On May 21, 2019, Malawians went to the polls to elect the president, members of Parliament and local councilors in tripartite elections. Shifting political alliances and several surprising results of by-elections in the run-up to the 2019 campaign, yielded an increasingly competitive and unpredictable political landscape. Though past elections in Malawi were relatively conflict- and violence-free, incidents of political violence; especially involving youth; became more common contributing to a loss of public confidence in elections.

Against this backdrop, the International Foundation for Electoral Systems (IFES), through the Consortium for Elections and Political Process Strengthening, provided technical assistance to the Malawi Electoral Commission (MEC), the judiciary, civil society organizations (CSOs), the Malawi National Police Service (MPS), Multi-Party Liaisons Committees (MPLCs), and other stakeholders in the run-up to the tripartite elections. This was done under the “Malawi Electoral Integrity Program” funded by the United States Agency for International Development and the Department For International Development.

**Program Highlights**

**Electoral Security Mapping:**
IFES held four security mapping workshops throughout Malawi between November 2018 and January 2019. These workshops identified areas of potential electoral violence, as well as key partners at the national and subnational levels to participate in an “Early Warning and Early Response” (EWER) program. Thirteen of the country’s 28 districts were identified as high-risk areas for electoral conflict and violence. The security mapping exercise and data were continually updated through a series of 45 community-level dialogue meetings, which took place during the campaign and electoral periods.

**Implementation of the EWER Program:** IFES worked with Malawian stakeholders to develop a robust EWER mechanism in 13 districts identified as at high risk for electoral and political violence. Six partner CSOs fielded 65 trained, community-level monitors to collect data on electoral conflict incidents, which was then verified and aggregated on a digital online platform, called *Chisankho2019*. *Chisankho2019* provided the public and stakeholders – including the MEC, MPS, National Election Consultative Forum and media – with a dashboard of reliable data on electoral conflict dynamics in the 13 high-risk districts. IFES’ partner CSOs, together with these stakeholders and the districts’ Multi-Party Liaison Committee (MPLC) members, then sought appropriate interventions to quickly address and mitigate these conflicts at the community level.

The dashboard captured the exact location of the incident and time, the type of incident, the perpetrators and victims and their gender, weapons used in the incident and the nature of mitigative responses taken. Beyond the platform, this data was regularly packaged into easy-to-read reports that were widely distributed to local and international electoral stakeholders.
Support to MPLCs: MPLCs in Malawi are conflict-mitigative structures made up of both state and nonstate actors at the district level, including security personnel, MEC officers, CSO representatives and community leaders. Through CSOs, IFES provided electoral conflict mitigation training to 314 MPLC members across the 13 hotspot-districts. Training prioritized the role of MPLCs in electoral conflict mitigation, mediation and negotiation in electoral conflict and electoral conflict transformation. Additionally, IFES provided logistical support for MPLCs to rapidly deploy. The MPLCs’ conflict mitigation work was complemented by community and youth leaders who were identified and trained on electoral conflict mitigation and peace messaging through a series of meetings and workshops.

Peace Messaging: IFES partnered with a local media company to develop four peace and voter education messages, which were broadcast over five radio stations and aired 300 times in three local languages – Chichewa, Yao and Tumbuka. Two messages were branded as part of the MEC’s official educational campaign.

Support to Malawi Police: The Malawi police play a critical role in elections, maintaining public safety and guaranteeing the integrity and security of electoral materials. Supporting communication efforts within the police and with other key stakeholders, IFES provided 332 police officers with mobile airtime over a three-day period to ensure effective security coverage during the pre- and immediate post-election periods.

Strategic Communications Support to MEC: IFES embedded a strategic communication advisor within the MEC in support of activities aimed at strengthening voter confidence in the electoral process and to position the MEC as a transparent, credible institution. In conjunction with the MEC, IFES designed a strategic communications plan covering the pre-election, Election Day and results announcement periods. The plan comprised activities that ensured effective communication and timely dissemination of information to voters. Further, IFES provided trainings to the media and journalists on responsible reporting of elections. IFES also advised the MEC chairperson and CEO on media engagement during the results announcement period and on drafting standard responses to common electoral complaints. IFES’ technical communication assistance to the MEC has continued even in the post-election period.

MEC Voter Education Support: IFES’ communications adviser also assisted MEC efforts to hold regular press briefings, update the MEC website and utilize social media for voter education and information, and produce messages and animations on national and regional TV and radio to inform and motivate voters.

Technical Assistance to Electoral Dispute Resolution (EDR): IFES trained MEC’s legal department and district elections officers, ensuring efficient and professional resolution of electoral complaints. A separate EDR workshop for 52 representatives of the judiciary, including Judges, chief magistrates, court registrars and clerks was held. These trainings covered topics such as comparative approaches for resolving election petitions, recommendations to improve courts’ handling of EDR, and burden of proof and standards of evidence in electoral cases.

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