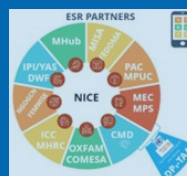


Malawi 2025 CSO-Led Election Situation Room (ESR) Report



Rialtas na hÉireann
Government of Ireland



Contents

3	Abbreviations	32	Strengthening the Voter Registration Process
5	About the report	34	Recommendations
6	Executive Summary	38	Management and Monitoring
7	Key Outcomes at a Glance	39	ESR Structure
9	Background		
9	Electoral Context		
9	The Rationale for a CSO-Led Situation Room		
10	Conflict Sensitivity Framework		
11	Vision and Mission		
12	Strategic pillars		
13	Key Objectives		
14	Structure and Deployment		
14	Observer Network		
15	Functional Hubs		
17	Partner Ecosystem		
18	Incident Reporting and Electoral Integrity Analysis		
19	Analysis by Issue Type		
21	Hotspot Analysis		
22	Institutional Performance		
24	Election Day Overview and Analysis		
25	Gender, Youth and Inclusive Participation		
30	Election Outcome		

Abbreviations

AU	African Union
BVVD	Biometric Voter Verification Device
CMD	Centre for Multiparty Democracy
CSO(s)	Civil Society Organisation(s)
DPP	Democratic Progressive Party
ESR	Election Situation Room
EU	European Union
EUEOM	European Union Election Observation Mission
GCN	Gender Coordination Network
GICY-Hub	Gender Inclusion, Youth and Child Rights Hub
ICC	Independent Complaints Commission
ICTAM	Information and Communication Technology Association of Malawi
IPI	Institute for Policy Interaction
MCP	Malawi Congress Party
MDF	Malawi Defence Force
MEC	Malawi Electoral Commission
MHRC	Malawi Human Rights Commission
MISA	Media Institute of Southern Africa
MoJ	Ministry of Justice
MPLCs	Multiparty Liaison Committees
MPS	Malawi Police Service
MPUC	Malawi Peace and Unity Commission
NDI	National Democratic Institute
NGOGCN	Non-Governmental Organisations Gender Coordination Network
NICE	National Initiative for Civic Education
NRB	National Registration Bureau
ORPP	Office of the Registrar of Political Parties
PAC	Public Affairs Committee
PP	People's Party
PPLGEA	Presidential, Parliamentary and Local Government Elections Act (2023)
PVT	Parallel Vote Tabulation
PWD(s)	Persons with Disabilities
RTS	Results Transmission System
SADC	Southern African Development Community

SADC-ECF	Southern African Development Community Electoral Commissions Forum
UDF	United Democratic Front
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
UNSDCF	United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework
UNW	United Nations Women
USA	United States of America
YAS	Youth and Society



**Scan to access the Malawi
Electoral Support Project (MESP)
page**

About the report

The Consortium for Electoral Democracy's state-of-the-art, IT-powered National Election Situation Room was independently observed during the 2025 Elections. Deploying a network of 6,840 (6,331 stationed, 509 roving) trained observers and leveraging a custom-built digital platform, the Situation Room collected, verified, and analysed real-time data from all 509 wards and 229 constituencies.

By leveraging accessible technology, a network of citizen observers, and data-driven analysis, the Situation Room served as a credible source of information, a deterrent to manipulation, and an early warning system for potential conflicts. Its core functions were not to conduct a Parallel Vote Tabulation (PVT), but to track and verify electoral incidents, counter misinformation, and provide timely, evidence-based analysis to stakeholders and the public. This initiative enhanced the transparency and integrity of the 2025 electoral process, built public confidence by opening the Election Situation Room to all international observers, political parties, and the public, and contributed to a peaceful post-election period in Malawi.

However, the pre-election period was marred by a high incidence of hate speech and unsubstantiated allegations on social media. The Situation Room's iVerify fact-checking monitoring tool successfully flagged over 2,000 instances of potential misinformation, enabling targeted counter-messaging. While voting and counting were assessed as "Generally Peaceful and Orderly," the post-election period saw a spike in localised misunderstanding in one constituency (Mtandire-Mtsiriza), which were mitigated through timely alerts to the Malawi Electoral Commission.

Overall, the Integrated Election Situation Room concludes that the 2025 electoral process, from the campaign period to the voting, counting, and results transmission, was credible and accurately reflected the will of the voters.

Executive Summary

The Integrated Election Situation Room (ESR) concludes that the 2025 Malawi General Elections, held on 16 September 2025, were credible and accurately reflected the will of Malawian voters. Voting and counting were assessed as Generally Peaceful and Orderly.

The ESR, a coalition-led, technology-powered monitoring platform, deployed 6,840 trained observers across all 509 wards and 229 constituencies.

Operating through the Maso Athu digital platform, the ESR collected,

verified, and acted on real-time field data, establishing itself as an independent pillar of electoral oversight alongside the Malawi Electoral Commission (MEC) and international observer missions.



Figure 1

Justice Annabel Mtalimanja, Chairperson for the Malawi Electoral Commission (MEC) leads the launch of the CSO-led Election Situation Room (ESR)

Key Outcomes at a Glance



6,840

Observers Deployed



76.39%

Voter Turnout



3,574

Incidents Recorded:
Pre, During and Post Voting



6,331
Stationed



509
Roving



↑ Up from **58.6%** in 2020



Verified and escalated



7,203,390

Registered Voters



2,000+

Misinformation Flags



212

Critical Incidents Resolved



57%

Women



Via the
iVerify
tool



Pre-escalation
resolution



Enhanced transparency: MEC posted signed results forms at all polling stations and distributed copies to party monitors; the Results Transmission System (RTS) provided an additional layer of real-time accountability.



Peaceful process: Election Day was largely calm and well-organised, with polling stations opening on time and adequate security deployments nationwide.



Localised tensions managed: Post-election misunderstandings in the Ntandele constituencies were contained through timely alerts to MEC and security agencies.



Gender milestone: Women constituted **57.1%** of registered voters and, for the first time in Malawi's political history, nine women were nominated as vice-presidential running mates.



Inclusion progress: **137,925** voters with disabilities were registered; the Gender Hub addressed **134** gender-related incidents, and the ESR's child rights monitoring flagged violations for referral.



Civic engagement: Civic education campaigns reached over **8.6** million citizens, contributing to the significant rise in turnout.



Pre-election concerns: The pre-election period was marred by elevated hate speech and disinformation on social media. The iVerify tool flagged over **2,000** potential instances, enabling MISA Malawi to target counter-messaging.

Persistent structural challenges, including allegations of vote-buying, gaps in security deployments at select tally centres, and the underrepresentation of women in security and political party roles, demand targeted reforms ahead of the 2030 electoral cycle. The recommendations contained in this report are structured for immediate implementation and long-term institutional consolidation.

Background

Election Context

Malawi's democratic history carries both the weight of hard-won progress and the lessons of significant institutional failure. The Constitutional Court's annulment of the 2019 presidential election, upheld by the Supreme Court of Appeal, laid bare systemic weaknesses in electoral administration, particularly in the management and transmission of results. The subsequent 2020 fresh election was widely praised, yet it also demonstrated how quickly electoral credibility can erode when information vacuums are filled by rumour and disinformation.

Against this backdrop, the 2025 Presidential, Parliamentary, and Local Government Elections represented a critical test for Malawi's democratic institutions. A new legal framework, the Presidential, Parliamentary and Local Government Elections Act (PPLGEA 2023), introduced structural changes, including the 50%+1 majority requirement and provision for a presidential run-off. These reforms raised the stakes for all actors and underscored the importance of independent, credible electoral oversight.

The Rationale for a CSO-Led Situation Room

The decision to establish a CSO-led Election Situation Room reflected four interconnected imperatives.



Independence and non-partisanship: Civil society organisations occupy a unique space in Malawi's democratic ecosystem. Operating outside the formal political and governmental structures, they can build trust simultaneously across the electorate, political parties, and the state — a capacity that neither official bodies nor political actors can replicate.



Independent verification of institutional credibility: A robust, data-driven CSO initiative can independently verify whether the MEC's operational standards meet the expectations of a credible election, providing an accountability layer beyond partisan contestation.



Conflict prevention and rumour control: In fragile post-election environments, the rapid spread of unverified information is among the most significant drivers of political violence. The ESR's mandate to track, verify, and counter misinformation in real time was therefore not merely communicative; it was preventive.



Active citizen ownership of democracy: Beyond observation, the ESR empowered citizens to become active guardians of the electoral process, reinforcing the principle that democratic legitimacy is ultimately rooted in popular engagement.

Conflict Sensitivity Framework

The ESR's monitoring architecture was shaped by recognised international frameworks on elections and political violence. Drawing on Sisk and Spies' UNDP Elections and Conflict Prevention Guide (2009), the ESR assessed the 2025 elections against six primary conflict triggers: the strength and clarity of the legal framework; the credibility and professionalism of the Electoral Commission and security services; compliance with electoral rules and consistency in their application; access for civil society and independent media; levels of inclusion for women, youth, persons with disabilities, and persons with albinism; and the independence, affordability, and accessibility of electoral dispute resolution mechanisms. Each section of this report evaluates the 2025 elections against these criteria.



Figure 2

The Election Situation Room deployed an Information Desk for Citizen Journalism, bringing together the MISA Malawi team managing iVerify and communications specialists from participating institutions to verify information and strengthen information integrity.

Vision

A peaceful, transparent, and credible 2025 election period where the electoral outcome is accepted by all, based on verifiable evidence and the legitimate will of the Malawian people.



Promoting peaceful participation by encouraging a calm and non-violent election period where citizens can exercise their rights freely.



Supporting an electoral outcome that is backed by clear, transparent, and credible proof.



Respecting the will of the people by upholding results that reflect the legitimate choice of Malawians and are accepted by all.

Mission

To independently and non-partisanly monitor, verify, and report on the 2025 election process using technology and citizen observers, to promote transparency, accountability, and peace.



Using technology to strengthen transparency.



Deploying citizen observers across the county.



Providing accurate, evidence-based reporting.

Strategic Pillars

The ESR's operational approach rested on three mutually reinforcing pillars.

First, technology was deployed to strengthen transparency: by digitising incident reporting, mapping electoral hotspots in real time, and enabling rapid escalation and response, the Maso Athu platform transformed the ESR from a passive observer into an active accountability mechanism.

Second, a nationwide network of citizen observers — present in every ward and constituency — provided the primary source of field intelligence, ensuring that no part of the country fell outside the ESR's monitoring perimeter. Third, evidence-based public communication served as the ESR's primary tool for building public confidence: daily press briefings, verified incident updates, and proactive counter-messaging all contributed to a well-informed electorate and a calmer information environment.



Figure 3

Visit by International Observers: Representatives from diplomatic missions and international organizations tour the Election Situation Room to observe how data is collected, verified, and acted upon in real time, commending the collaborative effort to promote credible and peaceful elections in Malawi.

Key Objectives

The ESR's mandate was defined by five interdependent objectives, each addressing a distinct dimension of electoral integrity.



Real-time environment monitoring

Systematically track, verify, and report on the political and security environment before, during, and after polling, including the conduct of political parties, joint security services, and the MEC, to provide a contemporaneous record of the electoral process.



Disinformation identification and counter-messaging

Actively monitor social and traditional media using the iVerify platform to identify fake news, hate speech, and inflammatory rhetoric, and to deploy timely, fact-based counter-narratives through MISA Malawi.



Authoritative public information

Serve as a trusted, independent source of information for the public, the media, political parties, and domestic and international observers, particularly during periods of uncertainty or contestation.



Mediation and de-escalation

Use verified data and stakeholder relationships to engage potential disputants early, mediating tensions before they could escalate into conflict or undermine public confidence in the electoral outcome.



Inclusive participation

Promote and monitor the safe and meaningful participation of women, youth, persons with disabilities, and other vulnerable groups, ensuring that the electoral process upholds its obligation to all citizens.

Structure and Deployment

Observer Network



6,840

Trained observers deployed nationwide



6,331

Stationed observers
At polling and tally centres

509
Wards

229
Constituencies

509

Roving observers
Mobile coverage across
multiple location



6,331

**EU-funded stationed
observers**

Funded by the European Union
through the NICE Trust
mechanism



Blanket coverage across Malawi



No ward without an
independent ESR
presence on
election day



Validated field data
at unprecedented
granularity

Observers reported through the Maso Athu (iReport) digital platform, submitting structured incident forms in real time from mobile devices. The platform aggregated reports into a live dashboard visible to ESR coordinators, allowing leadership to identify emerging trends and geographic hotspots as events unfolded rather than after the fact.

Election Situation Room Functional Hubs

The ESR operated through ten functional hubs, each with a defined mandate, core responsibilities, and escalation protocols. Together, they formed an integrated command structure capable of moving from field observation to verified public communication within hours.

Hub / Unit	Core Function	Key Responsibilities
 Coordination	Strategic leadership and operational oversight	Overall management, stakeholder engagement, coordination of hub activities, and consolidated reporting.
 Data Clerks, Monitoring and Observation	Election monitoring and incident tracking	Deploy observers, collect and verify field data, monitor incidents, and escalate critical cases to the Response Cell (ARC).
 Data Analysis and Technology (Data & ICT Cell – DIC)	Data systems and analytics	Manage databases, GIS mapping, digital tools, and real-time election dashboards for analysis and decision-making.
 Legal and Complaints	Legal compliance and rights protection	Provide legal redress support and assess the legality of proposed actions. Ensure that executive or emergency powers are not abused and that civil liberties are protected.
 Media and Communications (Communications & Outreach Cell – COC)	Public information and media engagement	Issue press releases, manage social media engagement, and counter misinformation and disinformation.
 Security and Logistics	Operational safety and security coordination	Ensure observer safety, oversee ESR operational security, and coordinate security liaison with police services nationwide.

**Oversight and Accountability**

Governance and compliance monitoring

Monitor actions and decisions of officials and institutions to ensure adherence to protocols, constitutional principles, human rights, and ethical standards.

**Gender and Inclusion**

Inclusive participation and protection

Promote safe and inclusive participation of women, PWDs, PWAs, youth, older persons, detainees, and minority populations.

**Intervention Desk**

Child protection and safeguarding

Monitor child rights violations, oversee child protection concerns, and coordinate appropriate referrals.

**Child Rights**

Child protection and safeguarding

Receive, verify, escalate, and track election incidents requiring intervention from MEC, security agencies, political parties, and MPLCs.

ESR Partner Ecosystem

Core Operational Partners



Institutional Partners

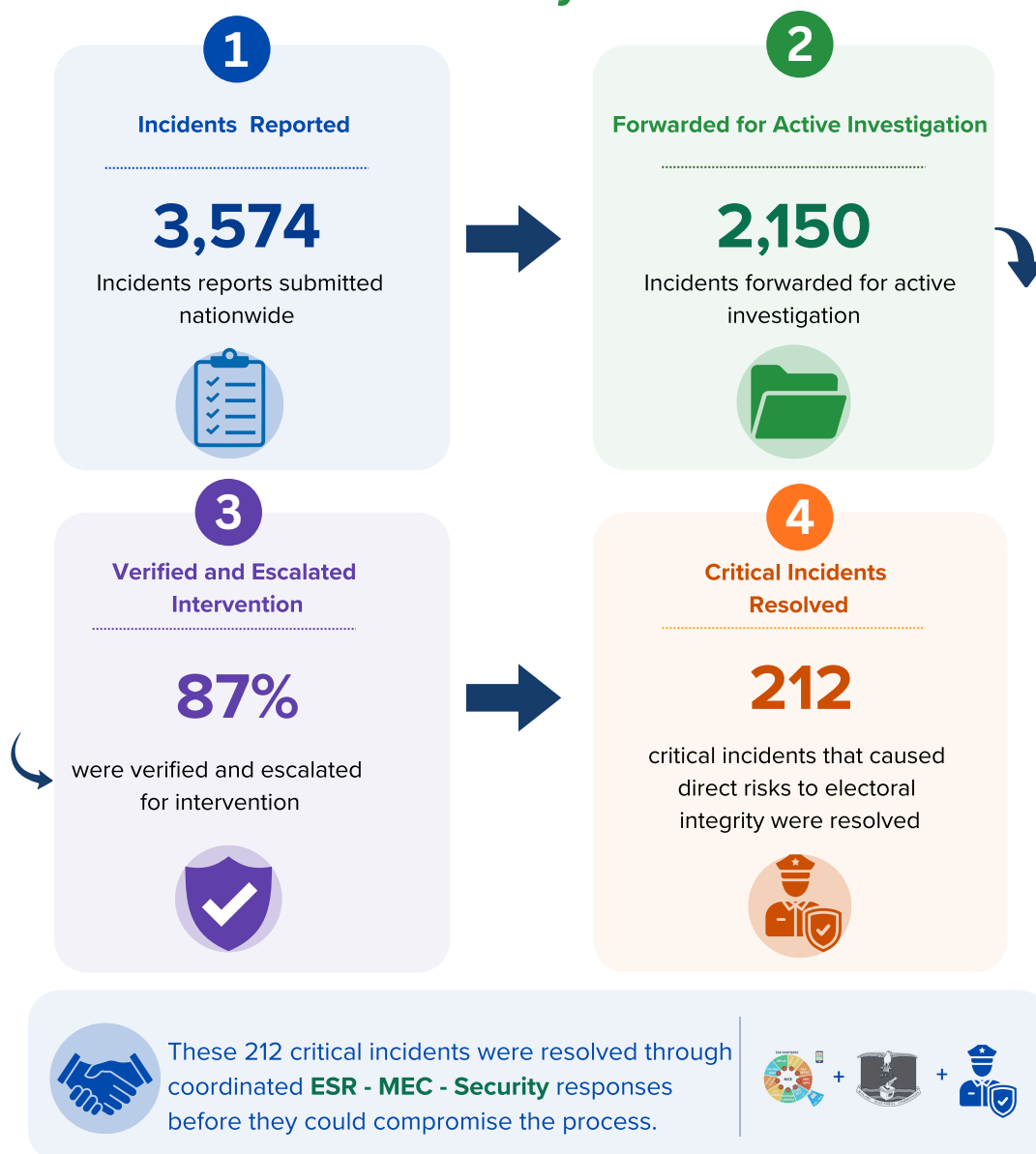


Endorsement



The ESR was further endorsed by the MEC as a complementary and independent mechanism within the formal electoral architecture.

Incident Reporting and Electoral Integrity Analysis



The Oversight and Accountability Hub and the Legal and Complaints Hub together received 102 filtered complaints from Independent Complaints Commission field officers, ESR observers, media monitors, and members of the public. Severity classification revealed that approximately 70% of these complaints were of medium severity, with critical cases accounting for fewer than 6% of the total.

Analysis by Issue Type

1. Handouts (High Frequency — 30 reported incidents)

Vote-buying was the most frequently reported issue during the electoral period, accounting for 30 incident reports and attracting considerable public attention. Review and verification processes highlighted the need for a clearer definition of “handouts,” as several reported cases were found to be unsubstantiated or inaccurately recorded. This pattern coincided with increased circulation of unverified information on social media during the pre-election phase. Verified incidents were recorded in Nsanje Dinde, Luchenza, and Nancholi, and these cases were referred to the Intervention Desk for further handling, including onward transmission to the Malawi Electoral Commission (MEC) and the Malawi Police Service.

The occurrence of both confirmed and unconfirmed reports of handouts underscores an underlying structural challenge within the existing legal framework. Specifically, the Political Parties Act does not provide a sufficiently clear or detailed definition of electoral inducement, making it difficult to distinguish between prohibited practices and legitimate community engagement activities. This lack of clarity may contribute to differing interpretations and present challenges for enforcement. The ESR therefore recommends that the Office of the Registrar of Political Parties consider addressing this issue through legislative review and clarification ahead of the 2030 electoral cycle.

2. Misinformation and Reporting Errors (High Frequency — 20 incidents)

Misinformation posed a significant systemic challenge throughout the electoral period, manifesting in two distinct forms: externally generated social media disinformation and internally generated errors in observer reporting.

On social media, the iVerify platform monitored over 2,000 instances of potential disinformation during the pre-election period, a volume that indicates a well-organised information environment capable of rapidly amplifying false narratives. The ESR's Communications and Outreach Cell, working with MISA Malawi, deployed counter-messaging effectively, and no single disinformation narrative materially disrupted electoral proceedings. Nevertheless, the scale of the challenge underscores the need for a permanent, institutionalised fact-checking capacity that operates continuously rather than only around elections.

Observer reporting errors, concentrated in Ntchisi, Machinga, and Mulanje, were primarily linked to data-entry mistakes and misinterpretations of incident categories. This finding points to a systemic gap in observer training: while pre-election training adequately covered field observation protocols, it was insufficient to equip observers with the precision in verification and reporting required by a real-time digital platform. The ESR recommends introducing mandatory refresher training within 30 days of future elections, with specific modules focused on evidence standards and platform use.

3. Security Deployment Gaps (High Frequency)

Insufficient security deployments were reported at three tally centres: Zomba Gymkhana, Lunzu, and Songani. These gaps were not the result of indifference on the part of the Malawi Police Service, but rather of operational risk assessments that led to the redeployment of personnel to higher-threat locations. While this decision reflects a degree of adaptive security management, it also highlights a structural capacity constraint: the Malawi Police Service currently lacks sufficient personnel, equipment, and communication systems to provide simultaneous, adequate coverage across all electoral sites, particularly tally centres, which represent the highest-risk phase of the electoral process.

4. Alleged Double-Voting Attempts (Medium Frequency — 15 incidents)

Double-voting attempts were reported across Dedza, Lilongwe, Nsanje, and Salima. The overwhelming majority of these incidents were resolved without significant disruption, largely due to the effective operation of Biometric Voter Verification Devices (BVVDs), which prevented duplicate registrations. This finding validates the investment in biometric verification technology and demonstrates its value as a deterrent. Confirmed cases were referred to the Intervention Desk; misidentified or misreported cases were resolved through verification.

5. Procedural Irregularities (Medium Frequency — 12 incidents)

Procedural irregularities included mismanagement of election materials, mishandling of result envelopes at tally centres, and obstruction of accredited observers. All cases were referred to MEC via the Intervention Desk and were resolved prior to the final declaration of results. MEC's generally prompt responsiveness to ESR escalations is commendable and should be formalised through a standing memorandum of understanding for future elections.

6. Violence and Intimidation (Low-Medium Frequency — 10 incidents)

Incidents of violence and intimidation were recorded in Nsanje, Blantyre, Nkhotakota, and Likoma. These incidents, while relatively infrequent, are among the most consequential in terms of their potential to undermine voter participation and public confidence. Police and Malawi Defence Force (MDF) responses were generally swift and effective; in no case did violence escalate beyond initial containment. However, the ESR notes that a reactive response, however competent, is inherently less effective than prevention. The persistence of intimidation at the same geographic hotspots across successive elections indicates entrenched patterns of political coercion that require a sustained, intelligence-led approach to address.

Hotspot Analysis

**9**

Districts

were classified as electoral hotspots requiring heightened intervention and post-election follow-up

Top Hotspots Districts

1**Blantyre City****18.7%****2****Zomba City****16.0%****3****Nsanje****13.3%**

Top Themes Across Hotspot Locations



**Handout
and inducement**



**Security and procedural
weaknesses mostly Pre-
Election period**



**Isolated but serious
critical incidents**



Three incidents were classified as critical in Nkhotakota, Chikwawa and Nsanje, requiring immediate ESR escalation to the security desk.

One critical incident in Chikwawa merits particular analytical attention: a presiding officer's suicide attempt following tallying difficulties. While the full circumstances remain sensitive and subject to investigation, this incident signals the profound psychological pressures placed on frontline electoral workers, pressures that are rarely acknowledged in electoral process. The ESR recommends that MEC formally institutionalise psychosocial support for polling and tally centre staff, drawing on lessons from humanitarian sector practice.

Institutional Performance

The credibility of any election is ultimately a function of the institutions that manage and protect it. The ESR assessed four key institutional actors: the Malawi Electoral Commission, the Malawi Police Service, the Malawi Defence Force, and the ESR itself.

Malawi Electoral Commission (MEC)

Overall, the MEC performed at a commendably high standard during the 2025 elections. Election Day was largely calm and well-organised, with polling stations opening on time across most locations. MEC's responsiveness through the Intervention Desk, promptly addressing escalated issues and making on-time decisions, demonstrated a level of operational agility that was notably improved compared to previous electoral cycles.

Results transparency was a particular strength. The practice of posting signed results forms at polling stations and distributing copies to party monitors significantly reduced the information gaps that have historically generated post-election disputes. All major queries from political parties were resolved before the final declaration of results, a striking contrast with the 2019 experience that led to annulment.

On inclusivity, MEC registered **137,925** voters with disabilities (**approximately 1.9% of the national register**), reflecting incremental progress in accessibility. Women constituted **57%** of registered voters, and female parliamentary representation increased slightly to **22.4%**. However, the ESR notes that representation at **22.4%** remains significantly below parity despite the excellent consideration of MEC-reducing fees. This reflects a structural rather than merely numerical challenge, one that requires affirmative policy intervention, strengthening political parties' internal democracies, to reduce pressure on the MEC during elections, and to simply improve civic education.

Malawi Police Service (MPS)

The Malawi Police Service demonstrated measurable improvements in professionalism and responsiveness during the 2025 elections. Polling day security was largely adequate, with positive observer assessments of police conduct at the majority of stations and tally centres. The Police Service also demonstrated effective coordination with the Malawi Defence Force in managing hotspot incidents, including rapid responses to violence and intimidation in Nsanje, Blantyre, and Nkhosang.

However, the ESR's observations confirm a longstanding and serious structural problem: the Malawi Police Service remains significantly under-resourced for the demands of a national election. Deficiencies were identified across three dimensions: public order management equipment, communication systems and command infrastructure, and modern policing technology. These gaps directly contributed to the deployment shortfalls observed at Zomba Gymkhana, Lunzu, and Songani tally centres.

RECOMMENDATION

The Government of Malawi should establish a dedicated, ring-fenced funding allocation within the national budget to support long-term election security preparedness within policing. This allocation would be separate from the general police budget and aimed at ensuring sustained investment in essential areas such as equipment, communication systems, and specialised training. Such an approach would promote continuity and readiness beyond electoral cycles, strengthening overall security planning and implementation.

Malawi Defence Force (MDF)

The MDF served as a critical security backstop in hotspot districts, deployed in coordination with the MPS to contain tensions beyond police capacity. Observer reports consistently noted the professional conduct of MDF personnel and the calming effect of their presence at tally centres in Nsanje, Blantyre, and Nkhotakota. The ESR assesses the MDF's contribution as having been central to preventing localised incidents from escalating into broader unrest.

Election Situation Room — Self-Assessment

The ESR performed strongly across all of its core functions. The deployment of 6,840 observers, achieving blanket coverage of all 509 wards, was a logistical achievement without precedent in Malawian civil society observation. The MasoAthu platform functioned reliably, enabling real-time data collection and geographic incident mapping. The Gender Hub, Intervention Desk, and Communications Cell all demonstrated operational effectiveness under pressure.

Two significant internal weaknesses, however, merit honest acknowledgement. First, approximately 5% of observer reports were submitted after the events they described had already concluded, a delay that materially reduced the ESR's capacity to respond in real time and points to a training gap in time-sensitive reporting protocols. Second, reporting errors concentrated in Ntchisi, Machinga, and Mulanje indicate that the platform training programme was insufficient for some observer cohorts. Both weaknesses are correctable through enhanced pre-election training and clearer escalation protocols; both are recommended as priority reforms for the next cycle.



Figure 4

The ESR coordinated 6,840 observers—509 roving and 6,331 station-based—deployed nationwide. Using the Maso Athu (iReport) platform, partners tracked and verified field data in real time to identify incidents and coordinate timely responses, promoting credible, peaceful, and inclusive elections. The initiative was supported through the Malawi Electoral Support Project (MESP) with funding from the EU, the United States, Ireland, FCDO (UK), and Norway.

Election Day Overview and Analysis

Polling Station Performance

ESR observers visited a total of 6,097 polling stations on election day, providing comprehensive coverage against which seven key performance indicators were assessed. The results reveal a picture of largely strong operational performance, with two specific environmental gaps that require targeted remediation.

Polling Station Assessment Key Indicators

Indicator	Stations	Score	Rating
 Polling centre safe for women/PWAs	5,993	98.3%	 Strength
 Ballot papers were opened with all officials present	5,964	97.8%	 Strength
 Polling centre spacious enough	5,868	96.2%	 Strength
 The voting queue moved smoothly	5,860	96.1%	 Strength
 Polling opened on time	5,617	92.1%	 Solid
 Health and safety provision adequate	5,266	86.4%	 Priority Improvement
 Polling centre properly shaded	4,094	67.1%	 Priority Improvement

The safety of polling centres for women and persons with albinism scored highest at 98.3% — a strong equity signal that should be formally documented and maintained as a baseline standard. Procedural integrity, voter flow management, and spacing all scored above 96%, demonstrating that core operational standards were well-embedded.

The two priority gaps, shading (67.1%) and health and safety provision (86.4%), represent the report's clearest operational recommendations. Inadequate shading at approximately 1,699 polling centres affected voter comfort and turnout, particularly during mid-day hours, and disproportionately impacted elderly voters, pregnant women, and persons with disabilities or albinism. These are environmental shortcomings that are well within MEC's capacity to address at relatively modest cost and with significant impact on voter experience and inclusion.

Gender-Disaggregated Participation

Gender-disaggregated data across the three primary stakeholder categories present on election day — MEC officials, security personnel, and political party representatives — reveals a mixed but generally encouraging picture.

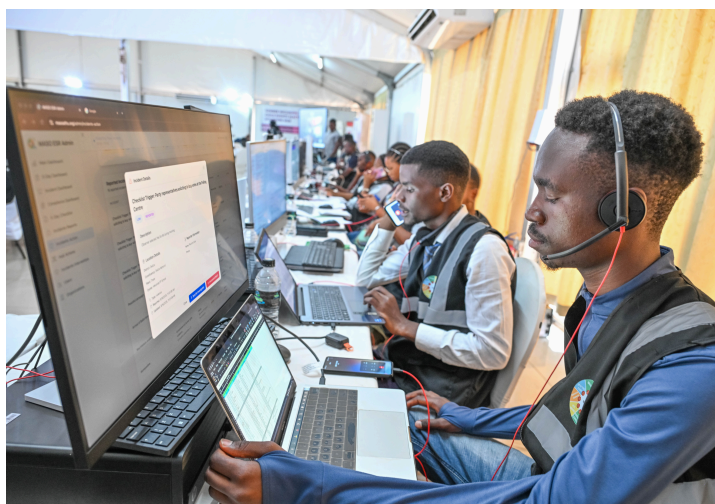
Polling Station Assessment Key Indicators

Role Category	Male	%	Female	%	Total
 MEC Officials	54,735	48%	58,699	52%	113,434
 Security Personnel	20,193	61%	12,827	39%	33,020
 Party Representatives	47,827	57%	35,428	43%	83,255

The achievement of a female majority (52%) among MEC officials is genuinely commendable and represents a milestone that should be formally recognised and sustained. However, the 39% female representation in security roles (11 percentage points below parity) and 43% among party representatives (7 points below parity) reflect persistent gendered role segmentation that requires active policy intervention, not simply a continuation of current approaches.

Figure 5

Incident Receiving Desk: Data clerks receive reports from observers through the Maso Athu (iReport) system, hotline, and social media, verify and log each incident, and direct it to the relevant thematic hub for analysis and response.



Gender, Youth, and Inclusive Participation

Women in the 2025 Elections

The 2025 elections produced notable symbolic milestones in women's political participation. For the first time in Malawi's political history, nine women were nominated as vice-presidential running mates — a development that sparked important public debate about the distinction between symbolic inclusion and substantive power-sharing. The question of whether female vice-presidential candidacies represent a genuine movement toward gender-equitable governance or constitute a form of tokenism that preserves male dominance in top executive positions merits sustained attention from civil society.

Women in the Electoral Process

Women as Voters

57.1%



✓ Majority of electorate

Women constituted 57.1% of registered voters in 2025, making them the demographic majority of the electorate

Women as Candidates



5.8%

Presidential candidates were women



22.4%

Parliamentary candidates were women

Parliamentary Results



331 → 48

Women contested for parliamentary seats

Women were elected



a modest increase over previous cycles

Regional Benchmark



30% minimum

Recommended by African Union and SADC frameworks



Recommended by African Union and SADC frameworks

The ESR's Gender Hub addressed **134** gender-related incidents across the electoral period, including cases of verbal intimidation (notably against women aspirants in Rumphi), physical assault (in Balaka, where a campaign team member and an aspirant's husband were attacked), and systemic exclusion, where women in Mchinji West were denied the right to vote due to system glitches. These incidents, while not numerically dominant, reflect the persistent reality that political space in Malawi remains unequal for women at every level.

ANALYTICAL FINDING: The gap between women's majority registration and their minority candidacy is not primarily an information or awareness problem; it reflects structural barriers embedded in party recruitment and financing systems. Political parties in Malawi overwhelmingly recruit and resource male candidates. Addressing women's political underrepresentation requires legal mandates (affirmative action provisions), party accountability mechanisms, and sustained campaign finance reform, not civic education alone.

Youth Participation



Young people (under 35)
constitute approximately
50%
Of Malawi's population

Giving an enormous
demographic stake in the
electoral outcome.

High Engagement



Voter Registration

High levels of registration
among young people



Community mobilisation

Active involvement in
outreach and mobilisation
efforts

The Challenge Remains

Structural barriers continued to limit young people's ability to convert
demographic strength into political leadership.



Limited access
to leadership
opportunities



Financial
constraints



Gaps in civic
education and
political training



Weak political party
networks and
mentorship



Young people are Malawi's present and future.

Removing structural barriers is essential to unlocking their full
potential as leaders and decision-makers.

The primary obstacles identified by ESR observers and civil society partners include entrenched party structures that favour established loyalties over merit or youth representation; financial constraints that make candidacy prohibitively expensive without party backing; limited institutional support for young candidates within party machinery; and active resistance from established political networks that have an interest in preserving existing power hierarchies. These are systemic problems that no single election cycle can resolve, but which civil society advocacy, party accountability frameworks, and public financing reform can meaningfully address over time.

Persons with Disabilities (PWDs)



Voter Registration

137,925

Voters with disabilities were registered by MEC

Approximately 1.9% of the national register



This reflects an incremental improvement in accessibility.



Candidates with Disabilities

19

Contested for parliamentary seats

59

Contested for local council positions



What this shows

PWD participation in the 2025 elections showed measurable progress

- ✓ More candidates with disabilities took part in the elections.
- ✓ Voter registration showed gradual change in accessibility.



Progress is visible, but continued efforts are needed to strengthen accessibility and representation.

However, several serious access failures were documented. In Machinga and Lilongwe, persons with disabilities were not prioritised in voting queues, despite provisions requiring priority access. In Mzimba, a candidate with a disability found their name missing from the ballot papers, a failure with direct legal and political implications that requires full investigation. System glitches in Mchinji West resulted in PWDs being denied the right to vote, a form of disenfranchisement that is both a rights violation and a credibility concern.

These failures are not marginal edge cases. They indicate that disability inclusion in Malawi's electoral processes remains aspirational in law but is marked by procedural inconsistencies in practice among citizens. While the Malawi Electoral Commission (MEC) is making commendable efforts to promote inclusion, the responsibility ultimately rests with every Malawian to recognise persons with disabilities (PWDs) as integral participants in the electoral process.. The gap between registration achievements and failures in polling station access demands a systemic, rather than ad hoc, response.

Child Rights



The Child Rights Hub operated throughout the electoral period, monitoring for violations including:



Child labour

in campaign activities



Exploitation of children

in rallies and campaign logistics



Exposure of children

to political violence



While **no mass child rights violations** were documented, the ESR observed that:



Children were present at several **volatile rally sites**.



The boundary between civic mobilisation and child exploitation was **not consistently maintained** by political campaigns.

The ESR recommends that MEC, the Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Welfare, and UNICEF jointly develop a child protection protocol specifically tailored to the electoral context — one that establishes clear prohibitions on the use of children in campaign activities, defines referral pathways for violations, and is enforced with meaningful consequences.

Election Outcomes

The 2025 General Elections produced the following results, as declared by the Malawi Electoral Commission after resolving all major queries raised by political parties.

Presidential Results

Prof. Peter Mutharika

Winner



Political Party: **DPP**

Vote share

56.76%

Dr. Lazarus Chakwera

Runner-up



Political Party: **MCP**

Vote share

33.01%

Parliamentary Seats

Political Party	Seats won
 Democratic People's Party (DPP)	82
 Malawi Congress Party (MCP)	51
 UTM Party	8
 United Democratic Front (UDF)	4
 Alliance for Democracy (AFORD)	2
 People's Party (PP)	3
 Freedom Party (FP)	1
 National Development Party (NDP)	1
 People's Development Party (PDP)	1
 Independents	70

The presidential result, with the winner securing over 50% of the vote under the new PPLGEA 2023 framework, avoided the need for a run-off and delivered a decisive outcome accepted across the political spectrum. The ESR's assessment that the process was credible and reflected the will of Malawian voters is supported by the field data: no material evidence of systematic fraud or outcome-determinative irregularities was found.



Figure 6

ESR Press Briefing: NICE Executive Director Gray Kalindekaffe updates the media on incidents tracked by the Election Situation Room, sharing how verified reports guided coordinated responses with key stakeholders to safeguard the credibility and peace of the electoral process.

Figure 7

Analysts receive verified reports from thematic hubs and coordinate real-time interventions with relevant stakeholders, including the Malawi Police and Malawi Electoral Commission, to resolve issues and maintain a peaceful electoral process.



Strengthening the Voter Registration Process



A credible elections depend on an **accurate, inclusive** and **accessible** voter register

ESR Observations from the 2025 Electoral Cycle



The MEC **adhered to the legal framework** in managing the process.



However, **continuous voter registration** remains essential to prevent disfranchisement.

Recommendations for Stronger Registration



Registration should be **conducted at fixed locations** over consistent periods, rather than shifting from place to place



The country should invest in sufficient **registration equipment** to allow for simultaneous deployment, as was done during the election period.

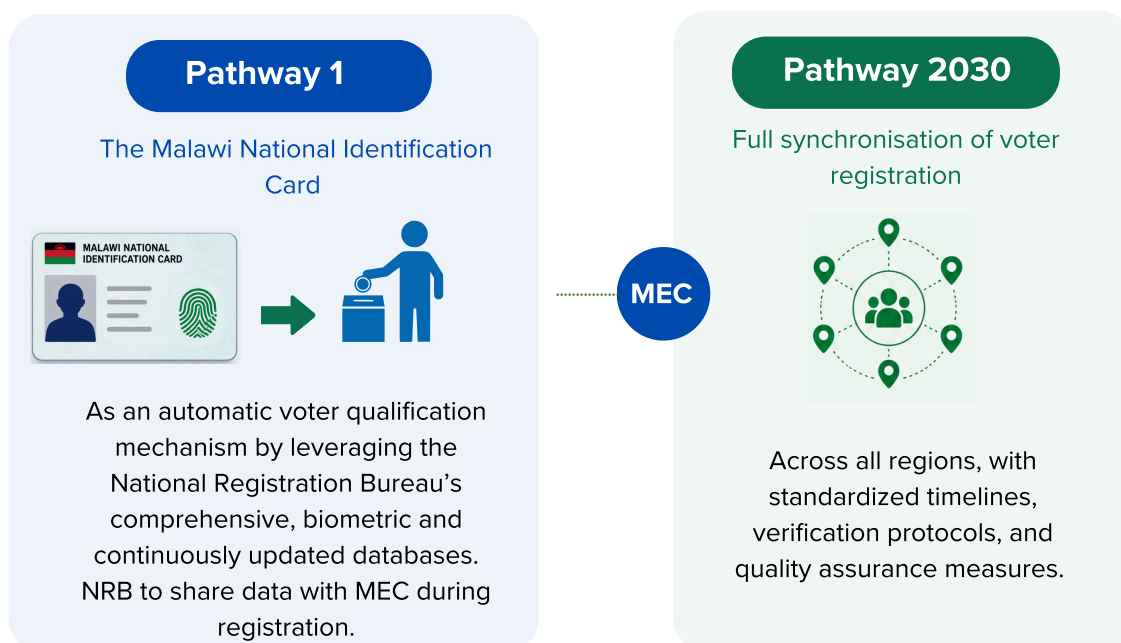
Voter Registration



An accurate, inclusive, and accessible register **strengthens democracy** and ensures no eligible citizen is **left behind**.

Proposed Reforms

The ESR strongly recommends that the Malawi Electoral Commission (MEC) adopt continuous voter registration as a key structural reform to alleviate the intense administrative pressures experienced during election years. This reform must be underpinned by a sustained annual budget allocation from Government to enable the MEC to systematically register all eligible citizens, especially individuals attaining the age of 18 and those issued with National Identification Cards.



Recommendations

The following recommendations are structured by thematic area, with responsible parties identified. They reflect the ESR's commitment to translating evidence into actionable reform rather than simply documenting shortcomings.

CSO Space and ESR Institutional Development



Expand the ESR's technological capabilities to include offline reporting tools for low-connectivity areas, AI-based trend analysis for early warning, and multilingual reporting interfaces.



Formalise the ESR as a permanent civic infrastructure for democratic oversight, not merely an election-time initiative. Its monitoring mandate should extend to by-elections, local government elections, and inter-electoral governance.



Integrate ESR operations into national democratic governance frameworks through a formal memorandum of understanding with MEC, MPS, and relevant ministries.



Increase the number of trained observers, with particular emphasis on rural and hard-to-reach areas. Introduce a mandatory 30-day refresher training programme before each election, focused on evidence standards, verification protocols, and platform use.



Develop gender-sensitive incident tracking and response protocols, including specific indicators for gender-based electoral violence.



CSO Space and ESR Institutional Development



Ensure continuous training on incident documentation, digital tools, and legal frameworks across all partner organisations.



Legal Reform



Ensure the timely passage of comprehensive electoral law amendments before 2030, with inclusive multi-stakeholder consultation.



Early and sustained civic awareness on elections and the use of technology should be conducted well in advance of the 2030 elections to mitigate the risks of misinformation and disinformation during the electoral process. Such initiatives will also enhance citizens' understanding, trust, and acceptance of technology, enabling them to fully appreciate its benefits in promoting transparency, efficiency, and credible elections.



Institutionalize political parties Act, strengthen legal and policy advocacy for diaspora voting rights, youth and disability inclusion provisions in electoral laws, and transparent campaign finance regulations.



ORPP



Amend the Political Parties Act to define the term 'handout' in explicit, enforceable terms that distinguish electoral inducement from legitimate community activity — eliminating the ambiguity currently exploited by political actors.



MoJ



Reform the law to allow all accredited observers, media, and essential personnel to cast their ballots at any polling station while performing their duties.



Legal Reform



Strengthen the Political Parties Act to mandate internal democracy, audited financial disclosures, and a stronger ORPP with enforcement powers.

CMD ORPP
Political Parties

Inclusion and Gender



Enact affirmative action legislation to increase political participation among women and other marginalised groups, aligned with SADC and AU benchmarks.



Institutionalise gender-sensitive electoral practices across all MEC operations, including deployment, training, and procurement. Institutionalise gender-sensitive electoral practices across all MEC operations, including deployment, training, and procurement.



Establish a child protection protocol jointly developed by MEC, the Ministry of Gender, and UNICEF, with clear prohibitions on the use of children in campaign activities.



Conduct a comprehensive review of all polling station locations for accessibility, identify and secure alternative venues for inaccessible sites, and ensure all electoral staff receive training on the use of Braille materials





Establish a psychosocial support service for frontline electoral workers, drawing on humanitarian sector best practice.



Security



Establish a dedicated, ring-fenced national budget line for electoral security preparedness, distinct from the general police budget, covering equipment, communications systems, and training



Shift election security planning from a reactive to a preventive, intelligence-led approach, operating throughout the electoral cycle rather than only around polling day.



Maintain and institutionalise the formal election security coordination framework linking MEC, MPS, MDF, and civil society.



Communication and Information Integrity



Establish the iVerify platform and the MEC-MISA Malawi collaboration as a permanent, year-round fact-checking and counter-disinformation service, not merely an electoral intervention.



Fully operationalise the Access to Information Act to improve transparency in all aspects of electoral administration.



Management and Monitoring

The ESR's operational performance in 2025 establishes a strong baseline for future electoral cycles. The following targets and processes are recommended for adoption as standing ESR governance commitments.



Set and publicly disclose performance targets for the next electoral event: a minimum of **95%** across all polling station indicators, with specific targets for shading provision (current: **67.1%**) and health and safety adequacy (current: **86.4%**).



Disaggregate all performance analysis by urban/rural classification, venue type (school versus non-school), and constituency, to enable precision resource allocation rather than blanket approaches.



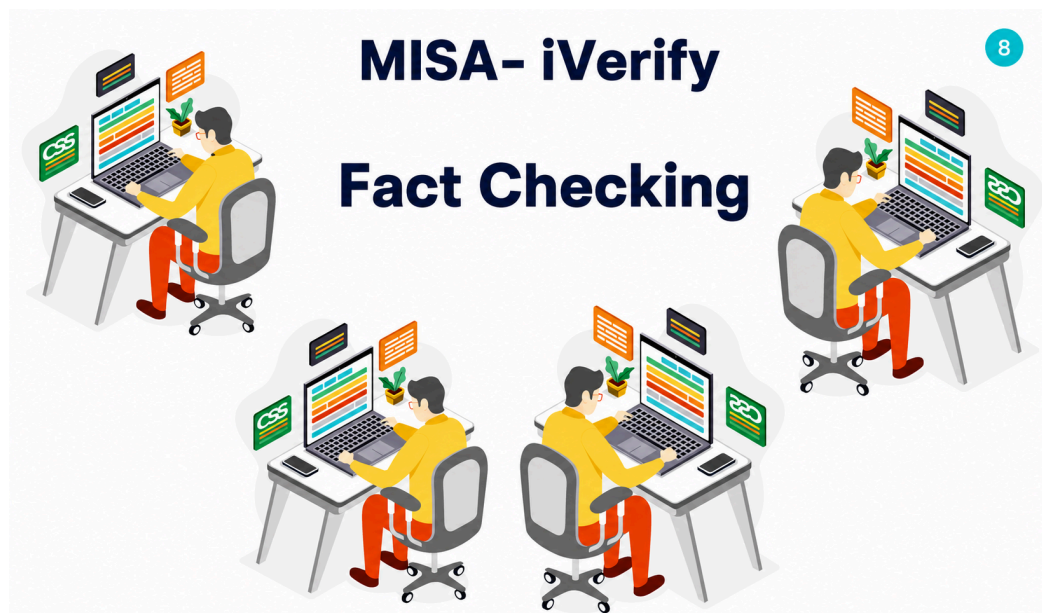
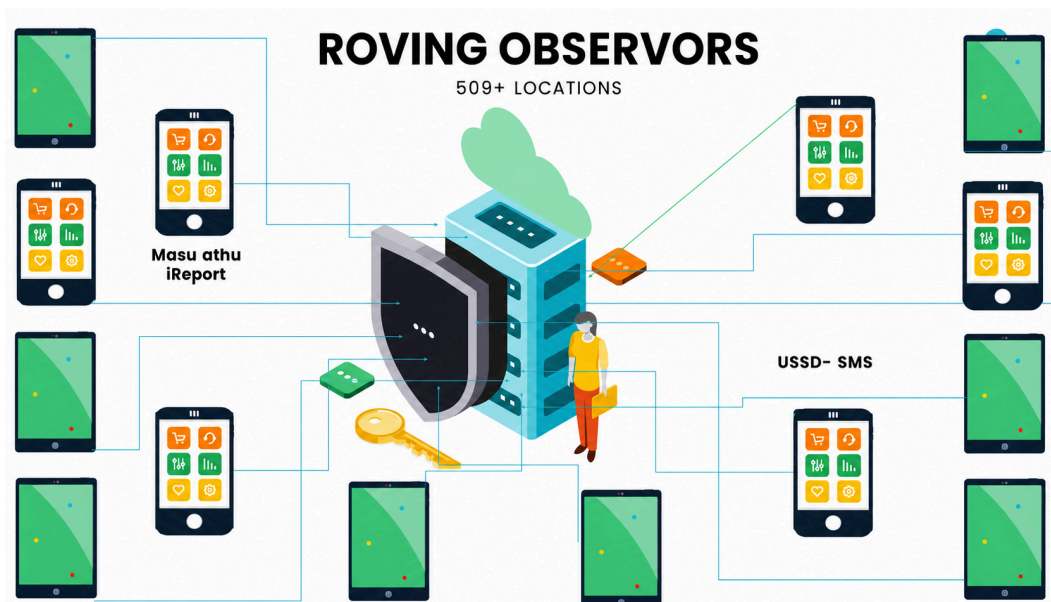
Commission an independent technical evaluation of the Maso Athu platform's security architecture, data integrity protocols, and resilience against interference, with public reporting of key findings



Institutionalise a standing ESR Steering Committee that meets quarterly between elections to monitor reform implementation, assess the electoral environment, and maintain observer network readiness.

The 2025 elections demonstrated that a well-resourced, technology-powered, and institutionally coordinated civil society monitoring architecture can materially strengthen democratic integrity. The ESR's concluding assessment, that the 2025 electoral process credibly reflected the will of the Malawian people, is itself a product of the evidence gathered by **6,840** citizen observers across every ward in the country. That evidence base is the ESR's most important legacy, and its continued development is the ESR's most important obligation to Malawian democracy.

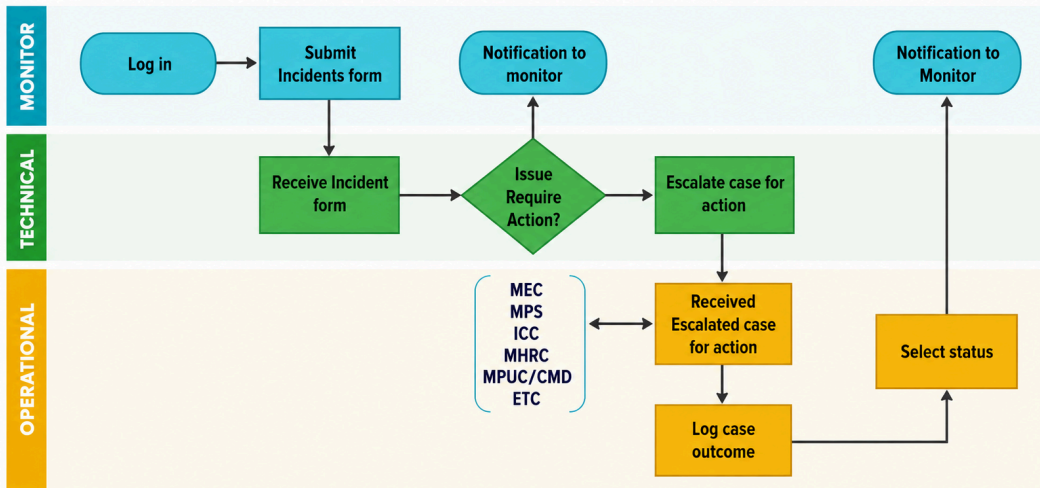
ESR Structure



FLOW DIAGRAM GROUND ZERO

ESR 2025

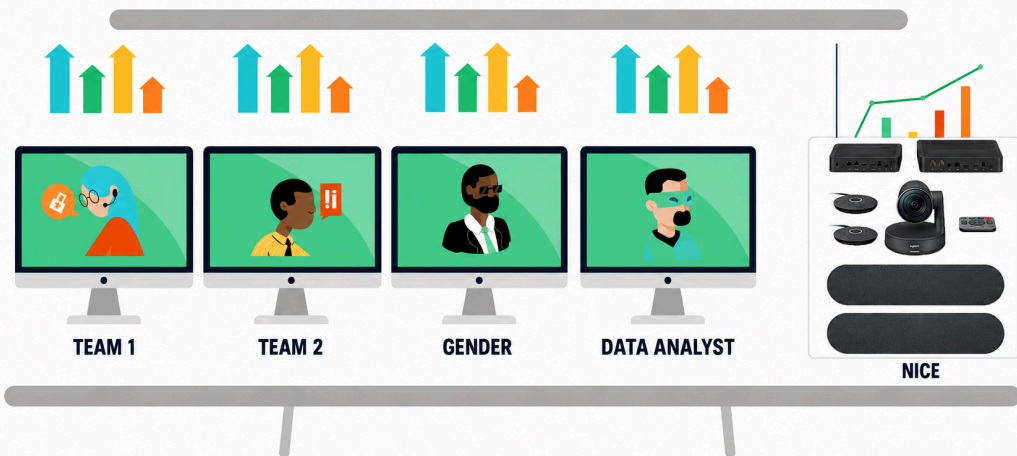
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OPERATIONAL STRUCTURE

MONITORING AND DATA ANALYSIS

6





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