often ignore them after elections. They see it as their right to demand good performance and to seek accountability through a recall when a satisfactory level of performance is not met. Given the poor state of development in the country, they also believe waiting five years to have an effective elected official is simply too long. Another reason participants cite for supporting recall is their belief that the threat of recall, even if they do not act upon it, will motivate elected officials to perform better. Some participants are against any type of recall provision because the vote was for a full term and because they feel it is unfair to judge someone on less than a full term in office since problems take time to resolve.

*It [a recall provision] is good because some [elected officials] start nicely but when you find riches, they forget they have work to do; forgetting us the poor, so it will be the best time to remove them. (Middle-Aged Rural Women, Karonga)*

*It [a recall provision] is important for these reasons: if the president, MP or local councilor does not deliver what we wanted them to deliver to us, then we are supposed to remove them from power even before their term ends. (Older Peri-Urban Men, Chitipa)*

*You cannot board a car and know that the car is developing a fault but you remain in the car, thinking it will reach your destination. You better stop and board another one. So if they [elected officials] are failing us, let's remove them by vote. (Middle-Aged Rural Women, Blantyre)*

*If an MP is a failure, then we will quickly remove him out and replace him with someone. That is the only way we can develop Malawi. (Older Rural Men, Mzimba)*

*Most people think five years is a long time. If they [elected officials] don't perform, and if we remove them before their term ends, we could promote seriousness in their job. (Middle-Aged Peri-Urban Men, Balaka)*

*That [recall] can be a good law...Leaders will be filled with fear because they know that they will be impeached if they won't fulfill their promises. (Middle-Aged Rural Men, Dedza)*

*[With a recall provision] presidential candidates, MPs and councilors will avoid giving empty promises which go unfulfilled for fear of being removed from power...These [recall] laws will make the candidates work hard in trying to develop the country for fear of being removed. (Younger Peri-Urban Women, Kasungu)*

*It [a recall provision] is not appropriate because it was agreed that the term is five years. So you wait five years and remove them by vote. (Older Rural Women, Blantyre)*

*It is not good to have this [recall] law because no one finds everything good when getting into office. There is time needed to sort that out and start new things so we could be thinking that they are not performing when they are sorting out things. (Younger Urban Men, Blantyre)*

**4. Most participants report significant problems in the chieftaincy system, including corruption and poor elevation procedures. Removal of traditional leaders and/or inclusion of CSOs/CBOs in benefits distribution and the establishment of clear guidelines on elevation of traditional leaders are needed to improve the system, they say.**

In 32 of the 35 group discussions conducted, participants say the chieftaincy system in Malawi is not functioning well. They outline several serious problems, the most common of which is corruption. Many participants indicate their traditional leaders are no longer fair arbiters. They say these leaders are now primarily concerned with giving resources and benefits to their own families rather than presiding over a fair distribution among village residents. The distribution of fertilizer coupons has been particularly troublesome, participants indicate, with the traditional leaders keeping most or all of the coupons for themselves or their relatives.

Another major issue participants identify with the chieftaincy system is the way in which traditional leaders are elevated to a higher position. The elevation process has been taken over by political parties and government, the participants believe. They say this has resulted in traditional succession lines (through family lineage) being ignored, which has in turn brought confusion and tension in the villages and in some cases, poorer performing leaders. Participants also lament how this change in succession

has led to traditional leaders who are more political, when they believe they should be neutral, and who they believe can be easily corrupted by political leaders. A few participants say the increase in the number of traditional leaders elevated is causing problems in the villages as well.

*There is unequal distribution of resources in the villages. Chiefs like to give the resources only to their relations. (Older Rural Men, Nkhotakota)*

*The chief favors their family members when it comes to distributing different things, especially from the government. (Younger Peri-Urban Women, Kasungu)*

*On the issue of benefits, they just write names of their relatives, and we suffer. (Older Rural Men, Chikwawa)*

*The issue of chieftainship is really a problem because even when it comes to distribution of fertilizer coupons, only the relatives of the chiefs are the ones who benefit instead of other poor people. (Younger Rural Women, Rumphi)*

*They are just picking anyone to be a chief. Yet, in the past, people could easily follow that from here the chieftaincy is going there. Now, because of tension and confusion, people who are crowned are not the ones that people want. (Younger Peri-Urban Men, Neno)*

*I am worried about chieftainship issue because it has taken a political face. Instead of choosing the proper person to be the chief, they are being chosen by government or political parties...I think the chieftainship is not in the blood nowadays. (Older Peri-Urban Men, Chitipa)*

*There are no procedures when elevating chiefs. They are elevated while the [royal] family has not approved...Many chiefs who are elevated are not the ones who are performing. Most of them are those that are on good terms with the leader of the time or the 'yes boss.' (Middle-Aged Peri-Urban Men, Balaka)*

*Political leaders are bribing chiefs to campaign for them. They are supposed to be non-partisan. (Younger Urban Men, Blantyre)*

*We are not happy because chiefs are so many in this country...That is causing some divisions amongst ourselves. (Middle-Aged Rural Women, Dedza)*

*The village is very small in size, but there are so many chiefs, and it is causing a lot of confusion amongst the people. (Older Rural Men, Ntcheu)*

Participants identify several actions they believe would improve the chieftaincy system. First among them is to have clear guidelines and criteria for succession and elevation of traditional leaders. However, they do not agree on what those guidelines should be: some prefer a fully inherited chieftaincy, some want citizens to have input into the selection of traditional leaders and some want District Commissioners or other local officials to choose the traditional leaders. A second suggestion from participants is either to remove traditional leaders from distributing goods and benefits to citizens or to include CSOs/CBOs as a check on the process. Guidelines from government for chiefs would help improve the chieftaincy system as well, they say, and a few participants advocate removing traditional leaders if they are not performing.

*I would tell the TAs to stop accepting anybody's ambition to become a chief if they do not belong to the royal family. (Middle-Aged Rural Men, Dowa)*

*There should be a strategy for choosing chiefs, like voting. (Middle-Aged Rural Women, Blantyre)*

*In the past, elevation of chiefs was in the hands of villagers and not governments. The government should therefore give back the powers to the people. (Middle-Aged Peri-Urban Men, Balaka)*

*The DCs should be the ones choosing the successor of the current chiefs in advance to avoid conflicts if anything happens to the current chief. (Middle-Aged Rural Men, Kasungu)*

*I blame the government for all these chieftainship problems because it tends to give some goods to the chiefs to share them with the people. That creates problems between the chiefs and the ordinary people. I think chieftainship issues would end if the government would stop giving things to the chiefs in order to distribute them to their people. (Older Rural Men, Ntcheu)*

*The government makes a mistake by trusting chiefs with everything concerning the welfare of the villages. I think it would be better if CSOs were also taking part in working with the chiefs in seeing to it that the welfare of all the villagers is met without favoritism. (Older Rural Men, Nkhotakota)*

*I can advise government to put strategies to be followed by chiefs on how to rule their people. Also to give them rules on the handling of some issues so that if they mishandle, they should also face the law. (Younger Urban Men, Blantyre)*

*Many of our chiefs lack proper guidance from the authorities above them. If chiefs would be advised properly, we wouldn't be facing these kinds of problems. (Younger Peri-Urban Men, Salima)*

*If the government put in a law to remove them [traditional leaders] if they are wrong, they would be afraid... There should be a way for ordinary villagers to remove or accept a chief. (Older Rural Men, Chikwawa)*

## CONCLUSION & RECOMMENDATIONS

As Malawi heads toward what may be its most competitive election in the multi-party era, participants in this study clearly express their desire for an issue-focused, peaceful campaign that places at its center solutions to improve their quality of life. They are tired of a political environment where candidates and parties repeatedly fail to listen to citizens and where most political pledges turn out to be empty promises. Their faith has been shaken in a political party system they believe has failed to provide them with distinct choices and has produced politicians who jump from one party to another to maintain power. Their level of confidence in Malawi elections has waned as well due to what they perceive as poor quality processes in the past. Despite this disappointment and distrust, participant responses demonstrate their commitment to the electoral process. Most are enthusiastic about voting and believe the vote is their greatest power. They want to believe the 2014 electoral process can rise above past experiences and in fact, say it did in the initial voter registration phase. How the process plays out now through Election Day and beyond could shape attitudes toward elections and democratic processes for years to come. Building upon participant comments, the recommendations to election stakeholders below can help restore faith in Malawi's ability to deliver a credible election process that reflects the genuine will of the people.

### *For Political Parties:*

Participants in this study are frustrated with politics as usual. They want to see political parties develop greater ideological and substantive positions, present distinct characteristics that provide them with real choices, limit inter-party attacks and conflict, demonstrate a willingness to act as a credible opposition party if defeated and prove they can deliver on their promises. For this election and beyond, the strategies participant comments suggest political parties should pursue to improve the political environment in Malawi and to win their respect include:

- Develop clear policy positions and focus on the public's core concerns.
- Offer realistic and realizable solutions, not oversized promises.
- Provide believable points of differentiation from other parties.
- Focus on policy criticisms and debates rather than personal attacks on other candidates and parties.
- Present a clear vision that can differentiate the current positions of the party from its record while holding the presidency. (For parties that have been the ruling party in the past.)
- Pledge publicly to accept defeat in a credible election.
- Refrain from promoting electoral violence and discourage supporters from doing so.
- Participate in forums that allow interactive communication with citizens.
- Participate in debates or other forums with other candidates to aid citizens in differentiating between candidates.
- Support election transparency initiatives, especially related to counting.
- Do not highlight or promote regional divisions.
- Do not engage in suspect electoral malpractices, such as voter registration card buying.
- Do not engage youth to harass or limit access to opponents or their supporters.



- Pledge to reform political party primary processes, including allowing party members to freely choose MP and local councilor candidates and increased voting security to increase confidence in the legitimacy in the primary elections.

*For the Malawi Election Commission (MEC):*

Belief that fraud has been part of past elections and concern that the Malawi Election Commission is appointed by the government make participants skeptical of the MEC's ability to deliver a credible election. To counter that, participant responses suggest the MEC should:

- Address rumors of electoral fraud immediately and communicate widely either to debunk the rumor, to explain how the rumored fraud will not impact the vote or to respond to any proven fraud, as appropriate.
- Communicate about the legal guarantees that allow MEC to operate independently.
- Demonstrate the independence of MEC through actions that promote neutrality and publicize those actions to increase citizen confidence.
- Take clear action on election violations and communicate that action widely.
- Publicize the ability of voters needing assistance to bring a person of their choice to assist them rather than needing to rely on a polling official.
- Promote the presence of political party and civil society monitors at polling stations and aggregation centers.
- Organize a competent and professional polling process.
- Emphasize to the public protections and safeguards for the counting and aggregation processes.
- Embrace independent efforts to verify the vote count.
- Ensure good election security and promote peaceful elections.
- Consider mechanisms to release results in a manner that will reduce significant lead changes.
- Ensure all release of partial results is accompanied by an explanation that more votes will be added to determine the winners and lead changes are normal may occur. Ask media to ensure this explanation is included in their coverage of any election result.
- Comment and act on media bias or party/candidate hate speech.
- Post-election, explore initiatives to improve the primary process, including through legal means, to increase confidence in electoral processes.

*For Civil Society Organizations (CSOs):*

Mostly viewed as trusted, independent institutions by participants, CSOs have a critical role to play in creating a more informed electorate and in increasing citizen confidence in the electoral process. The findings in this study indicate CSOs should pay special attention to the following tasks:

- Undertake activities to increase the identification and discussion of issues important to communities.
- Encourage interactions with candidates and parties to empower citizens to vote based on information and substance.
- Develop strategies to help voters evaluate candidates based on policies and positions.
- Provide guidance for voting based on issues, not undue influence or handouts.
- Organize/assist with candidate debates as a tool to educate voters.

- Help dispel unfounded election rumors to prevent an unnecessary lessening of confidence in the election.
- Publicize the ability of voters needing assistance to bring a person of their choice to assist them rather than needing to rely on a polling official.
- Promote the presence of political party and civil society monitors at polling stations and aggregation centers.
- Educate the public on counting and aggregation processes and their protections and safeguards.
- Engage youth to increase turnout and discourage violence.
- Encourage candidates to be issue-focused and reduce personal attacks.
- Call upon candidates to pledge to accept fair election results.
- Educate citizens on how voting in one area may not be a good prediction of who will ultimately win a post and explain that lead changes can occur for legitimate reasons.
- Post-election, encourage a debate on reform and improvement of the political party primary process.
- Post-election, offer support to newly elected local councilors to connect with their constituents.
- Post-election, start a discussion on problems within the chieftaincy system.

*For Media:*

The findings in this study suggest that media, especially radio, is very influential in shaping public opinion around elections. This can be both a blessing and a curse. Media can be at the forefront of encouraging an issue-focused campaign through its coverage of areas of citizen concern and impartial, evidence-based reporting. Yet, as participants in this study demonstrate, some citizens misinterpret electoral announcements of partial results and or lead changes as definitive proof of election fraud. To ensure responsible reporting that contributes to the electoral process, participant responses indicate the media should:

- Devote significant coverage to party and candidate policy positions.
- Press party and candidates to provide realistic and actionable plans for the promises they make to the public.
- Discuss extensively the concept of adding together votes from various locations to elect a winner and emphasize that votes from a single location or area are not a good predictor of the outcome.
- Ensure all publication and broadcast of partial results is accompanied by an explanation that more votes will be added to determine the ultimate winners.
- Stress in all publications and broadcasts that lead changes are normal and may occur legitimately and more than once as more votes are added to the total to determine the winner.
- Work to ensure equitable coverage of competing parties and candidates.
- View all coverage with an eye toward how it could adversely impact confidence of the public in the election; focus on fact-based coverage.
- Provide coverage of any election malpractices for which proof exists, but at the same time dispel malpractice rumors when it is clear they are false.

## APPENDIX A: FOCUS GROUP LOCATIONS & DEMOGRAPHICS

**FOCUS GROUP LOCATIONS & PARTICIPANT DEMOGRAPHICS**

DISTRICT	LOCATION	GENDER	AGE GROUP <sup>16</sup>	EDUCATION LEVEL
Chikwawa	Rural	Male	Older	None-Primary
Blantyre	Urban	Male	Younger	Late Primary-Secondary
Blantyre	Rural	Female	Older	None-Primary
Blantyre	Rural	Female	Middle	Early Secondary
Mulanje	Peri-Urban	Male	Middle	Primary-Early Secondary
Mulanje	Rural	Female	Younger	None-Primary
Zomba	Urban	Female	Younger	University
Chiradzulu	Peri-Urban	Male	Younger	Early Secondary
Phalombe	Rural	Male	Middle	None-Primary
Mwanza	Rural	Female	Middle	None-Primary
Neno	Peri-Urban	Male	Younger	Primary-Early Secondary
Mangochi	Peri-Urban	Male	Younger	None-Primary
Mangochi	Peri-Urban	Female	Middle	Early Secondary
Balaka	Peri-Urban	Male	Middle	Secondary
Ntcheu	Rural	Female	Younger	None-Primary
Ntcheu	Rural	Male	Older	None-Primary
Dedza	Rural	Female	Middle	Primary
Lilongwe	Urban	Male	Middle	Secondary
Lilongwe	Urban	Female	Middle	Secondary
Lilongwe	Rural	Female	Older	None
Salima	Peri-Urban	Male	Younger	None-Primary
Mchinji	Peri-Urban	Male	Younger	Primary-Early Secondary
Ntchisi	Rural	Female	Older	None-Primary
Dowa	Rural	Male	Middle	Primary
Kasungu	Peri-Urban	Female	Younger	Secondary
Kasungu	Rural	Male	Middle	Primary-Early Secondary
Nkhotakota	Rural	Male	Older	None-Primary
Mzimba	Rural	Male	Older	Primary-Early Secondary
Mzimba	Urban	Female	Middle	Secondary

<sup>16</sup> Age categories are: younger (ages 18-25), middle (ages 26-35) and older (age 36 and older).

DISTRICT	LOCATION	GENDER	AGE GROUP <sup>17</sup>	EDUCATION LEVEL
Nkhatabay	Rural	Male	Younger	Early Secondary
Nkhatabay	Urban	Male	Middle	Secondary
Rumphi	Rural	Female	Younger	Secondary
Karonga	Rural	Female	Middle	None-Primary
Karonga	Peri-Urban	Male	Middle	Secondary
Chitipa	Peri-Urban	Male	Older	Primary-Early Secondary

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<sup>17</sup> Age categories are: younger (ages 18-25), middle (ages 26-35) and older (age 36 and older).

## **APPENDIX B: MODERATOR'S GUIDELINE**

### **Malawi Qualitative Public Opinion Study Guideline January-February 2014**

#### **I. INTRODUCTION**

Hello, my name is \_\_\_\_\_. I am working on a research project for the Catholic Commission for Justice and Peace (CCJP), a faith-based organization (FBO) with its national offices based in Lilongwe. We are trying to learn more about what citizens of Malawi think about the important issues in this area. I am neutral and am NOT working for the government or any political party. I am the facilitator for today's discussion.

- There are no right or wrong answers.
- Everyone's opinion is equally important. We want everyone to speak.
- If you disagree with someone, that is okay.
- This discussion is only between those of us here.
- I have this recorder to help me when I write the report. Your name will not be used in the report. The report will only say a [woman/man] from [location] said this or that.
- The person here is taking notes to help with the report.
- Please speak loudly, and only one at a time, so the recorder can pick up your voice.

Thank you. Any questions before I begin?

Now let us begin.

## II. QUALITY OF LIFE

1. How are things going in Malawi today?
2. If you could spend five minutes with the person who will be elected president of Malawi on May 20, what advice would you give them?

## III. REGISTRATION AND VOTING DECISIONS

1. Voter registration is now over for the 2014 elections. Was the process was good OR not good? Why?
2. Have you heard of anyone either recording information from people's registration cards or buying people's registration cards in this area? [IF YES] What have you heard and who has been doing this?
  - a. If you hear that a political party has been doing this, will that have any effect on whether you vote for that party?
3. Do you intend to vote in the 2014 elections?  
[IF YES] What are the reasons you will vote? [IF NO] Why have you decided not to vote?
4. Of this list, who will have the most influence on your vote and why: [READ LIST SEVERAL TIMES AND ALL AT ONCE]
  - The TA
  - Group village headmen
  - Church [or Mosque] Leader
  - Your spouse [Husband/Wife]
  - A local political party leader
  - A local organizations like CBOs
  - Other [IF A PARTICIPANT SAYS SOMEONE ELSE WILL INFLUENCE THEIR VOTE, HAVE THEM STATE WHO INFLUENCE IS]
5. If the TA, the chief or the group village headmen in your area tells you to vote for a specific party, how would that affect your vote? Choose one of the following: [READ ALL THE CHOICES AT ONCE]
  - I would be more likely to vote for that party if my TA, chief or headman told me to
  - I would be less likely to vote for that party if my TA, chief or headman told me to
  - The TA, chief or headman telling me to vote for a specific party would have no effect on which party I would vote for

What is the reason for your answer?
6. What is role of handouts in Malawi elections?

7. How does getting a handout from a political party affect your vote? Choose one of the following:  
[READ ALL THE CHOICES AT ONCE]

- It will make me more likely to vote for the party
- It will make me less likely to vote for the party
- It will have no influence on which party I decide to vote for

What is the reason for your answer?

8. If one party decided not to give handouts but other parties continued to give handouts, would the party that did not give handouts still have a chance to win? Why or why not?

9. In general, do you think men and women are equally capable of serving as president of Malawi? We currently have a female president, but this question is not about her, so please do not base your answer on your opinion of her. [AFTER RESPONSE] What is the reason for your answer?

10. In the 2014 elections, there will be people running for president who are of different religions, like Christians, Muslims, and perhaps those with traditional beliefs. How will the religion of the candidate affect your vote?

11. In the 2014 elections, there will be younger and older candidates vying for office. How will the age of the candidate affect your vote?

#### **IV. CONFIDENCE IN ELECTIONS**

1. Do you feel there has been rigging in past Malawi elections? [IF YES] How did the rigging occur?

2. Do you think the 2014 elections will be free and fair? Why or why not?

a. [ASK PARTICIPANTS WHO SAY THE ELECTION WILL BE RIGGED] What are the ways rigging will occur in 2014?

3. If there are people from NGOs/CSOs in the polling stations observing voting, would that increase your confidence in the fairness of the elections or would that have no effect?

a. If those people from the NGOs/CSOs record the number of votes in the polling stations to compare against the final numbers announced by the Malawi Election Commission, would that make you feel more confident in the fairness of the election or would it have no effect on your confidence?

4. Are you aware that persons who need assistance with voting may bring a person they trust to assist them and do not have to rely on a polling official for assistance? [FOLLOW-UP] What do you think of that?

5. What is your opinion of the Malawi Election Commission, MEC? [FOLLOW-UP IF NOT ALREADY ANSWERED] Do you think MEC is independent of the government?
  - a. What could MEC do to make you feel they will act to the best of their ability to have a free and fair election? [PROBE FOR SPECIFIC ACTIONS]

**V. ISSUES AND VOTER INFORMATION**

1. Have you received any information about the election yet? [IF YES] What information have you received and how did you get it?
2. What are the main issues you want political parties and candidates to be talking about during their campaigns?
3. What issues do you want CSOs/NGOs/CBOs to be talking about during the elections?
4. What are the issues you think women would be most interested in hearing about during the campaign?
5. What are the issues you think youth would be most interested in hearing about during the campaign?
6. What are the issues you think the disabled would be most interested in hearing about during the campaign?
7. Have you heard of this thing called candidate debates? [IF NO: EXPLAIN THAT THE CANDIDATES FOR A POSITION ARE TOGETHER IN A FORUM WHERE THERE IS A NEUTRAL MODERATOR ASKING THEM QUESTIONS AND PEOPLE CAN HEAR THEIR RESPONSES IN PERSON OR AND/ON THE RADIO]  
  
[IF YES OR AFTER EXPLANATION] What do you think of debates?
8. Is it important to you OR not that candidates participate in a debate? Why?
  - a. Would it influence your vote if a candidate decided not to a debate? Why?
9. If there are presidential debates, what questions would you like a neutral moderator to ask the candidates? [PROBE FOR SPECIFIC QUESTIONS NOT JUST BROAD ISSUES LIKE 'EDUCATION']
10. Now let's talk about the recent government corruption case, what some people are referring to as Cash-gate. What do you think about that?
  - a. What progress do you feel has been made in resolving the Cash-gate problem?



## **VI. PARTIES AND CANDIDATES**

1. What did you think of the political parties' recently conducted primaries where they chose their candidates in this area? [CLARIFY WHICH PARTY THE PERSON IS REFERENCING IN THEIR RESPONSE]
  - a. Did some parties do a better job than others at conducting their primaries and choosing good candidates? [IF YES] Which parties did better than others and why?
2. What do you think of candidates who run as independents?
  - a. Will you consider voting for independent candidates OR only those from political parties?
3. You will be voting for president, MP and councilor. Do you think that you will vote for the same party for all three positions OR do you think you will vote for different parties or independent candidates for those positions? What is the reason for your answer?
4. The presidential candidates will announce who will be their Vice President prior to the elections. Will their choice of Vice President affect which presidential candidate you will vote for? Why or why not?
5. Do you think it is good or not to encourage more women to run for office? Why or why not?
  - a. Would you vote for a women candidate to be MP or local councilor? Why or why not?
6. I am going to name some political parties one-by-one, and I want you to give me your opinion of them: [ASK ABOUT EACH INDIVIDUALLY]
  - The Malawi Congress Party (MCP)
  - The United Democratic Front (UDF)
  - The People's Party (PP)
  - The Democratic Progressive Party (DPP)[ROTATE ORDER IN EACH GROUP]
7. In voting for president, do you vote more for the party or the candidate?
8. If a candidate wins the presidency with less than 50% of the vote, what would you think of that?
9. I am going to ask you about some of the presidential candidates. If you were helping to promote this candidate, what are the things you would say about this candidate to convince citizens to vote for that person? [ASK ABOUT EACH INDIVIDUALLY]
  - a. Autpele Muluzi
  - b. Lazarus Chakwera
  - c. Peter Mutharika
  - d. Joyce Banda

## **VII. MISCELLANEOUS**

1. If the fertilizer coupon program were ended, what would you consider a reasonable price for a 50 kg bag of fertilizer?

2. Do you feel the government is trying to address the food security situation? Why or why not?
3. Local councilors will receive no salary. What do you think of that?
4. Do you think there is need for the constitution or a law to prevent MPs from changing political parties after they are elected and before the next election? Why or why not?
5. Do you think there is need for the constitution or a law to allow Malawians to vote to remove elected officials from their office before their term ends? Why or why not?
6. What is your opinion of the chieftaincy system in Malawi?

**Thank you very much for your time and participation.**

## APPENDIX C: ABOUT THE AUTHORS

**Traci D. Cook** is a Senior Advisor for the National Democratic Institute’s Southern and East Africa team. An experienced opinion researcher, Ms. Cook has designed and authored qualitative public opinion studies in Malawi, Mozambique, Nigeria, Somalia, South Sudan, Sudan, Uganda, Zimbabwe and the Caribbean nation of Grenada. She previously served as senior director for strategic and corporate communications at the Women’s National Basketball Association and as vice president of marketing communications at SS+K in New York City. Ms. Cook also led a parliamentary and civil society strengthening program as Country Director for NDI in Malawi. Complementing her work in the field of international development and in the private sector is her experience as Political Director for the Mississippi Democratic Party, legislative work on Capitol Hill and research work for various U.S. House and Senate campaigns.

**Chris Chisoni** is national secretary of the Catholic Commission for Justice and Peace. A locally long experienced social and opinion researcher, Chisoni has worked with numerous research institutes in Malawi and in Southern Africa region bringing to the fore, socio-economic, political and cultural issues influencing and impacting on citizen participation in governance processes in Malawi and Southern Africa. Chisoni coordinates numerous governance programs in Malawi dealing with parliamentary accountability and responsiveness; promotion of vertical accountability between citizens and their representatives and strengthening local governance systems and structures in Malawi. His role also implies an advisory role to the Episcopal Conference of Malawi on advocacy and lobbying processes in socio-economic, political and cultural development areas.