



Zomba, Malawi  
04 November 2021

## News release

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### **Malawians see inequalities but say federalism is not the answer, Afrobarometer analysis shows**

Malawians overwhelmingly reject a proposal to adopt a federal system of government as a way of ensuring equitable distribution of development resources, an Afrobarometer analysis shows.

At the same time, a majority of citizens say that their ethnic groups are treated unfairly by the government and that communities that don't vote for the ruling party suffer negative consequences in terms of public services and development projects.

Based on findings from Afrobarometer's most recent survey in Malawi, conducted in late 2019, fully half of citizens say there are more factors that divide them than unite them as a people.

#### **Key findings**

- Malawians widely (78%) reject a proposed change to adopt a federal system of government as a way to guarantee equitable distribution of development resources (Figure 1).
  - Although there are significant differences across regions (Figure 2) and party affiliations, majority opposition to the proposal cuts across these divides.
- Half (51%) of Malawians say their ethnic groups are “sometimes,” “often,” or “always” treated unfairly by the government – a perception that is considerably more common in the North (65%) and Centre (62%) than in the South (35%) (Figure 3). Support for federalism is 11 percentage points higher among respondents who feel their ethnic group suffers unfair treatment (Figure 4).
- Fully half (51%) of Malawians say there are more factors that divide them than unite them as a people. When it comes to ethnic vs. national identity, the largest number (50%) identify equally with both, while smaller proportions identify predominantly or only with their ethnic group (17%) or with their nation (33%).
  - Federalism is more popular among Malawians who identify predominantly or only with their ethnic group (29%) than among those who identify predominantly or exclusively as Malawians (17%) (Figure 5).
- About six out of 10 Malawians (59%) believe that communities that do not vote for the ruling party “sometimes,” “often,” or “always” suffer negative consequences, such as lack of government support for local services or development projects. This view is more widely shared in the Northern (76%) and Central (64%) regions than in the Southern region (47%).
  - Support for federalism is about twice as high among citizens who say that such communities are “often” or “always” sanctioned (30%) than among those who say this “never” happens (16%).

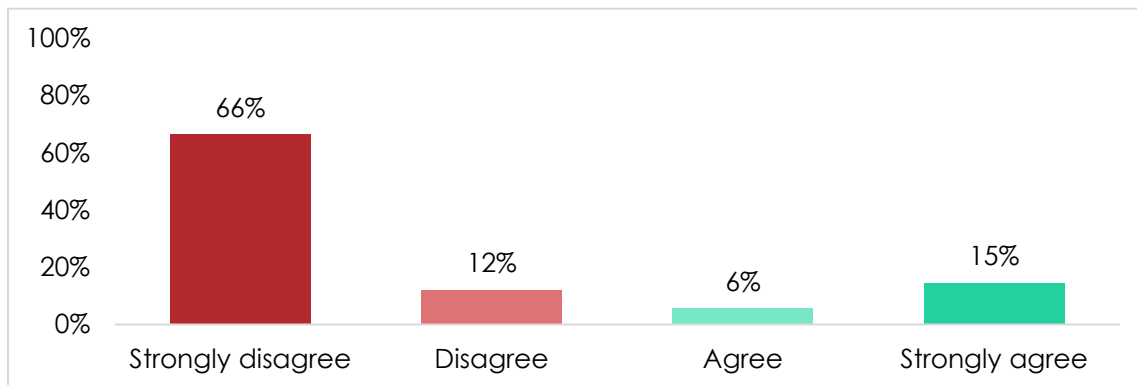
## Afrobarometer surveys

Afrobarometer is a pan-African, nonpartisan research network that provides reliable data on African experiences and evaluations of democracy, governance, and quality of life. Eight rounds of surveys have been completed in up to 39 countries since 1999. Round 8 surveys (2019/2021) cover 34 countries. Afrobarometer conducts face-to-face interviews in the language of the respondent's choice with nationally representative samples.

The Afrobarometer team in Malawi, led by the Centre for Social Research at the University of Malawi, interviewed 1,200 adult Malawians in November-December 2019. A sample of this size yields country-level results with a margin of error of +/-3 percentage points at a 95% confidence level. Previous surveys in Malawi were conducted in 1999, 2003, 2005, 2008, 2012, 2014, and 2017.

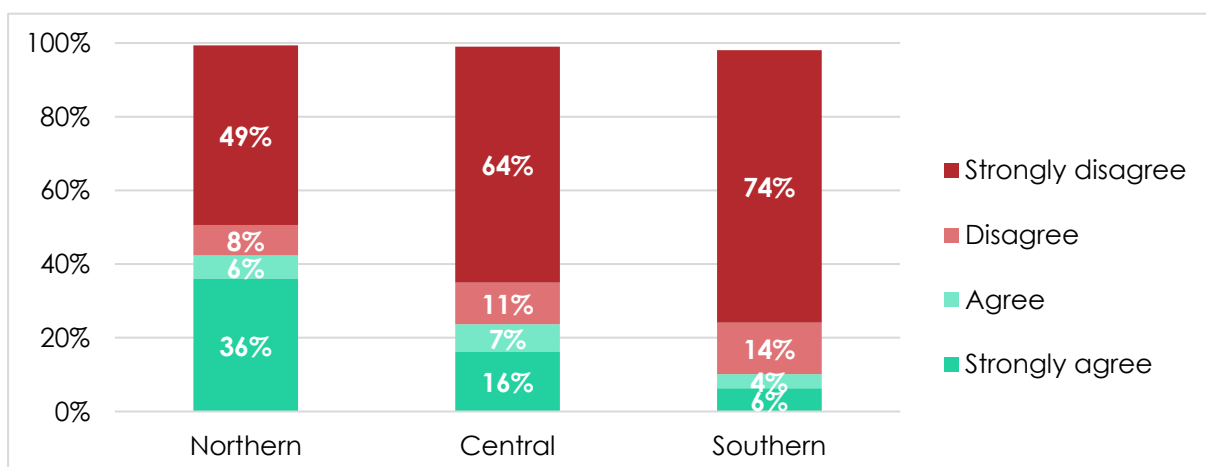
## Charts

**Figure 1: Should Malawi adopt a federal system of government? | Malawi | 2019**



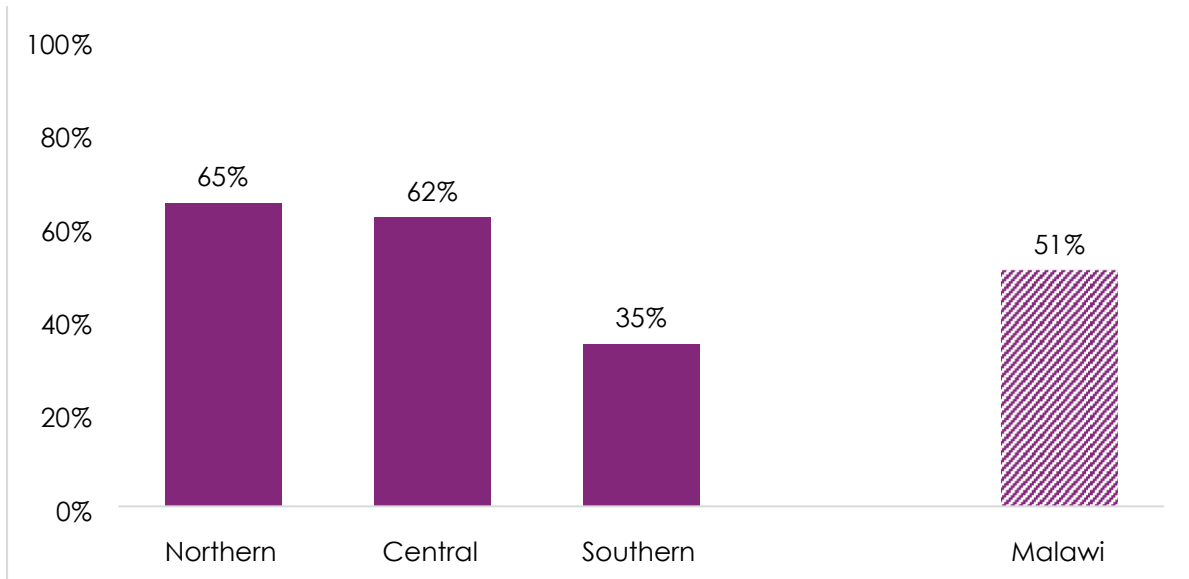
**Respondents were asked:** In your opinion, do you agree or disagree that Malawi should adopt a federal system of government for equitable development?

**Figure 2: Should Malawi adopt a federal system of government? | by region | Malawi | 2019**



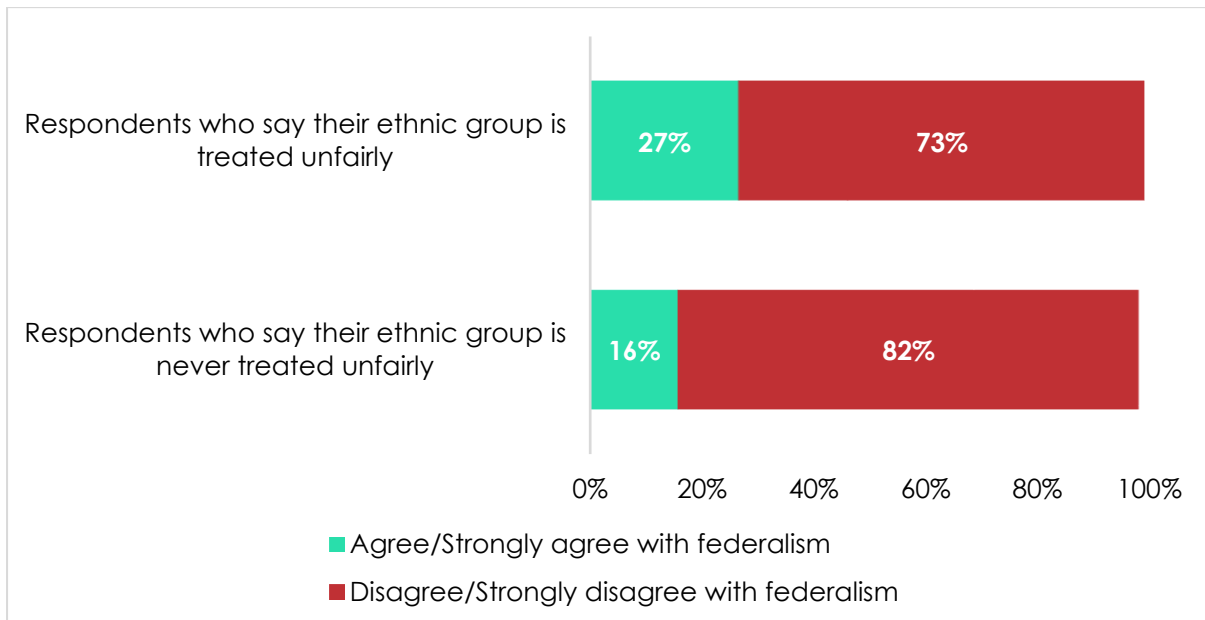
**Respondents were asked:** In your opinion, do you agree or disagree that Malawi should adopt a federal system of government for equitable development?

**Figure 3: Ethnic group treated unfairly by government | by region | Malawi | 2019**



**Respondents were asked:** How often, if ever, are [members of the respondent's ethnic group] treated unfairly by the government? (% who say "sometimes," "often," or "always")

**Figure 4: Support for federalism | by views on whether ethnic group is treated unfairly | Malawi | 2019**

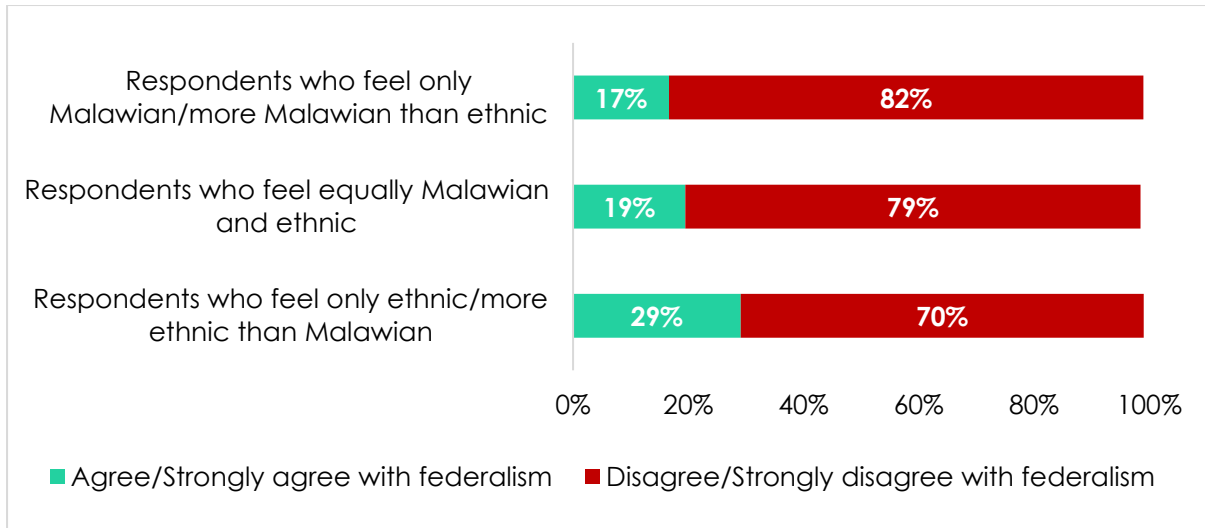


**Respondents were asked:**

How often, if ever, are [members of the respondent's ethnic group] treated unfairly by the government?

In your opinion, do you agree or disagree that Malawi should adopt a federal system of government for equitable development?

**Figure 5: Support for federalism** | by views on whether one feels more Malawian or ethnic | Malawi | 2019



**Respondents were asked:**

*Let us suppose that you had to choose between being a Malawi and being a ...which of the following statements best expresses your feelings?  
 In your opinion, do you agree or disagree that Malawi should adopt a federal system of government for equitable development?*

**For more information, please contact:**

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