

## **Terms of reference: Researching the cost of politics in Malawi**

The Westminster Foundation for Democracy (WFD) invites interested individuals, firms or research teams to submit short technical and financial proposals to conduct qualitative research on the cost of politics in Malawi, building on a [brief existing study](#) undertaken in 2019, with a particular focus on the challenges and impacts it poses for youth and female political participation and engagement.

Interested parties are requested to submit their proposal – to comprise a short technical proposal, a budget, a sample of previous work and the CVs of research team members – by **26 September 2025**.

### *1. The cost of politics*

To hold nationwide elections and sustain political campaigns, both key elements of any democracy, requires resources. Increasingly important, money may not guarantee electoral success, but it is rare that it comes to those with limited funds. How that money is raised and spent, as well as who receives it and how are important but under-researched questions.

The “cost of politics” approach focuses on the spending of individuals contesting for political office rather than those of political parties. It is broad in its scope, aiming to cover expenditure incurred across the election cycle: following the money spent, from the candidates decision to stand for political office at the party primary phase, to the end of an individual's elected tenure.

The approach attempts to better understand what factors drive individual choices when it comes to spending funds on politics. In doing so it can help explain why there is a divergence between stated rules and regulations and their implementation or lack thereof and provide a clearer indication of the obstacles to regulating and curbing, or better monitoring, spending on political campaigns.

The “cost of politics” has escalated with the greater political competition offered by multi-party democratic systems. Demands, from constituents, political parties and other stakeholders on legislators to deliver personalised goods during the election cycle contributes to the erosion of vertical accountability - citizens role in holding their leaders to account - and horizontal accountability – internal checks and oversight processes. This, along with issues of increased corruption, exclusion and disillusionment are some of the implications that existing studies conducted in Africa, Asia-Pacific, Eastern Europe and Latin America have uncovered. For more see [www.costofpolitics.net](http://www.costofpolitics.net).

### *2. Study objectives*

This qualitative study will gather data on the drivers, indicative costs and implications of seeking and holding political office in Malawi, following the September 2025 general elections.

It is envisaged that the briefing paper will be used to deepen the understanding of electoral incentives; stimulate national dialogue; inform legal and policy advocacy, particularly electoral reform processes; and improve democratic processes, particularly for youth and women, ahead of future polls. The following key questions will underpin this research:

- a) What are the key social, economic and political drivers of the cost of parliamentary/legislative politics?
- b) What are some of the types of costs incurred by prospective aspirants? And how does this differ depending on who they are or which political party they seek to contest with?
- c) How do the cost of politics impact on the participation of marginalised and special interest groups - youth, women and persons living with disabilities - in electoral politics?
- d) How do the cost of politics impact on the socio-economic development of the country?
- e) What are the legal, policy and programming options likely to reduce or regulate the cost of politics?

### *3. Suggested methodology, deliverables and timeframes*

The research should be conducted using a combination of desk-based research or relevant literature and reports, alongside predominantly qualitative key informant interviews and focus group discussions with critical stakeholders, including political aspirants, academics, civil society/media representatives and other relevant stakeholders. Other tools and methods can be proposed. WFD is particularly interested to hear from, and reflect, the experiences of women and youth in this study.

Then main output will be an 6,000-8,000 word briefing paper summarising the findings.

The selected partner will also be expected to hold an event or roundtable discussion at the start of the research which will serve as a kick-off dialogue to shape and expand on key themes the study will focus on. The costs for this event should be included in the proposed budget. An end of research launch event, either online, hybrid or in-person can also be included in the proposal, but is not mandatory.

We expect the research to be undertaken between October 2025 and January 2026.

### *4. Funding*

Financial support for the study will be provided by WFD. The individual or research team is asked to submit a financial proposal in response to these terms of reference of between EUR 7,500-10,000.

### *5. Skills and qualifications*

The individual/research team/firm should have experience conducting similar studies and the following qualifications and skills:

- The lead researcher should hold a postgraduate or advanced university degree in political science, public policy, or another relevant domain. Previous management of a research team is highly preferred.
- Members of the team, or the researcher, should have experience of conducting qualitative interviews with political stakeholders and experience organising and facilitating focus group discussions.
- Conceptual and practical knowledge of politics and electoral democracy.
- Strong writing and analytical skills in English

### *6. Application procedure*

Qualified and interested applicants are hereby requested to send their bids to WFD's Cost of Politics Manager, Jamie Hitchen ([j.c.hitchen@gmail.com](mailto:j.c.hitchen@gmail.com)) by 26 September 2025 using the subject heading "EOI Malawi Cost of Politics Study". Any queries can also be directed to this email address.

The application should contain the following:

- A technical proposal:** To include a summary of the applicant's qualifications and experience, a brief methodology, outlining how they will approach and complete the research, and a tentative timeline.
- A financial proposal:** This should indicate the all-inclusive fixed total contract price and be supported by a brief breakdown of costs by activities.
- Evidence of competence:** CVs of key team members and one example of a recent or relevant research study which the team/individual team members have undertaken.

Bids will be assessed and scored against the following criteria: relevant experience (25%), methodological approach (35%), qualifications of research team (20%) and value for money (20%).