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A DATA DIGEST AND KEY INSIGHTS ON THE MALAWI 2025 GENERAL ELECTIONS

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AHEAD
Africa



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TABLE OF CONTENTS

- 1** Executive Summary
- 2** Introduction
- 3** The 2025 Tripartite General Elections
- 4** Registered Voters for the General Elections
- 6** Commitment to Inclusivity - A Focus on Nomination Fees
- 7** Analysis of Voter Registration against Projected Population
- 8** Comparative Analysis of Registered Voters in Malawi against
selected SADC Countries
- 11** Analysis of Women's Participation as Candidates
- 13** Conclusion

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

As Malawi approaches the 2025 General Elections, it stands at a critical juncture that may either lead to a stronger democratic fabric or result in retrogression. The Malawi Electoral Commission (MEC) officially started the electoral cycle for the September 2025 General Election on July 2, 2024, marking the commencement of Malawi's electoral activities and events for the General Elections scheduled for September 16, 2025. The General Elections will include presidential, parliamentary constituencies and local authority wards contests.



Upon the conclusion of the voter registration process, the MEC reported a total of

7,203,390

registered voters,
representing

65.7%

of the projected

10,957,490

eligible voters.



Presidential
candidacy,
female
candidates
constitute
only

5.8%

of the total.

This figure indicates a decline from previous elections held in 2014 and 2019, raising critical concerns regarding voter engagement and mobilisation efforts. Moreover, a comparative analysis across selected regional countries which conducted elections in 2024 reveal that Malawi's voter registration rate of 65.7% trails behind that of other Southern African Development Community (SADC) nations, such as Namibia (90%) and Mozambique (104%). This disparity underscores the need for effective voter mobilisation strategies. Additionally, while there has been a slight increase in female representation in parliamentary elections - from 20% in 2014 to 22.4% in 2025, significant disparities persist, particularly in presidential candidacy, where female candidates constitute only 5.8% of the total.

Given the above, this paper therefore aims to provide a comprehensive analysis of voter registration, nomination fees, and their implications for commitment to inclusivity. It compares voter registration trends with those of regional counterparts, examine the trajectory of women's participation from 2014 to 2025, and highlight both existing gaps and notable achievements thus far.

INTRODUCTION

The General Elections in Malawi are planned for September 16, 2025. The electoral landscape comprises 509 wards for local government elections and 229 parliamentary constituencies. Each ward is responsible for electing one councillor, while each parliamentary constituency elects one Member of Parliament.

In presidential elections, the whole country is taken as one constituency and the electoral framework mandates a presidential candidate to secure a majority of the votes cast to be declared the winner by the Malawi Electoral Commission (MEC). If no candidate attains over 50% plus 1 of the votes in the initial round, a runoff election will be held. The Malawi voting is conducted using paper ballots, with subsequent manual counting of the votes. Although the legal voting age is set at 18 years, participation in elections is not compulsory.

Since the reintroduction of multiparty democracy in Malawi through a referendum in 1993, the nation has conducted general elections in 1994, 1999, 2004, 2009, 2014, and 2019.

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The 2014 elections marked a significant milestone, being the first tripartite elections, allowing Malawians to simultaneously vote for Councillors, Parliamentary representatives and the President.

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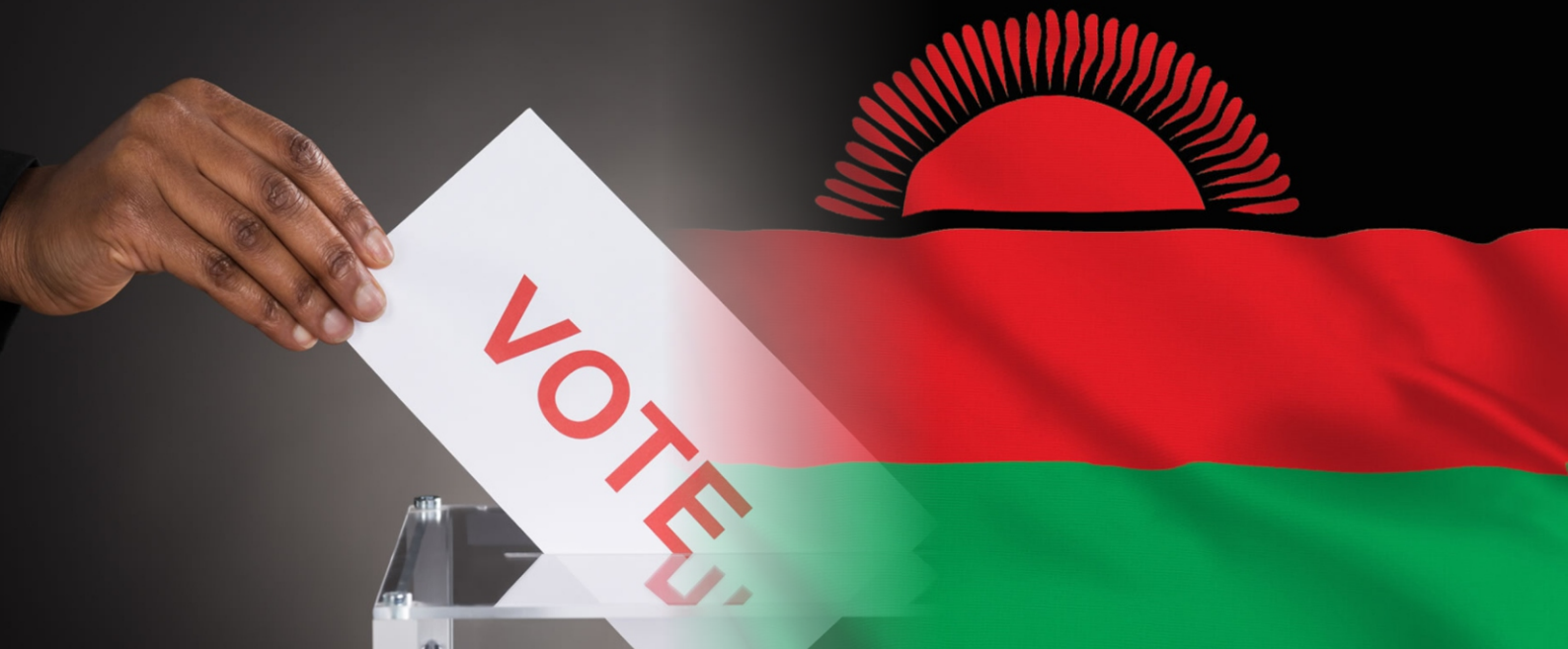
Since then, subsequent tripartite elections have taken place, with the upcoming General Elections scheduled for September 16, 2025, representing the third occurrence under this electoral format.

Since 1994, Malawi has conducted regular elections, but it is crucial to recognise that the significance of the Malawi elections extends beyond adherence to the schedule of regular electoral processes.

The country's electoral history has also been marked by numerous electoral challenges and controversies. A particularly notable instance arose during the 2019 elections, which were annulled by the courts due to widespread irregularities.

However, the nullification of the 2019 Presidential Election should not be viewed solely as a negative development. Instead, it holds substantial symbolic significance in the Southern African Development Community (SADC) region and beyond, mainly because Malawi became one of the African nations to nullify a presidential election on legal grounds and subsequently conduct a court-ordered rerun.

This landmark decision, upheld by the Supreme Court, signifies a pivotal moment in African electoral jurisprudence and reinforces Malawi's position as a democratic outlier in a region marked by political instability in some countries.



The 2025 Tripartite General Elections

On September 16, 2025, the citizens of Malawi will participate in another tripartite election to select the President, Members of Parliament, and Councillors.

The MEC officially launched the 2025 General Election on July 2, 2024, marking the commencement of the electoral cycle under the theme: *"Promoting Democratic Leadership Through Your Vote."* The Chairperson of the MEC emphasised the critical importance of active participation by all eligible voters to ensure the success of the democratic process in Malawi.¹

From the 2nd of July, a series of essential electoral processes have been rolled out. These processes encompass the inspection of the voters' register, the transfer of voters, the nomination of candidates, and the submission of nomination papers, as well as the commencement of official campaign activities.

In compliance with Sections 102 to 106 of the Presidential, Parliamentary, and Local Government Elections Act, the MEC has also solicited applications for the accreditation of both local and international observers for the upcoming 2025 General Election.

On July 14, 2025, Malawi embarked on a pivotal phase of its electoral process,² the official campaign period for the 2025 General Elections, a period that is legally mandated to last 60 days, concluding precisely 48 hours prior to polling day.

1. Malawi Electoral Commission Launches 2025 Elections - Malawi Electoral Commission

2. MEC launches campaign, police pledge independence - Nation Online

Registered Voters for the General Elections

The MEC is required under Section 4 of the Presidential, Parliamentary and Local Government Elections Act, 2023 (PPLGEA) to construct a voters' register for the conduct of statutory elections. This responsibility encompasses the processes of registering new voters who meet the eligibility criteria delineated in Section 3 of the PPLGEA. Furthermore, Sections 14 and 15 of the PPLGEA empower the Commission to update an existing register by amending the records of currently registered voters and removing individuals who have become ineligible for various reasons.

The National Statistical Office (NSO) projected that by September 16, 2025, there will be a total of



10,957,490

eligible voters in Malawi, comprising



5,810,811

females and



5,146,679

males.

Following the completion of all voter registration phases, the MEC announced that it successfully registered a total of **7,203,390** voters for the 2025 General Elections. This figure represents 65.7% of the projected eligible voters as per the NSO, a decrease from the 80.4% registration rate recorded during the 2019 elections and 90.3% in 2014.

The downward trend in registration raises serious concerns about voter engagement

and the effectiveness of voter mobilisation efforts, not only by the MEC but by all electoral stakeholders. It prompts critical questions regarding the underlying causes: could it be that logistical challenges, insufficient public awareness or a general decline in interest in electoral processes are contributing to this trend? Whatever the case may be, addressing these issues become very critical for improving voter participation and ensuring a robust democratic process in Malawi.

Out of the total number of registered voters,



4,114,720

are female and



3,088,670

are male, representing

70.8% and 60%

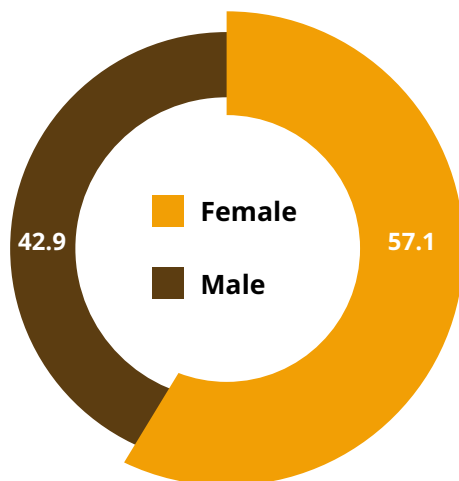
of the projected number of eligible voters, respectively.

Female registered voters constitute **57.1%** while male registered voters constitute **42.9%** of the total number of registered voters, respectively.



The data reflects a notable gender disparity in voter registration, with a predominance of female voters. However, this majority does not correspond to a similar representation among candidates for the 2025 elections. Understanding the relationship between voter registration and candidacy is crucial for developing effective strategies for future electoral engagement by women at all levels, as voters and as candidates.

Figure 1 Female to Male Registered Voters



Notably, the MEC also registered 137,925 voters with various disabilities, which represents approximately 1.92% of all registered voters. The distribution of these voters is as follows:

- Persons with visual impairments: 18,567
- Persons with hearing impairments: 13,604
- Persons with speech impairments: 5,361
- Persons with upper limb disabilities: 2,531
- Persons with other forms of disabilities: 101,981³

Overall, there is low percentage of registration of persons with disabilities, indicating a significant under representation compared to the general population. This probably calls for targeted outreach to increase awareness and accessibility of electoral processes to this special interest group.

3. 'Op-Ed: What the World Needs to Know About Malawi's 2025 Elections - Centre for Human Rights

Commitment to Inclusivity - A Focus on Nomination Fees

In accordance with section 29 (2)(a) and (b) and section 40 (2)(a) and (b) of the Presidential, Parliamentary, and Local Government Elections Act, 2023 (the “Act”), the MEC determined the nomination fees payable by or on behalf of candidates nominated for the positions of President, Member of Parliament, or Councillor for the 2025 General Elections.

Table 1: Nomination Fees

PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION	
Female and Male Candidates	K10,000,000
PARLIAMENTARY ELECTION	
Male Candidate	K2,500,000
Female Candidate	K1,250,000
Person with Disability	K1,250,000
Youth (Less than 35 years)	K1,250,000
LOCAL GOVERNMENT ELECTION	
Male Candidate	K200,000
Female Candidate	K100,000
Person with Disability	K100,000
Youth (Less than 35 years)	K100,000

As an expression of its commitment to inclusivity, the Commission applied special consideration in setting nomination fees for women, persons with disabilities, and youth candidates for the offices of Member of Parliament and Councillor. MEC has set a 50% reduction on nomination fees⁴ to encourage greater participation by women, persons with disabilities and youth in elections.

It is worth acknowledging the MEC for this financial reduction in nomination fees. This is a tangible measure aimed at lowering financial barriers for candidates representing the special interest groups. This financial incentive is crucial, as nomination fees can be a significant hurdle for many aspiring politicians. Therefore, this represents a strategic effort to ensure that the electoral process is more equitable and inclusive.

Table 2: Trend Analysis: Projected and Actual Registered Voters (2014 to 2025)

Year	Projected population of 18years+	Registered	% of Projected
2014	8,009,734	7,470,806	93.2%
2019	8,525,538	6,859,570	80.4%
2025	10,957,490	7,203,390	65.7%

4. Female aspirants to pay 50% nomination fee - Nation Online

Analysis of Voter Registration against Projected Population

The data indicates a growing projected population alongside a declining percentage of registered individuals. The projected population has significantly increased from 8,009,734 in 2014 to an estimated 10,957,490 by 2025, reflecting a growth of approximately 37.3% over 11 years.



Projected Population

8,009,734 in 2014



10,957,490 by 2025

In contrast, the registered population peaked to 7,470,806 in 2014⁵ but experienced a decline to 6,859,570 in 2019, before slightly recovering to 7,203,390⁶ in 2025. This trend might highlight ongoing challenges in maintaining or increasing registration numbers over time.



Furthermore, the percentage of
registered individuals compared to
the projected population was

93.2% in 2014

but fell to

▼ **80.4% in 2019**

and further declined to

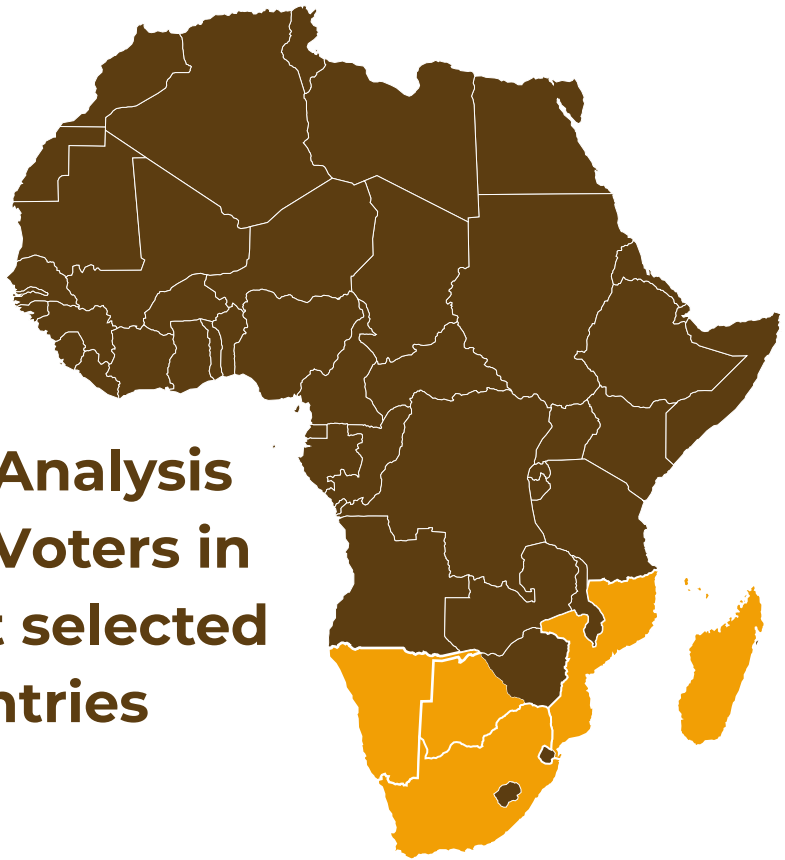
▼ **65.7% in 2025**

This decreasing trend suggests a troubling decline in the registration rate relative to the overall population growth.

5. final-Elections-Report-2014-designed-2.pdf

6. Final-2025-GE-Voter-Registration-Statistics-by-Centre-13072025.pdf

Comparative Analysis of Registered Voters in Malawi against selected SADC Countries



The 2025 elections in Malawi mark the first electoral event in the SADC region for the year, following elections conducted in six countries in the previous year (2024). These elections were conducted in South Africa, Mozambique, Botswana, Namibia, Comoros, Madagascar and Mauritius.

“
***An examination of voter registration
processes across these SADC countries
reveals a complex interplay of technological,
political, and social factors.***
”

Some nations have made significant progress in establishing inclusive and efficient voter registration systems but others encounter substantial challenges that may compromise electoral integrity.

While elections were conducted in seven countries, this analysis will focus specifically on the number of registered voters in four selected countries, which are Namibia, Mozambique, South Africa, and Botswana. It will deliberately refrain from examining the underlying factors that may influence or facilitate these registration processes.

The total number of registered voters in these jurisdictions is essential for evaluating whether there is a discernible decline in voter registration trends across the region or if such a phenomenon is confined to specific countries, rather than reflecting a more widespread pattern.

Table 3: Regional Comparison: Total number of registered voters against the projected

Country	Total number of registered voters	% of Projected
Botswana	1, 038, 261	80%
South Africa	27, 782, 477	69.9%
Namibia	1, 449, 569	90%
Mozambique	17, 169, 239	104%
Malawi	7,203,390	65.7%

The voter registration statistics reveal significant differences in electoral engagement among Botswana, Namibia, Mozambique, Malawi and South Africa.

Botswana's Independent Electoral Commission (IEC) registered **1,038,261 voters**, achieving about **80%** of its target of **1.3 million**,⁷ indicating a commendable effort but leaving room for improvement.

In contrast, Namibia's Electoral Commission (ECN) registered **1,449,569 voters**, representing an impressive **90%** of eligible voters,⁸ probably suggesting effective mobilisation strategies that foster high levels of civic participation.

Mozambique demonstrated a remarkable increase of **30%** in registered voters compared to the 2019 elections, despite an adult population growth of only 17%.⁹ The final voter registration figures of **17,169,239** surpassed initial projections of **16,497,501** by the CNE, reflecting a positive indicator of public interest in the electoral process.

On the other hand, South Africa, with a population of approximately **62 million**, registered **27,782,477 voters**, which translates to only **69.9%** of estimated eligible voters.

7. Botswana SEOM-Preliminary Statement -30 October 2024 (1).pdf

8. Aueom-preliminary-statement-to-the-republic-of-namibia-2024-1-x.pdf

9. EU EOM Mozambique PRELIMINARY STATEMENT EN.pdf

This lower registration rate highlights potential challenges in voter mobilisation and engagement, pointing to the need for targeted initiatives to enhance participation in the electoral process. While voter registration is not compulsory in South Africa, there is concern over a high number of potential voters, estimated to be above 7 million, who did not register to vote.¹⁰ The varying registration rates underscore the necessity for tailored country-specific approaches to improve voter engagement and access in individual countries.



Table 4: Trend Analysis: Participation of women as candidates (2014-2025)

Year	Levels	Total Number of Candidates	Female Candidates	Percentage
2014	Parliamentary	1,293	261	20%
	Local Authority	2,412	419	17.4%
	Presidential	12	2	16.7%
2019	Parliamentary	1,329	295	22.2%
	Local Authority	2,709	645	24.1%
	Presidential	7	0	0%
2025	Parliamentary	1,132	254	22.4%
	Local Authority	2,384	426	17.8%
	Presidential	17	1	5.8%

10. Final AUEOM SA Preliminary Statement 2024 31 May 2024-1.pdf



Analysis of women's participation as candidates

The trends in candidate representation from 2014, 2019 and 2025 reveal both progress and challenges in the political landscape with regards to the total number of candidates and gender representation across local authority, parliamentary and presidential elections.

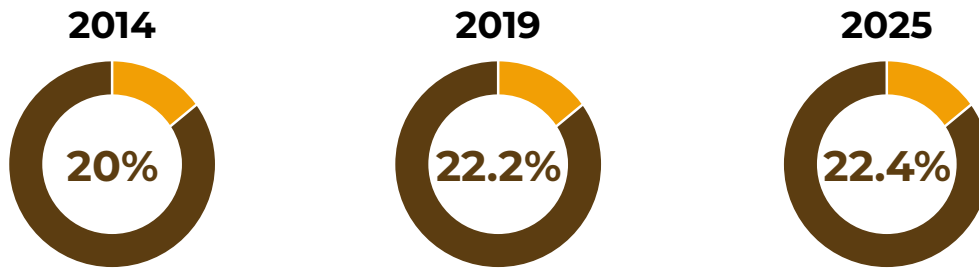
Overall, the total number of parliamentary candidates slightly increased in 2014 (1,293) to 2019 (1,329) followed by a decline in 2025 (1,132). In terms of gender distribution, female representation in parliamentary elections increased from approximately 20% (261 out of 1,293 candidates) in 2014 to about 22.2% (295 out of 1,329) in 2019 then 22.4% in 2025. Overall, local authority elections displayed an almost similar pattern, with candidates rising from 2,412 in 2014 to 2,709 in 2019, before dropping to 2,384 in 2025.

The proportion of female candidates in local authority elections improved from 17.4% in 2014 to 24.1% in 2019, only to decrease to 17.8% in 2025. Presidential elections saw a notable decrease from 12 candidates in 2014 to just 7 in 2019 but rebounded to 17 in 2025. The presidential elections exhibited stark gender disparity, with female candidates representing only 16.7% in 2014, none in 2019, and 5.8% in 2025. Male candidates continued to dominate, comprising the majority across all categories.

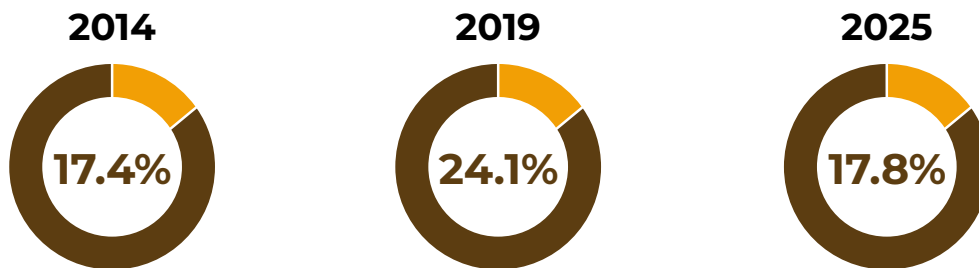
**Trends in candidate representation
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and presidential elections.**



Female representation in parliamentary elections increased from



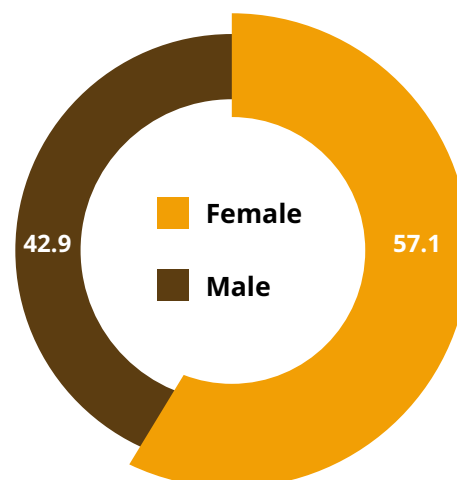
The proportion of female candidates in local authority elections



The Malawi 2025 General Elections has a predominance of female registered voters when compared to males

Figure 1

Female to Male Registered Voters



CONCLUSION

Data regarding the Malawi 2025 elections indicate a positive trend in female participation, particularly in local authority elections.

The findings presented herein are reflective of a gradual increase in the number of female candidates, suggesting progress in gender representation at this level. However, significant disparities remain, especially in presidential elections.

Additionally, the data reveal variations in voter registration across different jurisdictions within the region. Although the levels of registered voters may not directly correlate with voter turnout, they underscore the necessity for enhanced voter mobilisation efforts, particularly in countries with lower registration rates and those experiencing retrogression.

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