

Youth-Led Political Movements and Policy Reform in Malawi: A Post-2025 Assessment

Vitu Chawaza¹

¹Research Clinic Malawi

ABSTRACT

Youth engagement in political processes has accelerated in Malawi following the 2025 general elections, reshaping the political landscape and influencing governance reform agendas. Young Malawians — mobilized through youth advocacy groups, digital activism, and organized political movements — are increasingly challenging traditional political norms, demanding inclusive representation, and contributing to policy dialogues on national priorities. This study examines how youth-led political movements have influenced policy reform in Malawi since 2025. It explores youth organization strategies, patterns of political participation, impacts on institutional reforms, and ongoing challenges to meaningful youth inclusion in decision-making. Drawing on recent developments, civil society documentation, and electoral outcomes, this article highlights both the opportunities and constraints faced by youth in shaping policy in contemporary Malawi.

Keywords – Youth Political Participation, Digital Activism, Policy Reform, Governance, Malawi, Democratic Inclusion.

I. INTRODUCTION

Malawi has one of Africa's youngest populations, with more than 60% of its citizens under 35 years old.¹ This demographic reality has elevated the political relevance of youth voices in national governance. In the lead-up to and aftermath of the 16 September 2025 general election, youth advocacy gained unprecedented momentum, leveraging digital platforms, civil society coalitions, and organized action to influence the national policy agenda.¹⁷

Historically, young people in Malawi have faced systemic barriers to political inclusion — from limited representation in leadership roles to marginalization in party structures.¹⁴ However, recent developments indicate that youth are increasingly asserting themselves as political actors rather than passive observers in Malawi's democratic processes. This article assesses how youth-led movements are shaping policy reform and governance in the post-2025 era.

II. METHODOLOGY

This study draws on a qualitative review of publicly available sources, including youth organization manifestos, civil society reports, media analyses, and post-election political commentaries from 2024–2026. Thematic analysis is applied to examine youth political engagement patterns, policy influences, and institutional responses to youth advocacy.

III. EVOLUTION OF YOUTH POLITICAL ACTION IN MALAWI

A. Pre-2025 Mobilization and Organizing

Youth political mobilization in Malawi intensified ahead of the 2025 elections, with groups such as the Young Politicians Union (YPU) advocating for increased youth representation among candidates and policy influence.¹³ YPU identified structural barriers within party systems and campaigned for reforms to level the playing field for young aspirants.¹⁴

B. Institutional Support and Advocacy Frameworks

Several youth-focused civil society coalitions coordinated national initiatives such as the Malawi Youth Manifesto 2025–2030, a strategic document shaped by consultations with thousands of young Malawians to articulate youth priorities across education, employment, governance, climate action, and digital inclusion.

IV. YOUTH PARTICIPATION IN THE 2025 ELECTIONS AND POLICY IMPACT

A. Increased Youth Representation

The 2025 electoral cycle resulted in an increased number of young Members of Parliament (MPs) elected to Malawi's National Assembly, signaling a shift toward generational inclusion in political institutions.¹⁶ Analysts note that this reflects broader societal demands for responsiveness and change by young voters and advocates.

B. Digital and Civic Mobilization

Youth organizations and digital campaigns played a significant role in voter education and advocacy, particularly through social media engagement and online platforms which expanded political dialogue across diverse demographic groups.¹⁷ The use of digital tools allowed youth to counter misinformation, promote issue-based political discussion, and hold leaders publicly accountable — an emerging feature of Malawi's civic space.

C. Election Dialogues and Policy Platforms

Youth-centered policy dialogues — such as Presidential Youth Dialogues — provided spaces for young voices to engage directly with political leaders on policy priorities including job creation, education reform, technology adoption, and health services.¹⁸ These interactions helped elevate youth-driven policy items into the national conversation, influencing political party manifestos and commitments.

V. CONTRIBUTIONS OF YOUTH MOVEMENTS TO POLICY REFORM

A. Shaping the National Policy Agenda

Youth activism contributed to elevating issues like employment, education quality, health access, and climate change in public policy dialogues.¹⁸ The 2025–2030 Youth Manifesto explicitly calls for youth inclusion in governance structures and articulates policy priorities that extend beyond election cycles into broader legislative reform frameworks.¹

B. Institutionalizing Youth Engagement

Through sustained campaigns, youth movements have pressured government and institutions to acknowledge youth as key stakeholders in governance. This influence is reflected in policy

discussions and consultative processes aimed at aligning national strategies with youth-driven developmental objectives.

VI. CHALLENGES LIMITING YOUTH INCLUSION

Despite progress, several constraints hinder the full translation of youth activism into policy influence:

Table 1: Challenges Faced by Youth in Shaping Policy Reform

Challenge	Explanation	Implication
Structural Barriers	Party systems and nomination rules disadvantage youth aspirants	Limits youth representation
Economic Constraints	High campaign costs and financial exclusion	Reduces participation viability
Tokenism	Youth given symbolic roles rather than substantive positions	Weakens policy influence
Digital Divide	Unequal access to online platforms	Restricts broad engagement

Youth and Society (YAS) organizations have highlighted that many young leaders struggle to access decision-making spaces because some positions meant for youth are held by older individuals, diluting representation and impact.¹⁸ Financial limitations also remain a persistent hurdle, as many youth lack resources to campaign effectively, making political competition inequitable.¹²

VII. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORKS: YOUTH POLITICAL INCLUSION AND DEMOCRACY

Democratic theory emphasizes that inclusive governance requires that all significant demographic groups — including youth — have substantive opportunities to influence policy and institutional decisions. This article situates youth political movements within participatory democracy frameworks, which argue that meaningful political inclusion leads to better public policy outcomes and legitimizes democratic systems.

VIII. OPPORTUNITIES AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS

A. Institutional Reforms and Quota Discussions

There is growing advocacy for institutional reforms that would require political parties and public institutions to adopt youth inclusion quotas and mentorship structures to support emerging leaders.

B. Digital and Civic Education

Expanding digital civic education programs, such as the Ndale M'manja WhatsApp Chatbot — empowers more youth with political knowledge and engagement tools.¹⁰ Scaling similar digital innovations can democratize access to political information and strengthen civic participation.

C. Building Strategic Partnerships

Youth movements are increasingly partnering with international and local civil society organizations to secure resources, expand outreach, and strengthen organizational capacities that sustain long-term policy advocacy.

IX. CONCLUSION

Youth-led political movements are reshaping Malawi's governance landscape by amplifying youth priorities, influencing policy discourse, and demanding greater representation in formal political structures. The post-2025 democratic context has expanded opportunities for young Malawians to contribute to policy debates, but significant challenges persist, requiring strategic reforms and sustained investment in youth empowerment.

REFERENCES

1. Girls Activist Youth Organisation (GAYO). Malawi Youth Manifesto 2025–2030: A roadmap placing youth at the centre of national policy and development. GAYO Malawi (2025).
2. European External Action Service (EEAS). Promoting gender-transformative and youth-inclusive democracy in Malawi, EU–Malawi partnership (2024).
3. Capital Radio Malawi. Youth Politicians Union calls for increased youth participation in 2025 elections (2025).
4. Times Group. Fresh perspectives in parliament as young leaders take seats after 2025 elections (2026).
5. AllAfrica. Malawi youth form own political party to contest 2025 elections (2024).
6. 247Malawi News. Youth and Society highlights representation issues limiting youth participation (2025).
7. Malawi Guardian. Lessons from 2025 elections: youth participation and media engagement (2025).
8. Malawian National Youth in Politics. Digital civic tools and leadership training initiatives for young Malawians (2025).