



Malawians admire South Africa as development model, see strong influence of U.S. and China

Afrobarometer Dispatch No. 13 | Joseph J. Chunga

Summary

South Africa ranks highest among models for Malawi's future development, according to Malawians' perceptions of international relations expressed in a recent Afrobarometer survey.

The United States is the second-most-popular model and is regarded as the most influential country in Malawi.

While acknowledging China's influence on their country, seven years after the establishment of diplomatic ties, Malawians are almost equally divided as to whether China's economic development assistance does a good job in meeting Malawi's development needs. Appreciation of China's infrastructure and business investments reflects Malawi's needs in these areas, while the quality of Chinese products is the most damaging factor for China's image.

Awareness among Malawians of the roles and activities of international organisations is limited, but there has been a significant increase in the proportion of the population that is able to evaluate such organisations as the African Union (AU), United Nations (UN), Southern African Development Community (SADC), and Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA).

Afrobarometer survey

Afrobarometer is an African-led, non-partisan research network that conducts public attitude surveys on democracy, governance, economic conditions, and related issues across more than 30 countries in Africa. Five rounds of surveys were conducted between 1999 and 2013, and Round 6 surveys are currently under way (2014-2015). Afrobarometer conducts face-to-face interviews in the language of the respondent's choice with nationally representative samples of between 1,200 and 2,400 respondents.

The Afrobarometer team in Malawi, led by the Centre for Social Research, University of Malawi, interviewed 2,400 adult Malawians from 24 March to 5 April 2014. A sample of this size yields results with a margin of error of +/-2% at a 95% confidence level. Previous surveys have been conducted in Malawi in 1999, 2003, 2005, 2008, and 2012.

Key findings

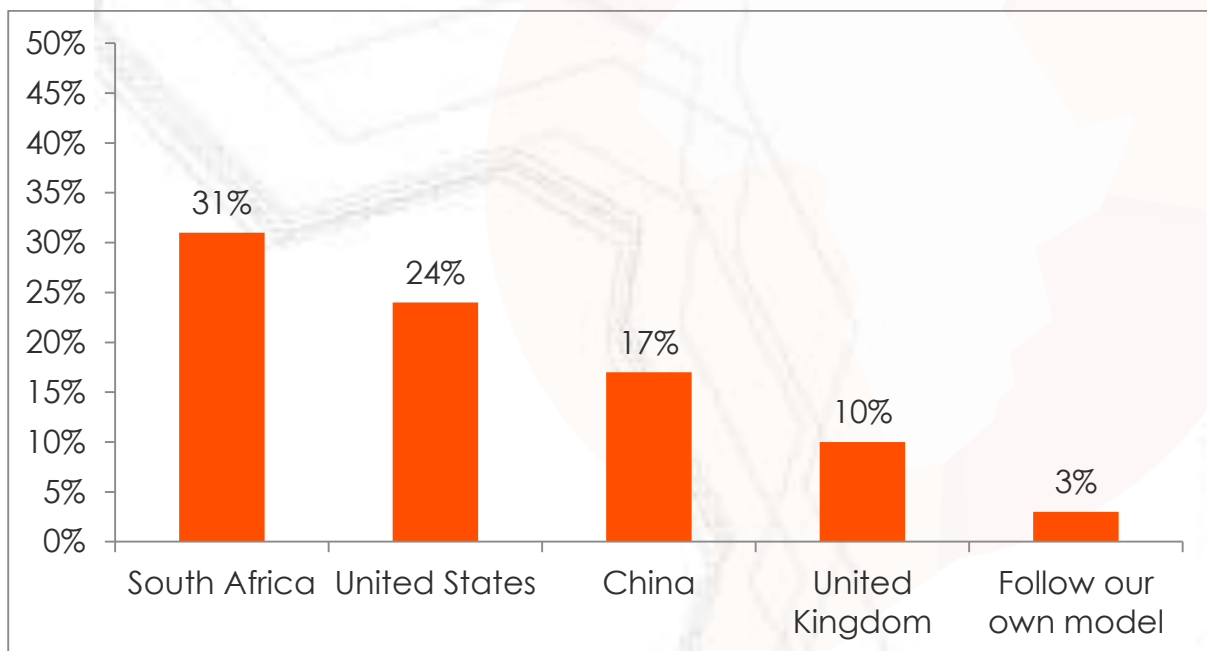
- South Africa (cited by 31% of respondents) leads countries that Malawians look up to as a model for their development path, followed by the United States (24%), China (17%), and the United Kingdom (10%).
- Malawians express mixed views about the role of China in their country. About four in 10 (43%) say China's economic development assistance does a "very good" or "somewhat good" job of meeting the country's development needs, while almost as many (38%) say the opposite. Half (50%) of respondents say China's economic and political influence is positive.

- The United States gets the most votes (31%) as the most influential country in Malawi, followed by South Africa (16%), the United Kingdom, and China.
- A significant proportion of Malawians say they don't know whether international organisations such as the SADC (43%), African Union (44%), and COMESA (47%) are of help to their country. However, this is a significant decrease from the 2008 Afrobarometer survey.

South Africa leads as a model of development

The socioeconomic and political development path taken by South Africa is the most admired, with 31% of respondents saying it would be the best framework for Malawi – a finding that points to South Africa's strong influence in the region as well as Malawians' affinity for African-led development. About one-quarter (24%) think the United States of America is the best model, while 17% would choose China. The country's former colonial master, the United Kingdom, comes in fourth, while 3% of respondents say Malawi should craft and adopt its own model (Figure 1).

Figure 1: Ranking of models of development | Malawi | 2014



Respondents were asked: *In your opinion, which of the following countries, if any, would be the best model for the future development of our country: United States? China? The United Kingdom? India? South Africa? We should follow our own country's model?*

The views of urban Malawians are significantly different from those of rural residents (Figure 2). Among urbanites, the leading model is China (29%), closely followed by the United States (27%). In rural areas, a plurality (33%) prefers South Africa, with 23% opting for the United States. There are also important variations of views based on education levels of the respondents (Figure 3). South Africa is the favoured model among respondents with no formal education or with primary school education, while the United States leads among those with secondary or post-secondary education, suggesting that exposure to ideas beyond the continent affects which countries people think should be their models.

Figure 2: Ranking of models of development | by location | 2014

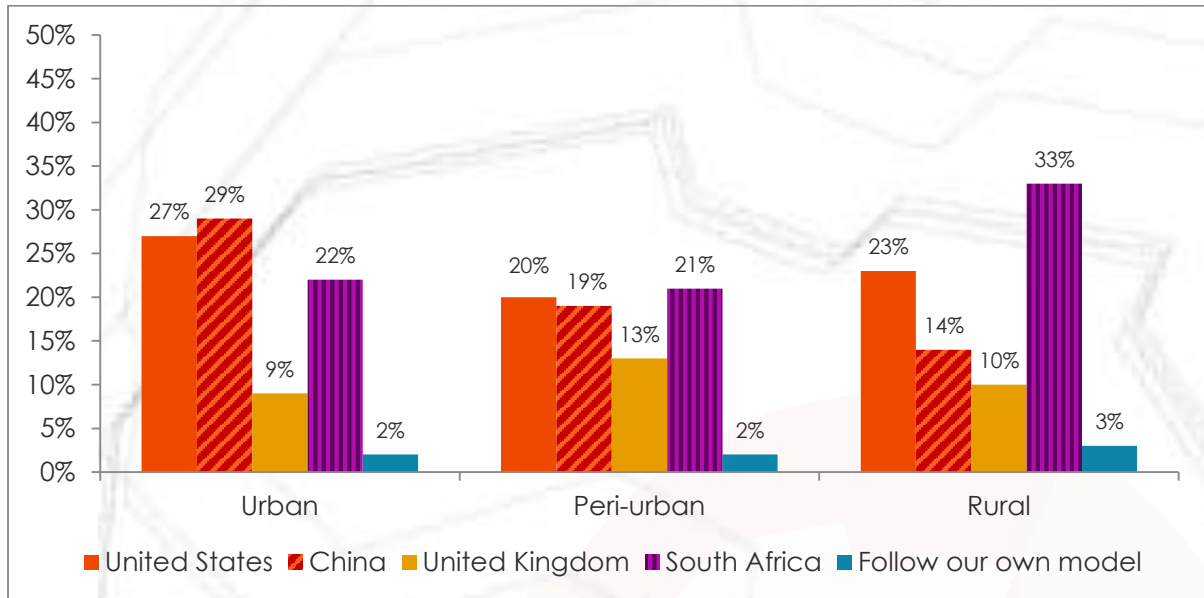
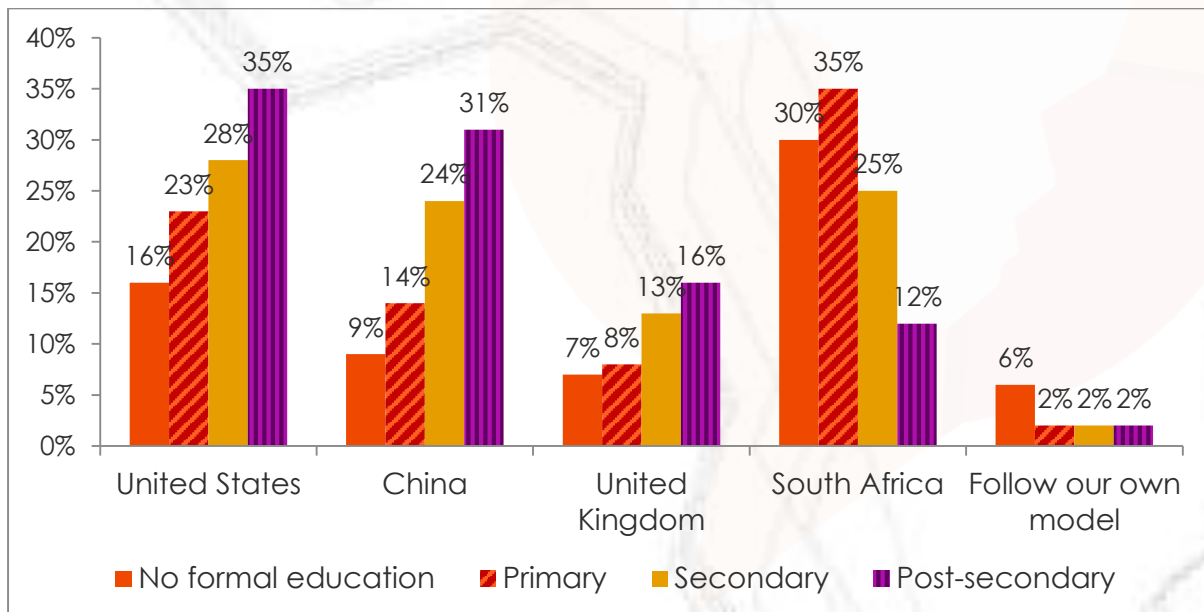


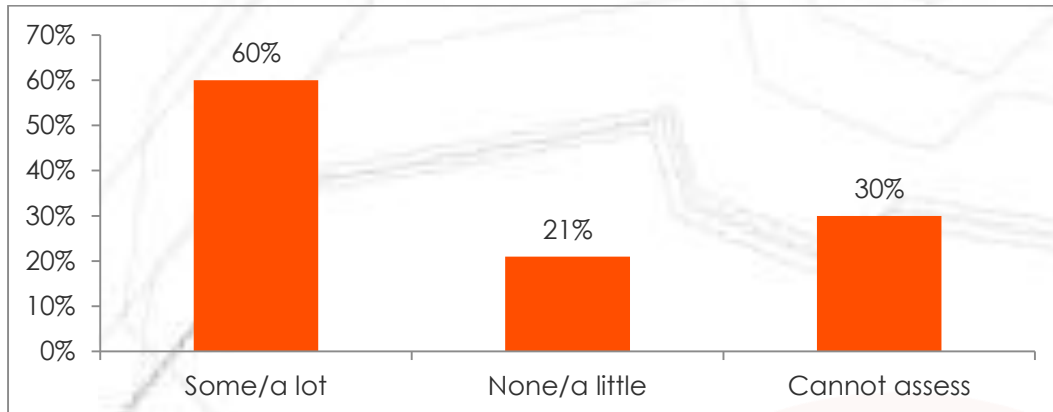
Figure 3: Ranking of models of development | by education | 2014



Malawians are positive but cautious about China

Malawians view China as exercising some economic influence on Malawi. Only one-fifth (21%) of respondents say China has “no” or “a little” influence, while 60% believe it has “some” or “a lot” of influence (Figure 4).

Figure 4: China's influence on Malawi | 2014

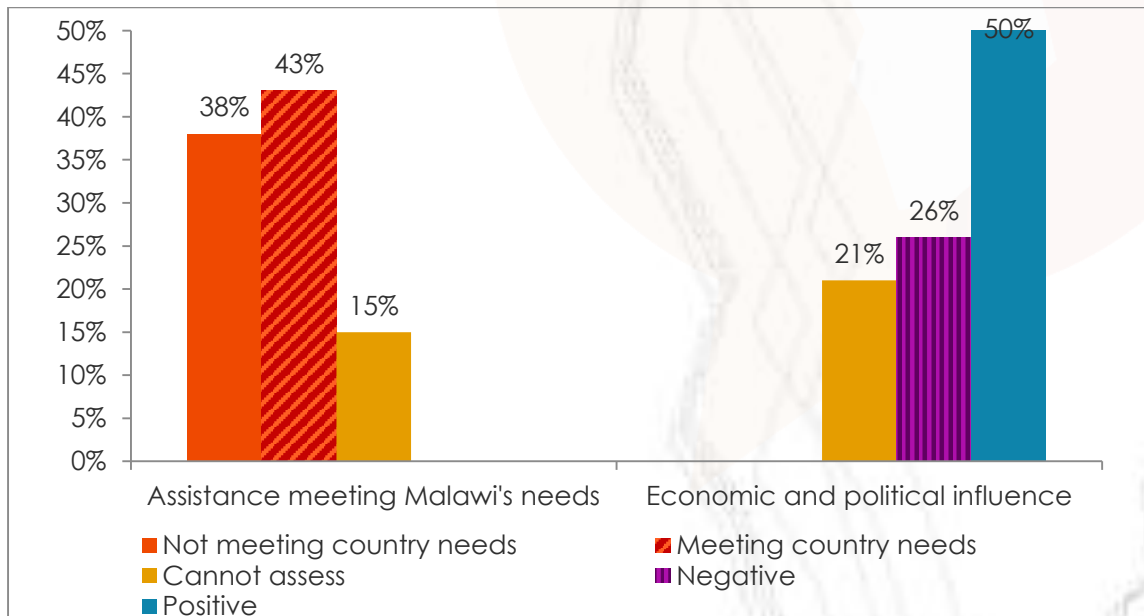


Respondents were asked: How much influence do you think China's economic activities in Malawi have on our economy, or haven't you heard enough to say?

Overall, there is a positive view of China's Influence. Half (50%) of respondents say China's economic and political influence is "somewhat" or "very" positive, compared to 26% who believe the influence is "very" or "somewhat" negative (Figure 4). A significant proportion of Malawians (21%) report they are unable to make an assessment because they "don't know" or have "not heard enough" about the issue.

However, only four in 10 Malawians (43%) say that China's economic development assistance does a "very" or "somewhat" good job in meeting the needs of the country, while 38% believe the assistance does a "very" or "somewhat" bad job (Figure 5).

Figure 5: Assessment of China's influence and development assistance | 2014

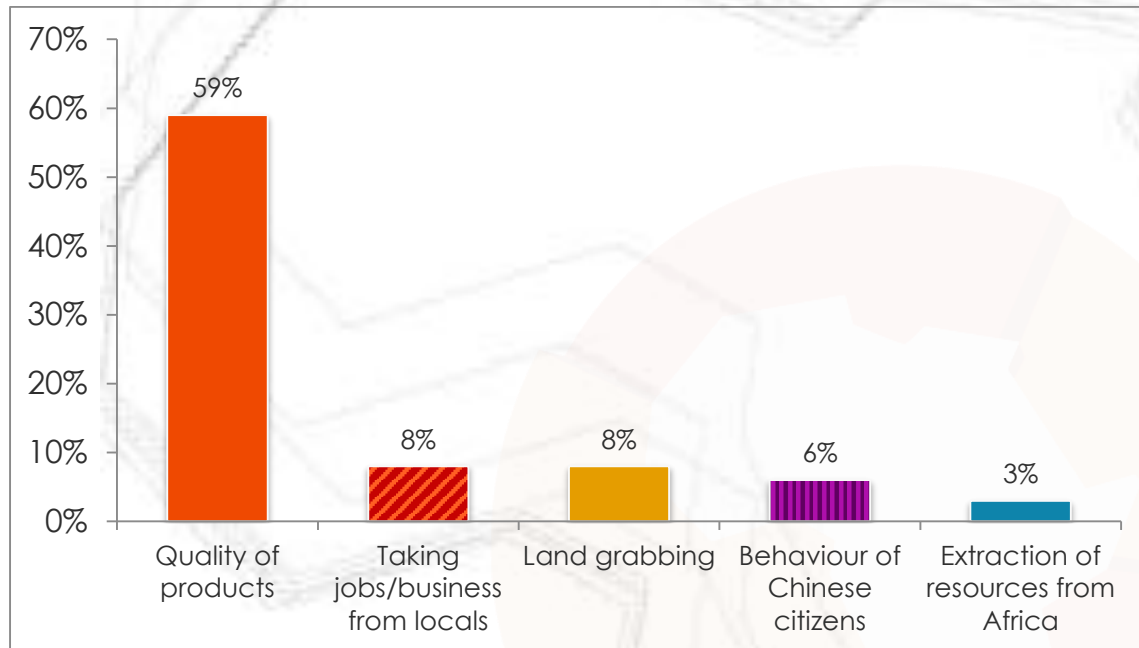


Respondents were asked:

- In your opinion, does China's economic development assistance to Malawi do a good job or a bad job of meeting the country's needs, or haven't you heard enough to say? (% for "not meeting country needs" shows respondents who said "very bad job" or "somewhat bad job"; % for "meeting country needs" shows those who said "somewhat good job" or "very good job")
- In general, do you think that China's economic and political influence on Malawi is mostly positive, or mostly negative, or haven't you heard enough to say? (% for "negative" shows respondents who answered "very negative" or "somewhat negative"; % for "positive" shows respondents who answered "very positive" or "somewhat positive")

Malawians' perceptions of China are largely shaped by economic considerations, rather than political factors. The quality of Chinese products is the single most important reason for China's negative image, cited by six in 10 respondents (59%). Almost one in 10 (8%) raised concerns about land grabbing by Chinese businesses or individuals, while the same proportion mentioned Chinese citizens taking over jobs and businesses at the expense of locals (Figure 6).

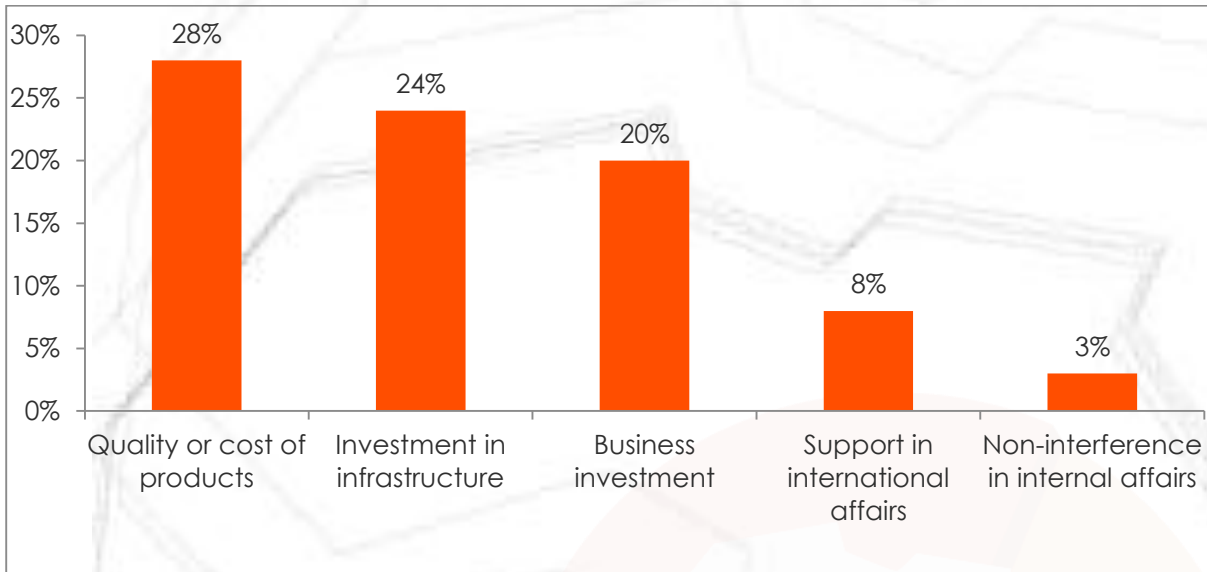
Figure 6: Factors contributing to a negative image of China | Malawi | 2014



Respondents were asked: Which of the following factors contribute most to a negative image of China in Malawi, or haven't you heard enough to say?

Factors contributing most to a positive image of China in Malawi are the quality or cost of its products (28%), its investments in infrastructure development (24%), and its business investments (20%) (Figure 7). There are clear differences between urban and rural Malawians in terms of which of the factors matter most. For urban residents, infrastructure development (with 39%) is the most important reason, followed by quality or cost of products (20%). In rural areas, the first factor is the quality or cost of products (30%), followed by business investments and infrastructure investments (each 21%).

Figure 7: Factors contributing to a positive image of China | Malawi | 2014

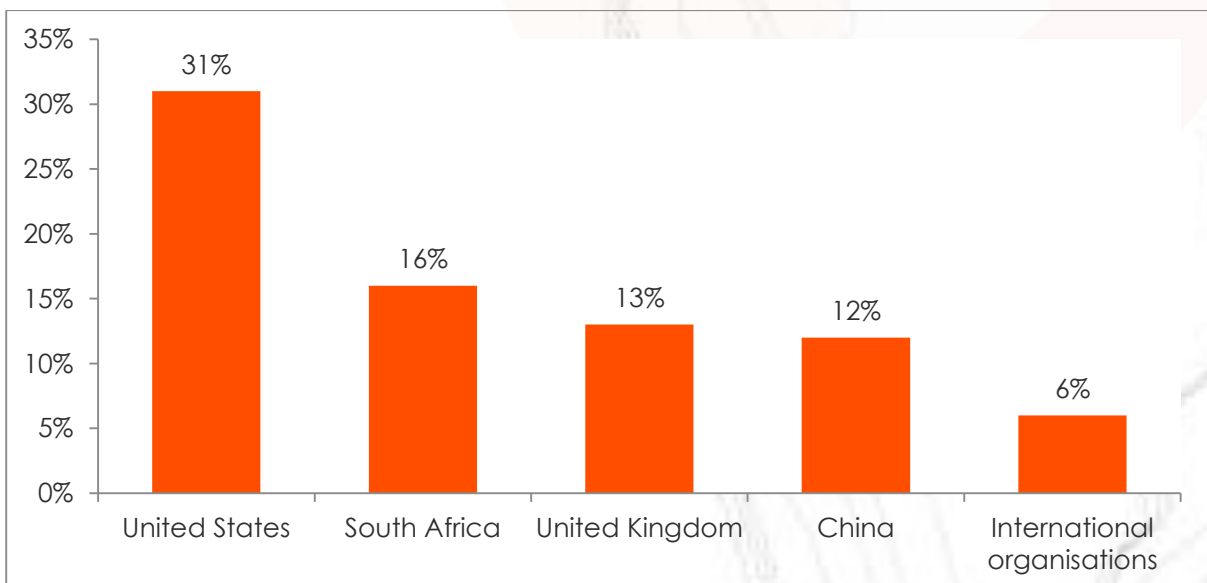


Respondents were asked: Which of the following factors contribute most to a positive image of China in Malawi, or haven't you heard enough to say?

International influences on Malawi

The United States is regarded as the international entity with the greatest influence on Malawi, cited by 31% of respondents. South Africa is a distant second (16%), followed by the United Kingdom, China, and international organisations (Figure 8).

Figure 8: Countries and organisations with influence on Malawi | Malawi | 2014

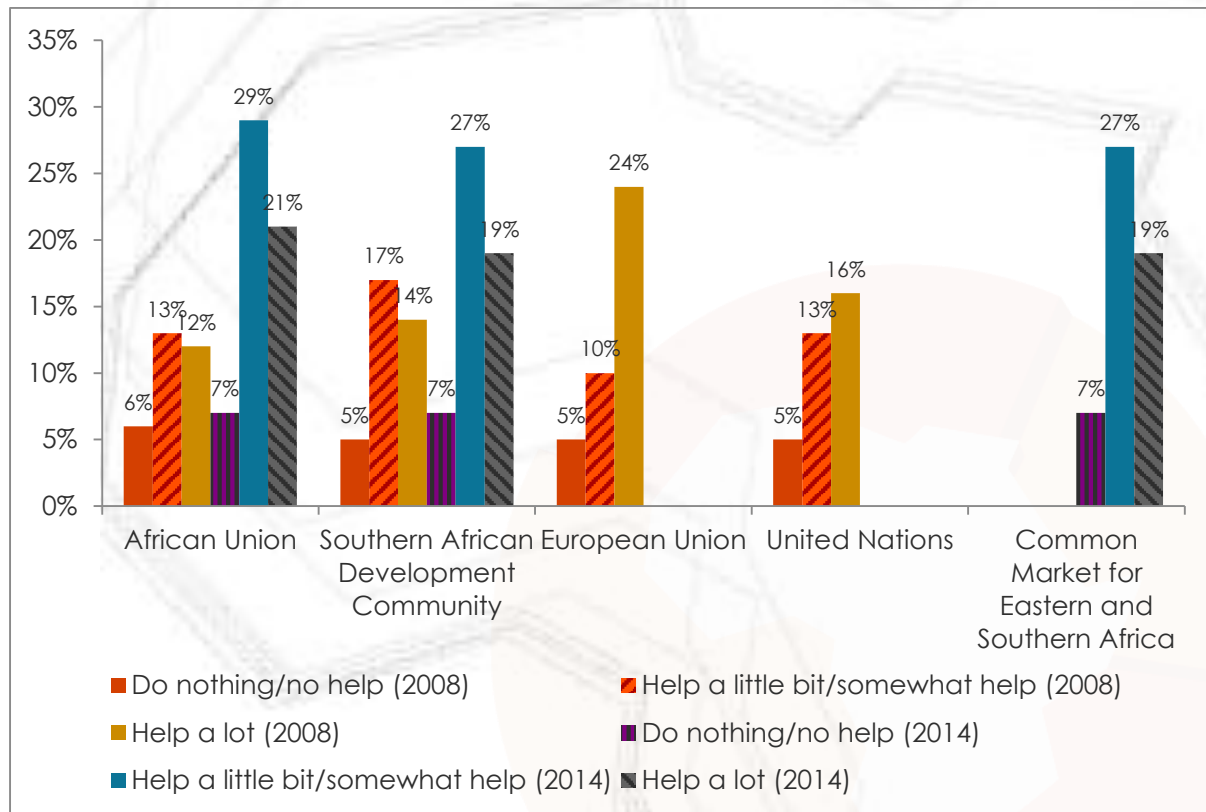


Respondents were asked: Which of the following do you think has the most influence on Malawi, or haven't you heard enough to say: The United States? China? United Kingdom? India? South Africa? International organizations? Some other country or organization?

Regarding how helpful international organisations are for their country, Malawians are more positive than they were in the 2008 Afrobarometer survey. In 2014, 50% of respondents say the African Union (AU) helps Malawi "a bit," "somewhat," or "a lot," compared to 25% who held

the same view in 2008. Similarly, one in two respondents in 2014 believes that the Southern African Development Community (SADC) provides at least “a bit” of help, compared to 31% in 2008. Almost half (46%) say COMESA helps their country at least “a bit” (Figure 9).

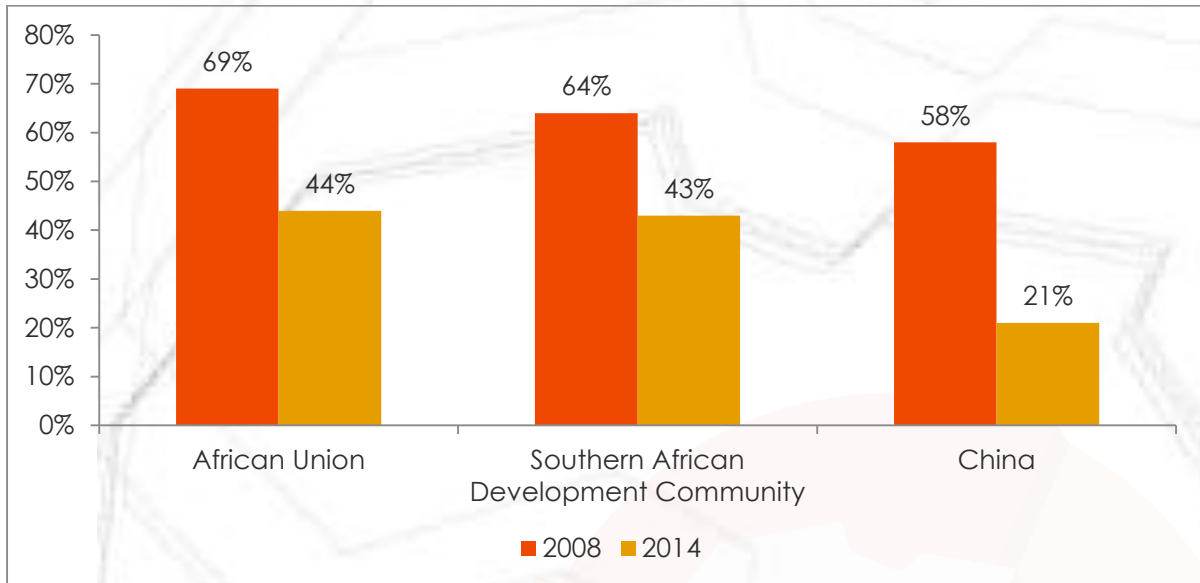
Figure 9: Assessment of help by international organisations | Malawi | 2008-2014



Respondents were asked: *In your opinion, how much do each of the following do to help your country, or haven't you heard enough to say: SADC? COMESA? African Union? United Nations? European Union?*

Equally important, in addition to the more positive assessment of assistance from international organisations, there is a decrease in the number of people who are unable to evaluate international bodies. More Malawians are aware of activities of these institutions and are able to express their views compared to the 2008 survey. In 2008, seven of 10 Malawians said they didn't know or had “not heard enough” about the AU to assess its assistance. This proportion has dropped to about four in 10 respondents (Figure 10). For the SADC, the proportion of respondents who were able to assess its role increased by 21 percentage points from 2008 to 2014. Similarly, the proportion able to evaluate help from China increased by 37 percentage points.

Figure 10: Trends in lack of awareness of the role of international bodies | 2008-2014



Respondents were asked: *In your opinion, how much do each of the following do to help your country, or haven't you heard enough to say? (% saying they don't know or have "not heard enough" to make a judgment)*

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Afrobarometer is produced collaboratively by social scientists from more than 30 African countries. Coordination is provided by the Center for Democratic Development (CDD) in Ghana, the Institute for Justice and Reconciliation (IJR) in South Africa, the Institute for Development Studies (IDS) at the University of Nairobi in Kenya, and the Institute for Empirical Research in Political Economy (IREEP) in Benin. Michigan State University (MSU) and the University of Cape Town (UCT) provide technical support to the network.

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