

9. Public views on what should be done to improve safety

Key Findings

- For most Malawians, the government, particularly the police, have the primary role to play in dealing with crime, and most Malawians favour a tough criminal justice approach to address crime in their country.
- Most Malawians believe that the police should increase the visibility of police patrols and units in their area (43.9% of the respondents), and a further 27.8% said that the police should increase specifically armed police patrols in the area.
- However, 10.1% of the respondents believed that crime could be reduced by increasing the penalties for convicted offenders.
- Just 7.6% indicated that they thought that by creating more employment, the government would be able to address crime.
- Individually, very few Malawians appear to have taken active steps to protect themselves and their property from crime, and apparently prefer a more community-based approach to dealing with the issue – 44% of the respondents reported that there was an organised group other than the police in their area that provided protection from crime.
- 33% of the respondents who knew of such groups in their area of residence reported that these groups handed out punishment on their own, a further 23.5% reported that they had personally seen these groups mete out such physical punishment to suspects and more than half (55.8%), reported that they had personally seen one or more of these groups apprehending suspects.
- Community Police Forums (or CPFs) are a recent initiative in Malawi and are currently being set up at most police stations – therefore, just 18.2% of all those interviewed in the survey knew what a CPF was, and of these 51.8%, that is, 9.3% of all respondents reported that there was a CPF in their area.

- Like the initiation of community policing, the implementation of victim support services is very new in Malawi. Therefore, public awareness of such services throughout Malawi is exceedingly low – just 438 individuals (6.4% of the total sample) were aware of any such services in their area and just 22.3% of these individuals had accessed these services.
- However, there is widespread public support for the provision of support to victims of crime – 95.6% of the total sample believe that some support should be offered to victims of crime,

9.1 The role of the government

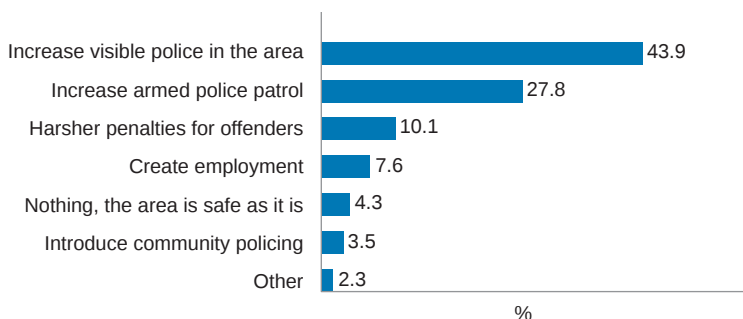
In the eyes of most Malawians, the government, particularly the police, have the primary role to play in dealing with crime. For instance, when asked what the government should do to reduce crime, respondents were most likely to say that the police should increase the visibility of police patrols and units in their area (43.9%), and a further 27.8% said that the police should increase specifically armed police patrols in the area. This correlates closely with findings in other countries, where police visibility often plays an important role in deferring people's fear, and generally creating a perception of safety and security.

However, 10.1% of those interviewed believed that crime could be reduced by increasing the penalties for convicted offenders.

Interestingly, just 7.6% indicated that they thought that by creating more employment, the government would be able to address crime.

Clearly then, most Malawians favour a tough criminal justice approach to address crime in their country. This is indicated in Figure 36 below.

Figure 36 Perceptions of the role of the government in addressing crime



9.2 Community-based responses to crime

Individually, very few Malawians appear to have taken active steps to protect themselves and their property from crime, and apparently prefer a more community-based approach to dealing with the issue.

For instance, 75.5% of those interviewed reported that they had done nothing to protect themselves from crime.

For the 24.5% of those who had taken active steps to lessen their vulnerability the most common measures were:

- bought a dog specifically for protection (5.9% of respondents)
- joined the neighbourhood watch (5.7%) – which is a community-based response to crime
- turned to prayer (4%),
- turned to traditional medicines or witchcraft (0.6%),
- installed security lights (0.2%)
- bought a gun (0.2%),
- bought a bow and arrow (0.1%) and
- installed an electric shock system to their windows (0.1%).

However, there appears to be much more engagement with the issue of crime on a community level.

Indeed, 44% of the respondents reported that there was an organised group other than the police in their area that provided protection from

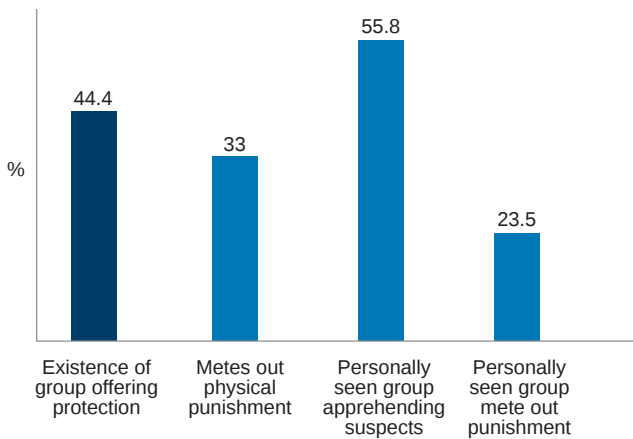
crime. These respondents reported that there were three primary types of organised community-based responses to crime. These were either legitimate, organised structures such as neighbourhood or block watches, commercial ventures such as private security companies, and thirdly, more informal, gang-like vigilante organisations.

The first reportedly work relatively closely with existing police structures, primarily the local stations, and are often involved in patrolling and crime prevention-type activities. The second primarily provide guarding and response services for those who can afford them. The third, reportedly respond to crime in an ad-hoc manner, sometimes patrolling areas and, more often, “tracking down” the supposed offenders, and handing out immediate, retributive justice.

Most of these groups, with the exception of the private security companies, tend to be volunteer groups – 84.1% of the respondents who knew of such groups indicated that they did not offer remuneration for participation or involvement in their activities. The 13.6% of the respondents who indicated that the groups they knew of paid for participation were, in all likelihood, referring to the private security companies offering protection to residents.

In tune with the common public desire for tough law enforcement, it appears that many of these groups administer their own rough and ready justice. A third of the respondents who knew of such groups in their area of residence (33%), reported that these groups handed out punishment on their own, without taking the suspect to the police. A further 23.5% reported that they had personally seen these groups mete out such physical punishment to suspects. More than half of those who said that such groups were active in their areas (55.8%), reported that they had personally seen one or more of these groups apprehending suspects. This is indicated in Figure 37 below.

Figure 37 Public knowledge of community-based groups offering protection against crime (n=6,482)



An interesting point to note here is that these groups are statistically more likely to be found in the Northern Region, where crime is lowest – 72.1% of respondents living in the Northern Region reported the existence of alternative groups that provided protection against crime, as opposed to just over half in the Central region (55.5%), and less than one third in the Southern Region (29.3%).

Conversely, most of the respondents who indicated that they had personally seen these groups administering punishment, resided in the Central Region (28.4%), followed by respondents in the Southern Region (23.3%) and then respondents in the Northern Region (10.2%). This suggests that while these groups are more likely to exist, or exist in higher numbers in the Northern Region, these groups appear more prone to administer punishment to suspected offenders in the Southern and Central Regions.

That Malawians tend to look for mostly punitive community-based responses to crime in their areas, rather than attempting to address the issue individually (which would sometimes be expensive and dangerous), is, given the high levels of community cohesion, not surprising.

9.3 Community cohesion

The use of a range of indicators in the analysis of the data collected in the survey, made it immediately apparent that there are strong bonds between people residing in particular areas across Malawi and between these people and their political representatives. Further, it appeared that most Malawians participate, in one way or another, in community-based activities.

For instance:

- 98.4% of the respondents reported that they knew the name of their next door neighbours
- 91.5% reported that they would let their neighbours look after their house if they went away, and;
- 87.6% reported that they would let their neighbours look after their children for an evening

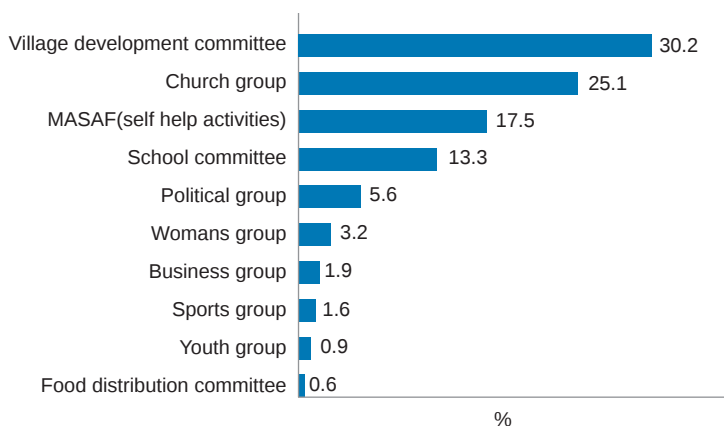
Such indicators of social trust in predominantly urban areas are usually significantly lower than this.⁴² The disintegration of social fabric, often characterised by a breakdown in community relationships and interaction is commonly viewed as a pre-cursor to, and inherently inter-related to, an increase of crime. It is therefore a positive sign that in Malawi, this does not seem to be significant at all.

Also, there appears to be a wide-ranging awareness, if not active engagement, of local politics and political representation. For example, 64.7% of those interviewed indicated that they knew the name of their ward councillor by name and 76.9% indicated that they knew their member of parliament by name, rather than by political party.

This awareness of local politics appears to be taken one step further, to a fairly active engagement with local level community organisations and activities. For instance, more than two thirds of the respondents to the survey (68.9%), reported that they were actively involved in one or a number of community-based organisations. This is indicated in Figure 38 below.

42 See Leggett, op cit and Burton and Sekhonyane, op cit

Figure 38 Public involvement in community activities (7,422 responses)



Interestingly, though, women were less likely than men to say that they participated in community activities – 64.1% of the women respondents to the survey reported that they were engaged in such activities as opposed to 72.6% of men respondents.

Unfortunately though, this generally active engagement in community-based issues does not yet appear to have taken the Malawi Police Service's Community Police Forums on board.

9.4 Community Police Forums

Community Police Forums (or CPFs) are a recent initiative in Malawi. They are bodies designed to facilitate interaction, the flow of information and engagement between police and communities they serve. Ideally, CPFs include voluntary representatives from the community and senior representative of the local police station and function as a trust-building intermediary between the police and their local communities. As yet, given the recent introduction of the concept in Malawi, they have not been established at all police stations.

Therefore, just 18.2% of all those interviewed in the survey knew what a CPF was, and of these 51.8%, that is, 9.3% of all respondents, reported that there was a CPF in their area.

Interestingly again, given that reported crime was lowest in the Northern Region, public awareness of the CPFs was significantly higher in the Northern Region (21.6%) than public awareness in the Southern (19.0%) and Central (16.4%) Regions.

Accurate knowledge of the functions of the CPF was even less common. Reflecting the misconceptions that often accompany CPFs,⁴³ respondents most commonly believed that the CPFs functioned to arrest criminals (26.9%), protect the community (25.6%) and, more accurately, to help the police deal with crime (22.5%).

Given the limited public awareness of the CPFs, as well as the diverse opinions of their functions, reported participation in these bodies was also low – 9.1% of those who reported that they knew of a CPF in their area, reported that they regularly participated in the organisation, while a further 9.8% said they participated occasionally.

Despite this, and the mixed perceptions of their functions, 79.8% of the respondents who reported knowing of a CPF in their area believed that the structure was effective in performing its functions.

Respondents who believed the CPFs were not effective, attributed this mainly to poor organisation (35.6%), lack of community commitment (20.3%) corruption (20.3%), poor leadership (13.6%) and a lack of awareness of the part of the community (10.2%).

All the respondents who reported knowing of a CPF in their area, were asked what they thought could be done to improve the effectiveness of the structure. Their main responses were:

- members should be paid for their participation (60.9%)
- CPFs should hold more regular meetings (10.6%)
- members should be provided with guns (7.95),
- there should be greater information sharing on what happens at the CPF (7.5%),

43 See Pelser, E, Louw A & Schnetler J. *Not everybody's business. Community policing in the SAPS' priority areas*. ISS Monograph No. 71, Institute for Security Studies

- the community should be made more aware of the existence of the CPFs (7.2%)
- transport to and from the CPFs should be improved (1.3%)

9.5 Victim Support

Victim support refers to a variety of services offered to victims of crime, usually from the first instance of reporting a crime, the police station, or in cases where there are injuries, from the hospital or clinic. The rationale behind victim support as a community-based crime reduction initiative is that adequate and appropriate support to victims of crime will help to prevent victims of crime becoming victims again.

Therefore, referral to, and often the provision of, victim support services are becoming mandatory for police at station level all over the world. The most common forms of victim support are counselling, medical support and advisory services.

Like the initiation of community policing, the implementation of victim support services is very new in Malawi. Therefore, public awareness of such services throughout Malawi is low. Just 438 individuals (6.4% of the total sample) were aware of any such services in their area. Just 22.3% of these individuals had accessed these services.

The respondents who knew of victim support services in their areas were most likely to indicate that these consisted of: medical services (41.9%), preventative information services (24.7%), counselling services (18.3%), first aid (17.3%) and financial support (14%).

Despite the low levels of awareness of victim support, the vast majority of Malawians (95.6% of the total sample) feel that some support should be offered to victims of crime, largely for the replacement or “recovering” of stolen goods.⁴⁴ Other common types of services that respondents indicated they would support were:

44 This, however, is slightly different from the conventional understanding of victim support, which tends to focus on the psychological and physical well-being of victims following the trauma of being victimised. Notwithstanding this, systems of financial aid, or a Victims Compensation Fund, is increasingly being debated in a number of countries, and would be one option of facilitating recovery of stolen property.

- Support to assist “victims cope” (27.9%)
- Medical assistance (14.9%),
- Counselling or services that provide “reassurance” to victims (13.4%).

However, of the 4.4% of the respondents who did not think that victims should receive support, most feel that such a service is too open to abuse, and that people may take advantage of the initiative (41.3%). A number of people also felt that such services would not change anything (38.3%), or that such services would be a waste of money (10.9%).

Finally, respondents were asked what additional support they felt victims of crime should receive, if any. Reflecting the answers to the earlier questions, almost half of the respondents (48.9%) thought that those who had been criminally victimised should receive practical financial support, to help them replace goods, or “get on their feet again”. Also common was the role of the community in providing support, with 19.5% of the respondents suggesting that victims should receive support from the community, while another 10.4% felt that moral support was the most important.

Just 2.4% of the respondents felt that crime victims should receive no support at all.

In summary, victim support is a relatively new concept in Malawi and there is as yet little public knowledge of what it entails and where it may be accessed. However, the findings presented above clearly indicate the widespread public desire for such services.