



Vol. 1, No. 1, 2025

MALAWI JOURNAL OF POLITICS AND PUBLIC AFFAIRS

A Journal of the Political Science Association

ARTICLES

**Editorial Foreword: Reflections on Governance, Trust, and
Policy Horizons in Malawi**

Happy Mickson Kayuni and Boniface Dulani

**Ideal Deal? — Rethinking The 1954 Anglo-Portuguese
Agreement**

Dan Kuwali

**Political Party Systems and Their Influence on Policy
Horizons in Malawi and Tanzania**

Clemence Chiposa Alfazema

**Political Patronage as a Form of Political Corruption and
Its Implication for Public Service**

Bernadette Malunga and Ngcimezile Mweso

Political Trust in Malawi Amidst Covid-19 Pandemic

Chisomo Magawa

**Democratization and Anti-Corruption: Lessons from
Malawi's Political Transition**

Audetter Masaninga

ISSN : 3105-224X

**Published by Political Science Association in Conjunction with
Politics & Government Department of the University of Malawi**

Political Trust in Malawi Amidst Covid-19 Pandemic

Chisomo Magawa¹

Abstract

The COVID-19 pandemic highlighted various social and political issues that affected public trust in state governments. This paper explores political trust in Malawi during the pandemic. The study analyzes public opinion data to assess COVID-19's effect on political trust in the country. The findings indicate that the pandemic led to increased distrust in the political system, largely due to misinformation and perceived mishandling of the situation. These factors contributed to a decline in political trust, leaving decision-makers struggling to respond effectively to the pandemic.

Keywords: COVID-19, Political trust, Government, Trust, Malawi.

1.0 Introduction

Political trust refers to citizens' confidence in their government and political institutions to act in the public's best interest, make fair decisions, and effectively manage public affairs (Vallier, 2020). It reflects a belief that political authorities are competent, transparent, and uphold the law. Political trust is crucial for fostering civic engagement, policy compliance, and social stability, especially during crises like pandemics. On the other hand, low political trust can lead to disillusionment with the government, public protests, and diminished participation in political processes. Political trust is a crucial component in the relationship between citizens

and their government, reflecting the confidence that the populace has in political institutions to act in their best interest, make equitable decisions, and effectively manage public affairs. It embodies a belief that political authorities are competent, transparent, and uphold the law. Political trust is particularly vital during crises like the COVID-19 pandemic, where effective governance and communication are essential for maintaining social stability and ensuring public compliance with health measures. In the context of Malawi, the COVID-19 pandemic exposed significant challenges in governance, revealing not only technical but also socio-political hurdles that hindered effective crisis management. It should be emphasized that the interplay of economic performance, historical scandals, and public perception has significantly influenced the country's political trust levels. For instance, Figure 1 below shows data collected by Afrobarometer from 2003 to 2022. The data shows a marked increase in trust towards the ruling party in 2008, coinciding with Malawi being recognized as the second-fastest-growing economy globally. However, this trust experienced a notable decline during the Cash Gate scandal in 2013, severely undermining public confidence in the government. The erosion of trust became even more pronounced with the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020, as the government's response to the crisis, compounded by socio-economic impacts and global uncertainty, contributed to further deterioration in political trust. In this context, citizens relied heavily on their governments for credible information and guidance, making effective communication from the government essential for public compliance with health measures.

¹ Institute of Public Opinion and Research (IPOR),
Zomba, Malawi
Email: chisomomagawa@gmail.com

Trust in ruling and opposition parties in Malawi

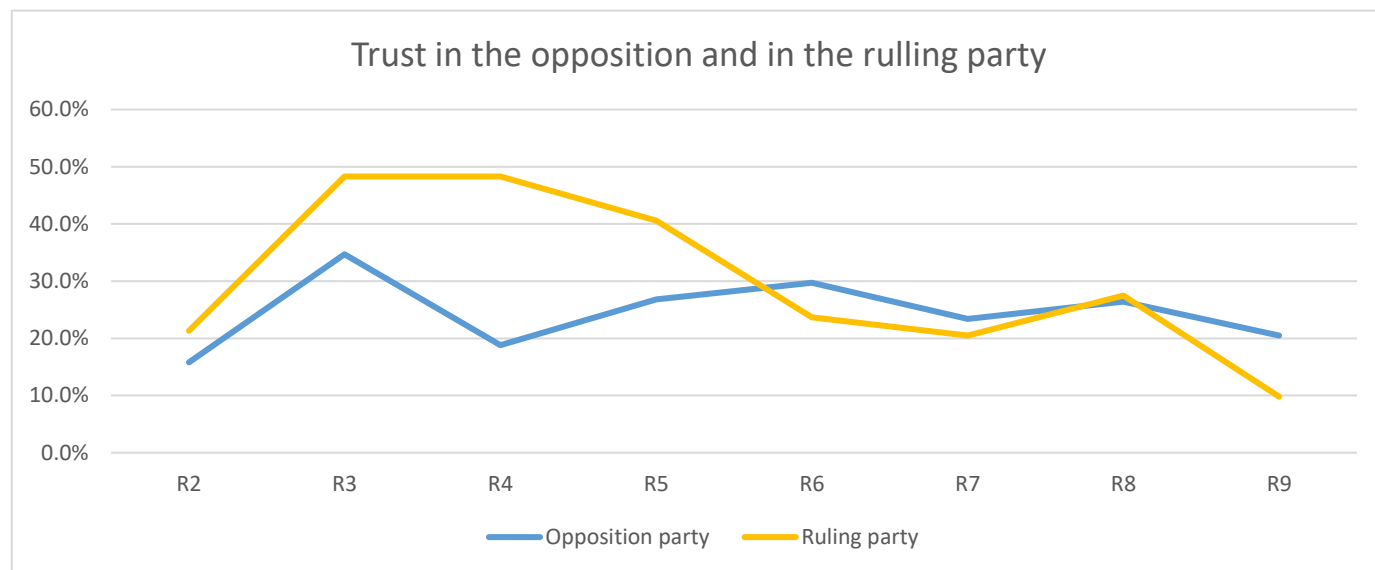


Figure 1: Analysis of Trust Trends in Malawian Political Parties

Source of data: Authors' construction using Afrobarometer data

The governance of the COVID-19 pandemic in Malawi required a nuanced understanding of socio-demographic factors, media representations, and political dynamics, which shaped public trust and influenced the government's ability to manage the crisis. The effectiveness of pandemic governance depended on an adaptive learning approach that integrated public health knowledge with socio-political considerations. Therefore, this study aims to analyze the trends in political trust in Malawi during the COVID-19 pandemic, assess the role of institutional trust theory in understanding the relationship between government actions and public trust, and evaluate the effectiveness of government communication and transparency in maintaining public trust and compliance with health measures. By addressing these objectives, the research seeks to provide insights into the dynamics of trust and its significance in crisis management, highlighting the critical need for transparent and responsive leadership in fostering public confidence in institutions.

2.0 Literature review

The literature on political trust underscores its importance in fostering civic engagement, policy compliance, and social stability, particularly during crises. Political trust is influenced by several factors, including institutional performance, transparency, and accountability (Hetherington, 1998; Miller & Listhaug, 1990). During public health crises, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, institutional trust becomes even more critical. Studies show that trust in government institutions correlates with higher compliance with health directives and improved

public health outcomes (Devine et al., 2021; Greer et al., 2021). Capano et al. (2020) discussed how variations in pre-pandemic resources and government actions across different countries affected their pandemic responses, highlighting the role of institutional capacity in shaping public trust. Devine et al. (2021) found that trust in government institutions is associated with higher compliance with health directives and lower mortality rates during the COVID-19 pandemic, reinforcing the importance of political trust in managing public health crises. Blair et al. (2017) provide evidence that trust in government and healthcare actors is crucial for public compliance with health measures, particularly in low-resource settings. Greer et al. (2021) show that countries with higher citizen engagement in policy institutions responded more swiftly and effectively to the pandemic, demonstrating the importance of institutional trust in public health responses. Hetherington (1998) explores the political relevance of trust and its impact on governance and policy effectiveness. Rothstein & Uslaner (2005) examine the relationship between social trust, corruption, and institutional trust, emphasizing the importance of fairness and transparency. Levi & Stoker (2000) highlight the importance of political trust and trustworthiness in maintaining effective governance and public compliance. Siegrist & Zingg (2014) investigate the role of trust in managing public health risks, emphasizing its importance in achieving public compliance during health crises. OECD (2020) provides guidelines on maintaining and enhancing institutional trust during crises, emphasizing transparency and accountability. Guriev & Melnikov (2016) discuss the erosion of political trust in developing

countries, focusing on the impact of corruption and ineffective governance.

2.1 Institutional Trust Theory

The institution theory suggests that trust is built when institutions are perceived as effective, fair, and transparent. Conversely, trust is eroded when institutions fail to meet these criteria. Institutional trust is defined as the public's confidence in the ability of political institutions to perform their functions effectively and fairly (Hetherington, 1998). Key components influencing institutional trust include institutional performance, transparency, accountability, and fairness (Miller & Listhaug, 1990; Levi & Stoker, 2000). During public health crises, institutional trust becomes particularly crucial. Effective management of a crisis like the COVID-19 pandemic depends on the public's willingness to comply with health directives and trust the information provided by the government (Rothstein & Uslaner, 2005; Levi, 1997). Trust in political institutions influences how citizens perceive government actions and their willingness to follow public health guidelines, which is critical for controlling disease spread (Devine et al., 2021; Siegrist & Zingg, 2014). Trust is built through consistent and effective institutional performance, transparent communication, and accountability (Levi & Stoker, 2000; Cook, Hardin, & Levi, 2005). Trust is eroded by corruption, perceived inefficiency, and lack of transparency. In Malawi, the government's response to the COVID-19 pandemic and its overall management of the crisis significantly influenced public trust. Effective communication, transparency in handling the pandemic, and perceived fairness in the distribution of resources were critical factors (Greer et al., 2021; OECD, 2020). As noted by (Guriev & Melnikov, 2016) historical mistrust in political institutions, compounded by any perceived shortcomings in the government's pandemic response, could exacerbate the erosion of trust as it was in Malawi during the pandemic.

3.0 Methodology

This study utilized a mixed-methods approach, combining qualitative and quantitative data to analyze political trust in Malawi during the COVID-19 pandemic. Qualitative data were collected through a desk review of academic literature, focusing on journals, books, and articles related to political trust, and the pandemic. Documents were selected based on their relevance to the research questions, and credibility. Quantitative data were sourced from Afrobarometer, specifically from rounds eight and nine of its studies conducted in Malawi. Afrobarometer is known for its rigorous and systematic data collection, using face-to-face interviews conducted in respondents' homes and their preferred language. Afrobarometer employs a stratified multistage sampling technique, where the population is divided into strata

based on geographic, demographic, and socioeconomic factors, ensuring proportional representation of all population groups. A random sampling process is used within each stratum to select households and individuals. The sample size for each survey cycle ranged from 1,200 to 2,400 respondents, representing adult citizens aged 18 years or older. Afrobarometer adheres to Ethical considerations, with all participants providing informed consent and understanding the nature of the study and their right to withdraw without penalty. Respondent confidentiality is maintained by excluding personal identifiers from the dataset, ensuring anonymity. For data analysis, qualitative data were analyzed using thematic analysis, where patterns related to political trust and perceptions of governance during the pandemic were identified and examined. Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics to summarize public trust in political institutions and the government's handling of the pandemic. The study was subject to limitations, including the potential exclusion of unpublished or ongoing research in the qualitative review and the limitation of Afrobarometer data to specific points in time, which may not fully capture shifts in political trust over the entire course of the pandemic.

4.0 Findings and Discussion

At the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, countries around the world found themselves facing a crisis with varying degrees of preparedness and resources. The response to the pandemic was influenced by a multitude of factors, including the level of public trust, governmental policies, and the level of public engagement with policy institutions. Research by Capano et al. (2020) highlights the substantial variations among countries in terms of both pre-pandemic resources and government actions. These differences interacted with one another, shaping the trajectory of the pandemic response. For instance, countries where citizens were more actively engaged in policy institutions tended to implement faster and more effective public health measures. These measures included widespread testing programs, business shutdowns, economic stimulus packages, and border closures (Greer et al., 2021). Consequently, these countries experienced higher levels of public cooperation in adhering to these measures. The case of Malawi exemplifies the importance of support and trust between various governments, social institutions, community organizations, and the public during the pandemic. The COVID-19 pandemic served as a profound test of governmental trust in Malawi, as well as in neighboring countries. Trust in the ruling party and key institutions became a critical factor in determining the success or failure of the pandemic response. In Malawi, the already fragile relationship between the government and its citizens was further strained, leading to widespread non-compliance with health measures,

vaccine hesitancy, and increased public resistance. This section explores how deep-seated mistrust in the government during the pandemic hampered efforts to manage the crisis and exacerbated the challenges Malawi faced, as reflected in the lower levels of trust compared to neighboring countries like Tanzania, Mozambique, Zimbabwe, and Zambia.

4.1 Government response, public opinion, and Trust

Trust in government plays a pivotal role in managing public health crises, especially during a pandemic where compliance with guidelines and the uptake of health interventions are critical. In times of uncertainty, citizens rely heavily on government communication and leadership to navigate challenges and protect their well-being. However, when trust in government is lacking, it can severely hamper efforts to control the spread of disease and implement effective relief measures. Mistrust can lead to non-compliance with public health guidelines, skepticism toward information provided by authorities, and even resistance to life-saving interventions like vaccination.

Figure 2 below shows that less than 10% of the population who became ill or tested positive for COVID-19 trusted the ruling party a lot. This indicates a deep-seated mistrust in the government among those directly affected by the pandemic. The majority of the population's mistrust in the government significantly hindered its relief efforts, posing a substantial concern for Malawi in dealing with the pandemic. When a vast majority of the population does not trust the government, especially during a crisis like a pandemic, it creates significant challenges. One of the primary issues is that people may not comply with government guidelines and health measures, such as wearing masks and practicing social distancing. People who mistrust the government are less likely to believe or act on the information provided. This skepticism can cause individuals to ignore important health advisories, seek out alternative sources of information that may be inaccurate, and ultimately make decisions that put themselves and others at greater risk. This widespread mistrust also affected the success of vaccination campaigns, which are vital in controlling the pandemic. If people do not trust the government, they may be hesitant or outright refuse to be vaccinated, even if the vaccines are proven safe and effective.

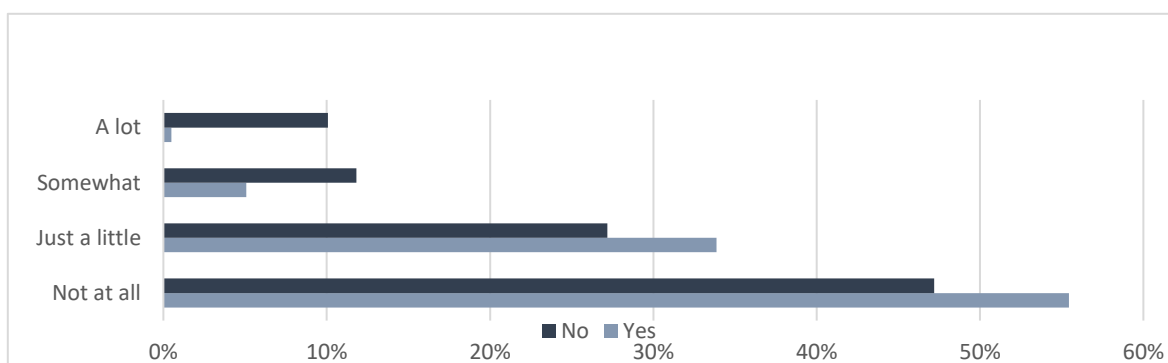


Figure 2: Trust in the ruling party in Malawi during the pandemic

Source of data: Authors' construction using Afrobarometer round 9 data.

Graph 3 below shows that Malawi, Zimbabwe, and Zambia had a small proportion of people who trusted the ruling party during the COVID-19 pandemic and Tanzania had the highest proportion. Trust in government, meaning the willingness of citizens to rely on government to keep a commitment, mainly reflects government performance: citizens observe the actions of political actors. For example, their ability to manage the pandemic, how they manage the economy, and whether they are involved in scandals, and based on these subjective performance criteria, they decide how much to trust (Keele 2007). Trust can also be achieved through the provision of public goods or social support, which was important during the pandemic. Governments need to

build trust, as this enables them to rule and manage pandemics without coercion, thereby lowering transaction costs and increasing their efficiency and effectiveness.

The COVID-19 pandemic has been a test of government trust in Malawi and its neighbors. During all stages of addressing the pandemic, including containment, mitigation, and recovery, trust in the ruling party, the president, public institutions, and compliance has been vital to any given government's ability to respond. This is particularly important, as contact restrictions, quarantines, and testing are invasive or at least bothersome, but non-compliance can be deadly. Recent studies have highlighted an important connection

between trust in government institutions and the outcomes of the coronavirus pandemic. Specifically, they show that when individuals have greater confidence in their government, they are more likely to adhere to health guidelines and regulations. This increased compliance, in turn, is associated with lower mortality rates during the crisis. Overall, the findings suggest that fostering trust in governmental leadership can lead to better public health responses and outcomes in challenging times (Devine et al. 2021). Yet, trust in government is also incredibly important for an inclusive recovery, for example, citizens trust their governments to ensure that COVID-19 vaccines are safe. Vaccine hesitancy was a significant challenge faced by many countries, not just in Africa or Malawi. This issue often arises from misinformation, historical mistrust, and cultural beliefs. The COVID-19 pandemic highlighted the importance of trust in

government for effective public health responses. When citizens have confidence in their leaders, vaccine uptake tends to be higher, while skepticism can hinder efforts to control the virus. Addressing these trust issues is essential for improving vaccine acceptance and health outcomes. Countries where trust in the president was high such as Tanzania had high levels of compliance and praise for their measures. Governments of countries that entered the crisis with already low levels of trust in the president and state institutions, however, faced stronger resistance and experienced more upheaval. In Malawi, for example, which ranked lowest in trust, lockdown measures were not only challenged with a court case but even sparked violence. The erosion of trust played a crucial role in the failure of former Malawian president Peter Mutharika's re-election.

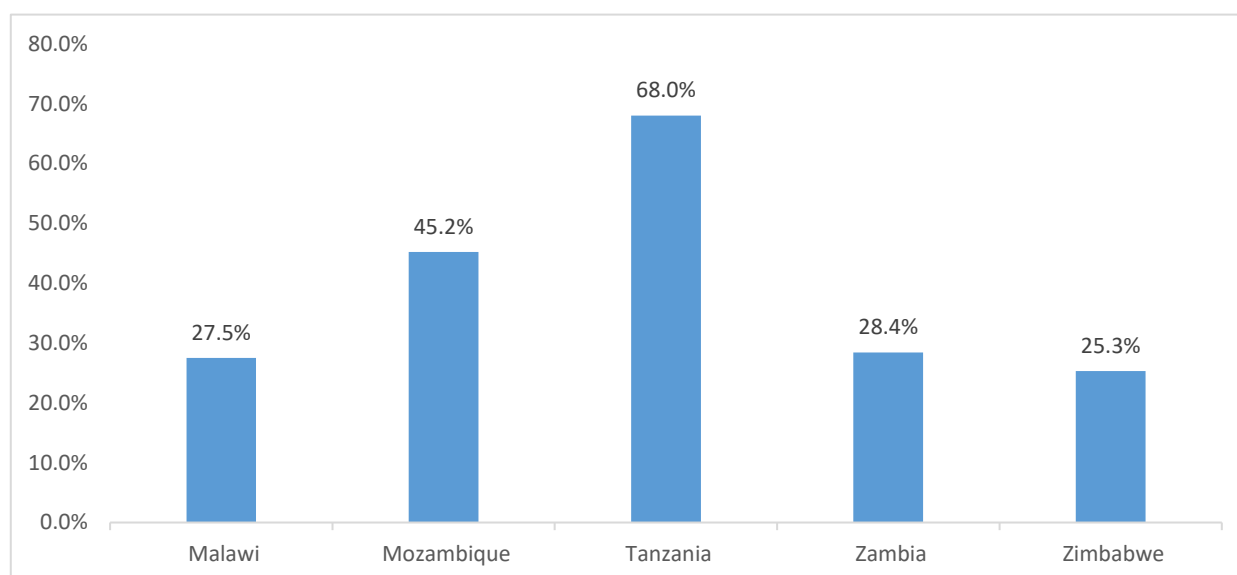


Figure 3: Trust in the ruling party a lot in Malawi and its neighboring countries during the COVID-19 period

Source of data: Authors' construction using Afrobarometer round 9 data.

4.2 Crisis communication and media influence on political support and trust

Communication strategies employed by political leaders impacted public trust and support during the crisis and the role of media coverage, misinformation, and social media also shaped public perceptions, attitudes, and support towards political leaders and policies during COVID-19 in Malawi. The experience of dealing with the COVID-19 pandemic suggests that delays in response and action combined with incorrect messages, non-uptake of preventive measures, and ill-advised epidemic control approaches disrupted public health systems under huge pressure. The COVID-19 pandemic has served as both a public health challenge and a unique opportunity for

social progress. The effective adoption of recommended public health behaviors hinges on the collaboration between policy, social communication, and public attitudes. Policymakers have had to navigate complex decisions about their responses, and the varied levels of urgency and accuracy in information dissemination have influenced individual behaviors and attitudes.

This experience highlights the importance of having a responsive political system at all levels of government, capable of swiftly processing information to develop and implement science-based policies that can adapt to changing circumstances. Moreover, fostering a knowledgeable and engaged population is crucial. When people are active participants in their communities and political systems, it strengthens the societal response. The

success of this collaborative effort depends on a range of public resources, including robust institutions, effective infrastructure, comprehensive education systems, accessible healthcare providers, and supportive community programs. The lessons gleaned from managing the COVID-19 pandemic emphasize that proactive communication, timely action, and the promotion of preventive measures can significantly enhance public health systems, even amidst pressure, as evidenced in various regions, including Europe and the USA. By learning from these experiences, we can build a more resilient and responsive public health landscape for the future (Govender and Poku, 2020).

4.3 Trust, Partisanship, Religious Behaviors, and Vaccine Hesitancy

The COVID-19 pandemic has had major political consequences, especially on the trust of the incumbents in Malawi. The government was punished in terms of political approval when COVID-19 infections accelerated, particularly in the absence of effective lockdown measures. Furthermore, citizens' trust in government, as well as compliance with imposed rules and acceptance of new norms and values, was fundamental to the implementation of valid pandemic governance solutions, since government recommendations were subject to frequent reformulations that tested the population's understanding and comprehension (Martínez-Córdoba, Benito, & García-Sánchez, 2021).

Since the 2019 general elections, Malawi experienced political unrest. Citizens protested against the chairperson of the Malawi Electoral Commission, Justice Jane Ansah, who declared Peter Mutharika the president-elect. The Human Rights Defenders Coalition, an organization dedicated to championing human rights, led the Anti-Jane Ansah Movement, which encouraged thousands of Malawians to take to the streets in protest (Chilanga et al, 2020). As demonstrations grew in number, leaders of the opposition sought the intervention of the high court in pursuit of justice. On February 3, 2020, the high court decided to annul the presidential results of the May 2019 general elections and called for new elections to be conducted within a 150-day timeframe. (Chilanga et al, 2020). It is during this period of political unrest that COVID-19 emerged in Malawi. Politicians facing an ethical dilemma made a judgment call on whether to conduct public political rallies. Politicians opted for massive open public rallies, disregarding COVID-19 mitigation measures, and this suggests that either they had a lower risk perception or that politicians prioritized their political interests over public health concerns (Gikandi, 2020). Both government and opposition parties were holding mass campaigns for the re-run elections, with minimal observance of preventive measures laid out for

COVID-19. Even though efforts were sometimes made at political rallies to make hand, washing water available, most people did not wear masks or observe any preventive measure, and this defeated the basic pandemic control principles (Masina, 2020).

Two contrasting views emerged among Malawians regarding their perceptions of the risk of contracting COVID-19, influenced by their political affiliations. Those aligned with the ruling party believed that a high-risk perception of COVID-19 could benefit the government, as it would allow them to cancel the presidential elections scheduled for June 2020 and remain in power. However, this belief was seen as potentially undermining the opposition's ability to challenge the ruling party through democratic elections. Supporters of the ruling party argued that COVID-19 was indeed a serious threat and that the government's planned prevention measures were in the best interest of the public. They held a strong belief that they were at high risk of contracting the virus, which justified the implementation of lockdowns and other strict measures (Gikandi, 2020).

The opposition parties reduced concerted government efforts towards combating COVID-19. They challenged the presidential order of lockdown, and they started their public political campaigns. Supporters from political opposition parties claimed that there were no COVID-19 cases in Malawi as they argued that the then government wanted to capitalize on the crisis. Opposition political leaders encouraged people to patronize their political rallies (Chilanga, et al, 2020). This approach undermined risk perception among supporters of the opposition parties. Political affiliation with opposition alliance parties and distrust in the government seemed to lower the self-perceived risk of contracting the disease. There was a lack of trust in the government.

Malawi is deeply a religious country with most citizens affiliated with religious groups (Chilanga et al, 2022). Religion also played a crucial role in the governance of the pandemic in Malawi especially on the existence of the pandemic, the safety of the vaccine, and the adherence to preventive measures. The graph below explains how Malawians from different religious groups responded to a question in which they were asked how they trusted the safety of the COVID-19 vaccine across major religions, which the government was encouraging the citizens to receive. The study reveals a strong relationship between religious beliefs and the level of trust in government-provided COVID-19 vaccines. Disaggregating the data according to religion is justified due to the distinct differences in religious ideologies that influence vaccine acceptance and preventive behaviors. The table below shows that only 18.4% of Christians and 12.4% of Muslims which are the dominant religious groups trusted the government provision of the COVID-19 vaccine and

35.5% of Christians and 40% of Muslims did not at all trust the safety of the government that vaccine at all. The table shows the dominant religion. Religious ideologies that most influenced risk reduction measures were the belief that this disease is a punishment from God, or a fulfillment of biblical narratives and that healing, and prevention can come from being steadfast in prayers (Chilanga et al, 2022). On the other hand, some religions did not believe that the pandemic existed and discouraged their members from being tested and vaccinated for COVID-19. It is the members of these churches who were

overly critical of the incumbent government, and it was difficult for them to support the government as they deem it to be accepting evil to prevail in the country. They had the belief that taking the vaccine is equivalent to taking the mark of the beast as written in the bible, or that they will turn to Zombies after taking the jab. Other religious leaders considered themselves immune to the infection. People with strong religious faith did not see themselves at risk. Consequently, they resisted taking preventive measures and COVID-19 vaccine to mitigate the spread of the disease.

Table 1: Trust in the government to ensure the safety of the COVID-19 vaccine by people from Different religions in Malawi

Trust govt to ensure safety of COVID-19 vaccine			
Religion condensed			
Category	Christian	Muslim	Other
Not at all	35.5%	40.7%	18.1%
Just a little	26.9%	27.8%	25.2%
Somewhat	13.3%	8.8%	10.0%
A lot	18.4%	12.4%	39.8%

Source of data: Authors' construction using Afrobarometer round 9 data.

In the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, political trust emerged as a critical factor influencing public health outcomes in Malawi. The public's perception of the government's inability to effectively manage the pandemic had a direct impact on their willingness to accept and participate in health interventions, such as vaccinations. A significant portion of the population expressed concerns about the safety of the COVID-19 vaccine, which likely contributed to lower vaccination rates. This highlights the broader implications of trust in political institutions on the success of health campaigns and the overall public response during crises.

Figure 5A shows that less than 20% of Malawians trusted the safety of the COVID-19 vaccine. This statistic reflects a significant lack of trust in the information and assurances provided by the government. Political trust plays a crucial role in public health initiatives, particularly in situations like a pandemic where government-led campaigns are essential for widespread vaccine distribution and acceptance.

Figure 5B indicates that only 28% of Malawians received the COVID-19 vaccination. This relatively low vaccination rate can be intricately linked to the aforementioned distrust in vaccine safety. When citizens lack confidence in their political leaders and institutions, they are less likely to believe in the safety and efficacy of

government-endorsed health measures, such as vaccinations.

The relationship between the two graphs suggests that the low levels of political trust in Malawi significantly hindered the effectiveness of the COVID-19 vaccination campaign. Distrust in the government stems from how the government started to manage the pandemic from its onset. When political trust is low, public health messages are often met with skepticism, and compliance with health directives decreases.

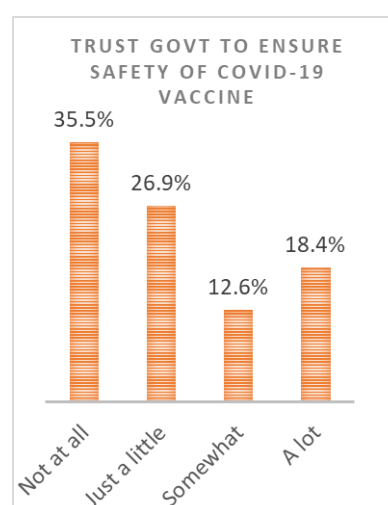


Figure 5A

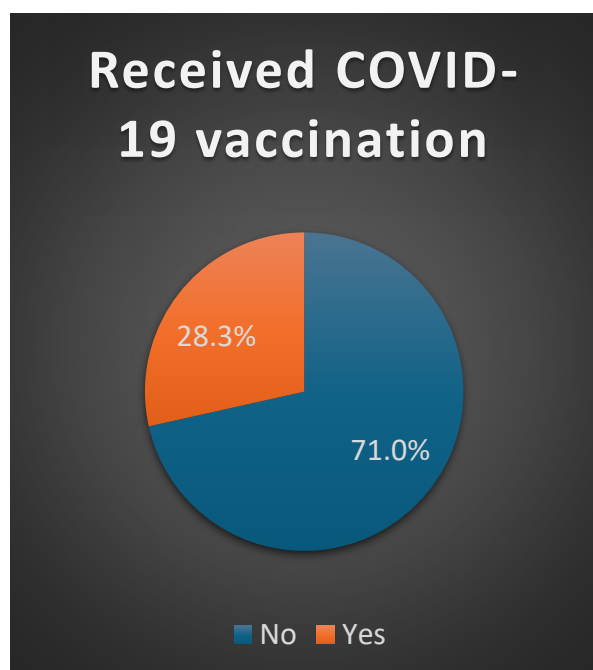


Figure 5B.

Source of data: Authors' construction using Afrobarometer round 9 data.

4.4 Trust in Government on the Management of COVID-19 Pandemic

Public perceptions of government performance during crises are often shaped by levels of political trust, as seen in the case of Malawi's response to the COVID-19 pandemic. The way citizens evaluated the management of the pandemic was significantly influenced by their trust in political leadership, with those lacking trust in the president or ruling party being more critical of the government's actions. Conversely, those with higher trust tended to view the government's response more favorably. This polarization in opinion underscores the powerful role that political allegiance and trust play in shaping how citizens interpret and react to crisis management efforts.

Figure 6A highlights the perceptions of how well the COVID-19 pandemic was managed in Malawi about trust in the president. Among those who did not trust the president at all, 60% believed that the pandemic was managed well. In contrast, only 17% of those who trusted the president a lot felt that the pandemic was managed well. This finding suggests that distrust in the president might have led to a more critical assessment of his actions.

Figure 6B examines the perceptions of pandemic management about trust in the ruling party. Among those who did not trust the ruling party at all, 62% thought that the pandemic was poorly managed. Conversely, only 13% of those who had a lot of trust in the ruling party thought that the pandemic was poorly managed. This data

indicates a significant polarization in opinions based on political trust. High trust in the ruling party correlates with a more favorable view of the pandemic response, suggesting that political allegiance strongly influences perceptions of government performance.

These figures together underscore the critical role of political trust in shaping public perceptions of crisis management. During the COVID-19 pandemic, trust in political leadership and ruling parties directly influenced how citizens evaluated the government's actions. Those with low trust in the president or the ruling party were more likely to scrutinize and potentially appreciate any positive outcomes, whereas those with high trust were predisposed to view the government's actions more favorably. The implications of these findings suggest that efforts to improve trust in government could lead to more unified public support for health measures and crisis response strategies. Building this trust requires transparent communication, accountability, and consistent demonstration of competence. Additionally, engaging with a broad spectrum of political and community leaders to endorse and communicate government actions can help bridge the trust gap. During the COVID-19 period, these dynamics of trust influenced not just public opinion but likely compliance with health directives and vaccination campaigns as well. A government that is trusted can mobilize public support more effectively, implement health measures more smoothly, and achieve better health outcomes (Mansoor, 2021). Conversely, a lack of trust can hinder these efforts, as seen in the varying perceptions and acceptance of pandemic management strategies in Malawi.

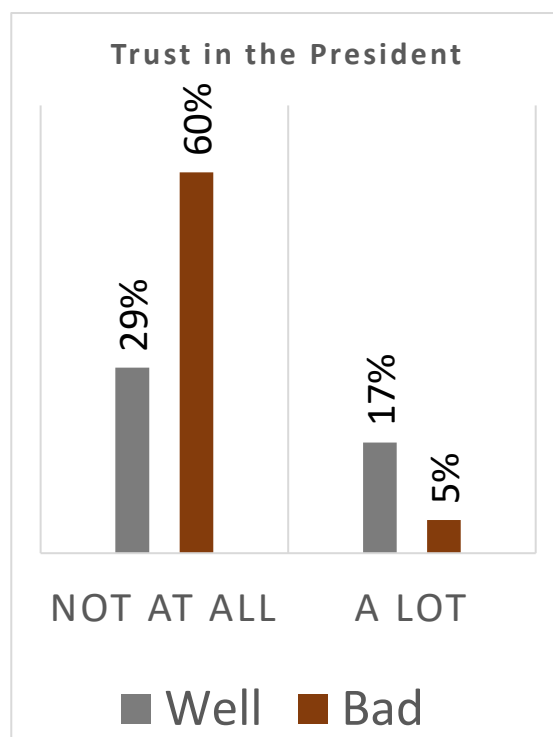


Figure 6A

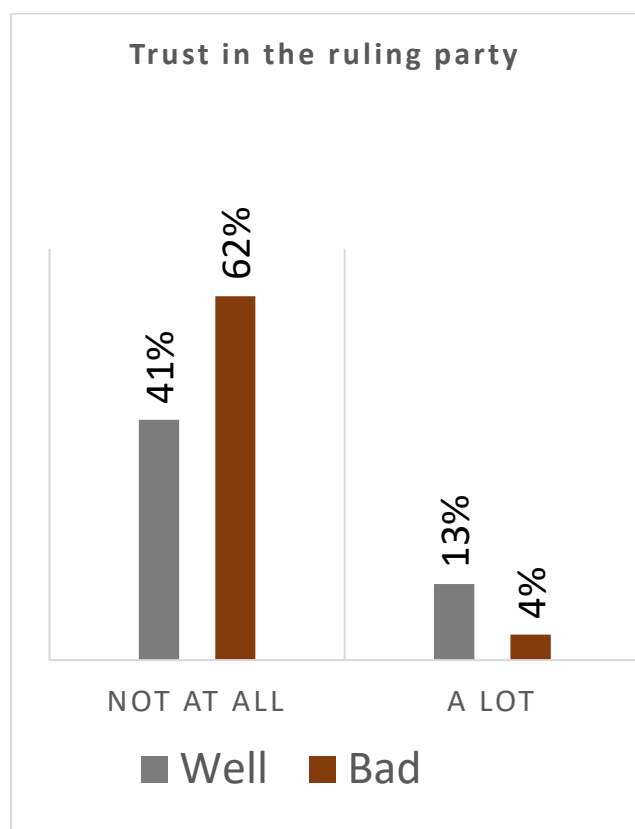


Figure 6B.

Source of data: Authors' construction using Afrobarometer round 9 data

Table 2A below shows that for those who said they did not at all trust the president 43.28 % of them believed that there was a lot of COVID-19 corruption in Malawi during the COVID-19 pandemic. Table 2B shows that for those who said they do not at all trust the ruling party 53.82% of them believed a lot that there was COVID-19 corruption during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The tables show that most Malawians thought there was a high level of corruption related to the COVID-19 pandemic. This belief was backed up by some serious incidents. For example, two government ministers were caught on public camera talking about how they would split up money meant for helping with COVID-19. This made people upset because it showed that some government officials were being dishonest. There was another rumor that over 6 billion Kwacha, which was supposed to be used for dealing with the pandemic, had been stolen through corrupt means. This made people even more suspicious and angry. As a result, some government workers were arrested. This made people start thinking that maybe the government was using the pandemic as an excuse to misuse money. Additionally, because of these incidents, doubts were raised about the honesty of some District Commissioners (DCs) and Controlling Officers in the management of the pandemic

funds. In response, these officials were suspended from their positions. These incidents made people lose trust in the government's ability to handle the pandemic properly. It showed that there needed to be better ways to stop corruption and make sure that money meant for helping people during the pandemic was used honestly and effectively. Rampant corruption reduced public trust in the government in Malawi, which undermined citizens' perceived risk of contracting COVID-19. Donor organizations provided COVID-19 funds to countries that registered the virus in Africa. The people felt politicians would use COVID-19 funds for self-enrichment. Other people speculated that the government fabricated that there is COVID-19 in Malawi for them to get rich out of this pandemic (Chilanga et al, 2022).

Table 2A and Table 2B: Level of COVID-19 corruption

Level of COVID-19 corruption and Trust in the president

Level of COVID-19 corruption	Trust president						Total
	Not at all	Just a little	Somewhat	A lot	Refused	Don't know	
A lot	43.28	33.62	11.93	10.11	0.61	0.46	100.00
Some	32.76	37.15	18.17	11.46	0.20	0.26	100.00
A little	23.52	36.64	17.60	18.99	3.25	0.00	100.00
None	31.16	34.31	11.13	22.81	0.00	0.60	100.00
Refused	79.49	13.69	0.00	0.00	6.82	0.00	100.00
Don't know	34.35	25.68	15.02	18.40	0.35	6.21	100.00

Level of COVID-19 corruption	Trust the ruling party						Total
	Not at all	Just a little	Somewhat	A lot	Refused	Don't know	
A lot	53.82	28.78	9.52	5.43	0.45	2.00	100.00
Some	43.63	26.79	15.07	12.52	0.20	1.79	100.00
A little	38.32	35.67	11.20	11.19	3.25	0.36	100.00
None	25.75	29.43	12.23	31.34	0.00	1.24	100.00
Refused	93.18	0.00	0.00	0.00	6.82	0.00	100.00
Don't know	39.88	19.70	16.19	14.27	0.37	9.59	100.00

Source of data: Authors' construction using Afrobarometer round 9 data

5.0 Conclusion

The paper has highlighted the critical role played by interactions in understanding the social and political dimensions of the pandemic. This understanding is crucial not only for better preparedness for future pandemics but also for comprehending the fundamental phenomena that influence outcomes in other large-scale disruptions, such as natural disasters and security crises. Trust in the government emerged as a crucial factor in maintaining political capacity and credibility during the pandemic. In times of crisis, citizens rely heavily on their government for credible information to guide their behaviors. However, the unprecedented nature of the COVID-19 pandemic challenged pre-established plans

and forecasts, presenting divergent and unforeseen requirements for its resolution. In the case of Malawi, the government faced several significant constraints in managing the pandemic. These included uncertainties among citizens regarding the adverse consequences of the pandemic, challenges in resource management, and the dissemination of accurate information about the pandemic. These constraints, in turn, affected the political support for the incumbent government. Overall, the COVID-19 pandemic underscored the importance of effective governance, public engagement, and institutional cooperation in managing crises of such magnitude. It also highlighted the need for governments to adapt swiftly to dynamic and unpredictable challenges to maintain public trust and support. The study highlights the pivotal role of government trust in shaping public perceptions and behaviors during crises, particularly in Malawi's management of the COVID-19 pandemic. Trust in government emerged as a key determinant in maintaining political credibility and capacity, influencing how citizens responded to public health measures. The pandemic exposed significant gaps in governance, resource management, and information dissemination, which in turn eroded political trust. The study recommends that the government should strengthen Information Transparency and Communication by focusing on providing clear, consistent, and transparent information during crises. Governments need to strengthen institutions to swiftly adapt to evolving crises, ensuring timely allocation of resources and efficient policy adjustments and the government should encourage public participation and fostering cooperation across institutions, this can create a more inclusive and resilient governance structure. The study is context-specific to Malawi, and the findings may not fully represent other countries with different political, economic, and social structures. Future studies should explore the role of government trust in other regions to provide broader generalizations. The reliance on perceptions and self-reported data may introduce biases, as respondents' views on government trust and pandemic management might be influenced by political leanings or misinformation. The research was conducted during a specific phase of the pandemic, and perceptions may have evolved as the crisis unfolded. A longitudinal approach could provide a more comprehensive understanding of how trust fluctuates over time. Future research could examine how government trust and public engagement in pandemic management vary across countries with different political systems and crisis management approaches.

6.0 References

- Afrobarometer Round 8, (2020) *Institutions, Leadership and Governance*.
- Afrobarometer Round 9, (2021) *COVID-19*.
- Afrobarometer Round 9, (2022) *Institutions, Leadership and Governance*.
- Blair, R.A., Morse, B.S. & Tsai, L.L., (2017) 'Public Health and Public Trust: Survey Evidence from the Ebola Virus Disease Epidemic in Liberia', *Social Science & Medicine*, Vol. 172, pp. 89-97.
- Capano, G., Hewlett, M., Jarvis, D.S., Ramesh, M. & Goal, N., (2020) 'Mobilizing Policy (In) Capacity to Fight COVID-19: Understanding Variations in State Responses', *Policy and Society*, Vol. 39, No. 3, pp. 285-308.
- Chilanga, E., Dzimbiri, M., Mwanjawala, P., Keller, A. & Mbeya, R.A., (2022) 'Religion, politics, and COVID-19 risk perception among urban residents in Malawi', *BMC Public Health*, Vol. 22, No. 1, p. 1430. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12889-022-13858-7>.
- Cook, K.S., Hardin, R. & Levi, M., (2005) *Cooperation Without Trust?*, Russell Sage Foundation.
- Devine, D., Gaskell, J., Jennings, W. & Stoker, G., (2021) 'Trust and the coronavirus pandemic: What are the consequences of and for trust? An early review of the literature', *Political Studies Review*, Vol. 19, No. 2, pp. 274-285. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1177/1478929920948684>.
- Fetzer, T., Hensel, L., Hermle, J. & Roth, C., (2020) 'Coronavirus perceptions and economic anxiety', *arXiv [preprint]*. Available at: <https://arxiv.org/abs/2003.03848> (Accessed: 27 August 2024).
- Gadabu, A., (2020) 'Malawi's response, risk factors, and preparedness for COVID-19', *North American Academic Research*, Vol. 3, pp. 44-66.
- Gikandi, H., (2020) 'Malawians vote for president (again) amid pandemic', *The World*, [Online].
- Govender, K. & Poku, N., (2021) 'COVID-19: Immediate and sustainable actions required in Africa', *HEARD*. Available at: <https://www.heard.org.za/publications-post/COVID-19-immediate-and-sustainable-actions-required-in-africa/> (Accessed: [Insert Date]).
- Greer, S.L., de Ruijter, A. & Brooks, E., (2021) 'The COVID-19 pandemic: Failing forward in public health', in Riddervold, M., Trondal, J. & Newsome, A. (Eds.), *The Palgrave Handbook of EU Crises*, Palgrave Macmillan, pp. 747-764. Available at: https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-51791-5_44.
- Greer, S.L., King, E.J., Massard da Fonseca, E. & Peralta-Santos, A., (2021) 'The Comparative Politics of

- COVID-19: The Need to Understand Government Responses', *Global Public Health*, Vol. 16, No. 8-9, pp. 1123-1136.
- Guriev, S. & Melnikov, N., (2016) 'War, Inflation, and Social Capital', *American Economic Review*, Vol. 106, No. 5, pp. 230-235.
- Hetherington, M.J., (1998) 'The Political Relevance of Political Trust', *American Political Science Review*, Vol. 92, No. 4, pp. 791-808.
- Keele, L., (2007) 'Social capital and the dynamics of trust in government', *American Journal of Political Science*, Vol. 51, pp. 241-254.
- Levi, M., (1997) *Consent, Dissent, and Patriotism*, Cambridge University Press.
- Levi, M. & Stoker, L., (2000) 'Political Trust and Trustworthiness', *Annual Review of Political Science*, Vol. 3, pp. 475-507.
- Mansoor, M., (2021) 'Citizens' trust in government as a function of good governance and government agency's provision of quality information on social media during COVID-19', *Government Information Quarterly*, Vol. 38, No. 4, p. 101597. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.giq.2021.101597>.
- Martínez-Córdoba, P.J., Benito, B. & García-Sánchez, I.M., (2021) 'Efficiency in the governance of the COVID-19 pandemic: Political and territorial factors', *Global Health*, Vol. 17, p. 113. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12992-021-00759-4>.
- Masina, L., (2020) 'Malawi COVID-19 cases rise as citizens return from South Africa', *Voice of Africa*.
- Masina, L., (2020) 'Malawi politicians ignore COVID-19 measures for elections', *Voice of Africa*, 6 May.
- Miller, A.H. & Listhaug, O., (1990) 'Political Parties and Confidence in Government: A Comparison of Norway, Sweden, and the United States', *British Journal of Political Science*, Vol. 20, No. 3, pp. 357-386.
- OECD, (2020) *Building Trust to Reinforce Democracy: Main Findings*, Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development.
- Rothstein, B. & Uslaner, E.M., (2005) 'All for All: Equality, Corruption, and Social Trust', *World Politics*, Vol. 58, No. 1, pp. 41-72.
- Siegrist, M. & Zingg, A., (2014) 'The Role of Public Trust During Pandemics: Implications for Crisis Communication', *European Psychologist*, Vol. 19, No. 1, pp. 23-32.
- Thula, M., Ju Matola, Nyasulu, T. & Nyasulu, K., (2020) *Assessment of the Impact of COVID-19 on Employment in Malawi*, Lilongwe. Available at: <https://malawi.un.org/en/89451-assessment-impact-COVID-19-employment-malawi>.
- Uslaner, E.M., (2005) *Trust and the Pandemic*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.
- Vallier, K., (2020) 'Social and political trust: Concepts, causes, and consequences', in *Trust in a Polarized Age (Online ed.)*, Oxford Academic. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1093/oso/9780190887223.003.0003>.