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Presidential, parliamentary, and local government elections in Malawi, May 2014



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Between 20 and 22 May 2014, over five million Malawians participated in the fifth election since the re-introduction of multiparty politics in 1994. For the first time since 1994 voters simultaneously cast ballots for president, members of parliament, and local government councilors. Turnout was consistent with earlier multiparty presidential and parliamentary elections, with 71% of registered voters casting votes.

Although election day passed peacefully at most polling centers, there were isolated cases of violence in Malawi's two largest cities of Blantyre and Lilongwe as voters protested shortages of voting materials at several polling stations. This forced the Malawi Electoral Commission (MEC) to extend voting for an additional two days in 45 of 4445 polling centers.

After repeated delays, an unsuccessful attempt by the outgoing president to annul the elections, and several court challenges, Peter Mutharika, the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) candidate and brother to the late President Bingu wa Mutharika, was declared victor of the presidential race on May 30, 2014. He was officially sworn-in as President the following day at a function that was boycotted by his immediate predecessor and Malawi's first female president, Joyce Banda. President Banda's loss to Mutharika marks the second time a sitting president has lost power through elections in Malawi.¹

The parliamentary elections have produced a hung parliament as no single political party has a clear majority. Four political parties dominated the parliamentary race: Mutharika's DPP; the Malawi Congress Party (MCP), which led the country during the one-party era from independence in 1964–1994; the United Democratic Front (UDF), in power between 1994 and 2004; and Joyce Banda's People's Party (PP), which she formed after being expelled from the DPP in 2010. These four parties collectively won 138 of the 192 parliamentary seats. Two other smaller parties won a

single seat each. The remaining 52 seats were won by independent candidates, making them the largest bloc in the new Parliament.

The 2014 election marked the re-introduction of local government councilors, offices that had been vacant since 2005. Local government races were dominated by Malawi's four largest parties, who won seats somewhat proportionally to their performances in up-ticket races.

1. Background

Alongside other African countries, Malawi re-introduced multi-party politics in 1994 after thirty years of authoritarian one-party rule under the life-presidency of the late Hastings Kamuzu Banda. In the May 1994 elections, Banda lost the presidency to the UDF's Bakili Muluzi. Muluzi won re-election in 1999 but was compelled to step down in 2004 after failing to change the constitutional provision limiting any president to a maximum of two five-year terms.² The UDF presidential candidate in the 2004 elections, Bingu wa Mutharika, a former Secretary General of the Common Market for East and Southern Africa (COMESA), won with 36% of the vote against a split opposition.³

A year into his first term, Mutharika quit the UDF and founded the DPP, making it the *de facto* ruling party without having contested an election. Mutharika's departure from the UDF, coupled with a combative leadership style, fractured his relationship with the 2004–2009 Parliament. Having inherited a moribund economy that registered negative growth between 2002 and 2004, Mutharika introduced economic policies that sought to reign in over-expenditure and inflation and reduce corruption. In 2006, these reforms were rewarded with the cancellation of Malawi's debts under the Highly Indebted Poor Countries initiative (International Monetary Fund, 2006). Under Mutharika's stewardship, Malawi averaged

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¹ In 1994, the late Hastings Kamuzu Banda (no relation to Joyce Banda) lost to one of his challengers, Bakili Muluzi, in the presidential race.

² See Section 83(3) of the Malawi Constitution, 1995.

³ For more on the 2004 elections, see [Dulani \(2005\)](#).

6.3% GDP growth between 2005 and 2009 (World Bank, 2014).

Against the backdrop of strong economic performance, Mutharika and the DPP won the 2009 presidential and parliamentary elections with a landslide (Smiddy and Young, 2009). However, Mutharika's second term was characterized by increased authoritarianism and suppression of democratic rights (Wroe, 2011; Cammack, 2012; Dionne and Dulani, 2013). Economic policies in Mutharika's second term, including a fixed foreign currency exchange regime, reversed the economic gains of his first term (African Development Bank, 2012; Wroe, 2011).

In his second term, Mutharika began to openly promote his brother, Peter Mutharika, as his successor. The fraternal succession plan caused a rift within the DPP and alienated Bingu wa Mutharika from his then vice president, Joyce Banda, who in December 2010 was expelled from the DPP. Shortly thereafter, Banda formed the PP. Civil society groups, who had supported Mutharika during his first term, organized street demonstrations in July 2011 to protest the government's increasing authoritarianism. Mutharika died of a sudden heart attack on April 5, 2012. Despite attempts by the late Mutharika's loyalists to install his brother, Peter, as president, the rule of law ultimately prevailed and Joyce Banda was sworn in as president on April 7, 2012 (Dionne and Dulani, 2013).

Upon taking office, Banda made changes to address the economic challenges of the preceding two years (African Development Bank, 2012). This included a departure from a fixed foreign currency exchange regime in favor of a liberalized exchange rate system. Banda's reforms resolved the foreign currency scarcity problem, addressed Malawi's commodity shortages (notably fuel), and prompted resumption of budgetary support from donors. On the international scene, Banda mended relations with the country's donors and neighbors, which had been strained under her predecessor. Banda's presidency was marked by a populist agenda, highlighted by continuation of the popular agricultural inputs subsidy programme and other pro-poor initiatives, including the construction of houses for poor Malawians under the Mudzi Transformation Fund.

Although an Afrobarometer survey showed that Joyce Banda enjoyed widespread support in mid-2012 (Tsoka and Chunga, 2013), her re-election prospects dimmed following the revelation of a major corruption scandal in September 2013, known in Malawi as Cashgate. Cashgate refers to the siphoning of government funds through fraudulent payments and loopholes in Malawi's financial management information system. President Banda suffered the greatest political costs of the scandal, with her approval ratings falling from 68% in mid-2012 to 38% just prior to the May 20 elections (Logan et al., 2014).

An Afrobarometer Dispatch based on a nationwide survey conducted from March 22 to April 5, 2014 showed a plurality of voters (27 percent) said they favored Mutharika of the DPP, followed by Lazarus Chakwera of the MCP with 21 percent, Banda of the PP with 19 percent, and Atupele

Muluzi of the UDF with 14 percent.⁴ The results of the Afrobarometer poll were widely publicized ahead of election day and were a source of debate for analysts and ordinary Malawians alike.

2. Campaign

The campaign period ran from March 18 to May 18 (Malawi Electoral Commission, 2014a). This was in accordance with electoral rules stipulating an official campaign period of two months and ending 48 h prior to the opening of the polls.⁵

The campaign period was generally peaceful, though it was preceded by the deaths of two Malawians at a rally held by President Banda on March 16 in Thyolo, a stronghold for the DPP and Peter Mutharika. There were also several reports of violent episodes resulting in injuries and property damage during the campaign period. The DPP alleged an attack on the personal assistant of its presidential candidate was committed by youths from the PP shortly after the deaths at President Banda's Thyolo rally.

Candidates engaged in standard campaign activities, including holding mass rallies and whistle stop tours, giving out handouts to supporters, and publicizing via media advertisements and road-side billboards. The 2014 election also veered from the standard Malawi campaign experience, with the introduction of televised debates, increased dissemination and discussion of political party manifestoes, greater social media presence of candidates and political parties, and greater (though still imbalanced) public media coverage of opposition candidates.

A staple in many African elections, campaign rallies where candidates give attendees handouts was a prominent feature in Malawi's 2014 elections, particularly with President Banda. For example, three weeks before the elections, Banda made a cash donation of K50 million (about US\$125,000) to two of Malawi's largest soccer clubs in a bid to win the votes of the clubs' supporters (Football Association of Malawi, 2014). Banda also traveled extensively around the country, holding campaign events dubbed "development rallies," where she handed out bags of maize, livestock, houses for the poor and elderly, and even motorbikes to the youth.

Banda was not alone in using handouts during the campaign. Most of her challengers and those competing in down-ticket races distributed assortments of cash and gifts.⁶ Director of the women's wing of the DPP, Patricia

⁴ Of particular note was the 15 percent of respondents that said they had either not made up their minds about who they would vote for or were unwilling to share with the survey team their voting intentions (Logan et al., 2014).

⁵ See Section 57 of the Malawi Parliamentary and Presidential Elections Act (1993).

⁶ The MCP stands out as an exception, even if by circumstances rather than choice. Faced with meager campaign resources, the MCP built its presidential campaign on the premise of ending handouts. As such, the party ran a frugal campaign focused primarily on its agenda if elected to office.

Kaliati, described handouts as “a winning strategy” for most political candidates (Malawi News Agency, 2014). In Zomba, the nation’s former colonial capital, a DPP parliamentary candidate running for re-election made available a fleet of buses to ferry commercial commuters for free in the weeks leading to the elections.

For the first time in Malawi electoral history, citizens watched or listened to presidential and vice presidential candidates debate the issues. The debates were organized by the Media Institute of Southern Africa–Malawi, assisted by the Malawi Electoral Commission and civil society organizations (CSOs). Funding and technical assistance for the debates came from foreign entities, including Open Society Initiative of Southern Africa, the National Democratic Institute, and UKaid. Two presidential debates were held in Lilongwe, Malawi’s capital, and one was held in Blantyre, the country’s commercial hub. The debates were broadcast live on radio and television. Banda, however, did not participate in any of the debates. The debates gave lesser-known candidates a platform they might not otherwise have had to share their views (Munthali, 2014). Political analysts were critical of the performance of the presidential candidates in the debates, saying there wasn’t much distinction between candidates’ policy stances (Munthali, 2014) and that candidates failed to articulate how their proposed policies would be implemented (Khunga 2014).

Prior to the presidential debates, Zodiak radio and the Center for Multiparty Democracy (CMD) organized two debates for presidential running mates from the four main political parties, the DPP, MCP, PP and UDF. The first of these debates was held in Lilongwe on March 8, 2014 and featured running mates from all four political parties. However, the PP candidate pulled out of the second debate in Blantyre on March 21, accusing Zodiak radio of bias favoring the MCP (Capital Radio, 2014).

The 2014 election also featured several debates and town hall meetings for candidates in down-ticket races. These were largely organized by local CSOs, including the National Initiative for Civic Education (NICE), Malawi CARER, the Catholic Commission for Justice and Peace, and the Federation of Disability Organizations in Malawi. Although some of these local debates were marred by poor attendance by the candidates (MEC Stringer, 2014), they provided an opportunity for contestants to articulate their agendas to the electorate. Debates between candidates in local councilor races were reportedly well received by potential voters (Mthawanji, 2014; Daily Times, 2014; Khakona, 2014).

Though still unbalanced, media coverage of opposition candidates and candidates for down-ticket races was better in the 2014 elections compared to previous elections. International observer reports bemoaned the imbalance of campaign coverage by the public broadcaster, Malawi Broadcasting Corporation, which favored President Joyce Banda and the PP (The Commonwealth, 2014; European Union, 2014). Detailed results on media monitoring during the campaign suggests the other major parties also benefited from unbalanced coverage by different private media houses (European Union, 2014).

A significant departure from the past was the prominence of party manifestoes in the 2014 election. In

previous elections, locating manifestoes was challenging (some party insiders were even uncertain as to their existence) and their content was typically thin. In 2014, the four main political parties (DPP, MCP, PP and UDF) all prepared and produced election manifestoes and three of these parties made their manifestoes available for download from their web sites.⁷ Though distinct in their history and leadership, the four leading parties did not demonstrate meaningful or obvious ideological or policy differences in their manifestoes. The manifestoes were mostly party propaganda, but there was significant devotion to discussion of issues important to ordinary citizens, and in some cases, policy proposals for dealing with those issues.

For the most part, the manifestoes came late in the campaign stage and were not widely circulated. The PP launched their manifesto on February 9, 2014 in Lilongwe. The UDF launched theirs on March 23, 2014 while the DPP and MCP launched their manifestoes on the same day, April 6, 2014, in Blantyre and Lilongwe respectively. Campaign advertisements in newspapers offered abbreviated highlights from party manifestoes. Although CMD worked with parties to produce abridged versions of the manifestoes in pamphlet format, only a small fraction of the electorate accessed these documents in time.

Relatedly, parties and candidates created and used web sites, Facebook pages, and Twitter accounts to spread their messages to potential voters. Social media was not a primary vehicle, however, for mobilizing attendance at campaign rallies or getting out the vote, as few of the candidates’ or parties’ accounts were actively managed in the period just prior to the election.

3. Institutions and rules governing the elections

Several pieces of legislation govern elections in Malawi. The Malawi constitution of 1995 establishes the Malawi Electoral Commission (MEC) and sets out the eligibility criteria for candidates for presidential, parliamentary and local government elections. A constitutional amendment in 2012 provides for the concurrent holding of local government elections with presidential and parliamentary elections.⁸ The Electoral Commission Act (1998) provides guidelines for the appointment of MEC commissioners and the Parliamentary and Presidential Elections Act (1993) and the Local Government Elections Act (1996) detail guidelines for conducting elections.

The Malawi constitution stipulates only two eligibility criteria for presidential candidates: Malawian citizenship and a minimum age of 35.⁹ However, MEC is empowered to set additional eligibility criteria, including the requirement

⁷ For example, the MCP manifesto, downloaded more than 2000 times before election day, is available at: <http://www.malawicongressparty.com/?wpdmact=process&did=Ni5ob3RsaW5r>. Likewise, the DPP manifesto is available at: <http://news.dppmalawi.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/04/DPP-Manifesto-2014-Final.pdf>, and the PP manifesto is available at: <http://peoplespartymalawi.net/images/PEOPLES-PARTY-MANIFESTO.pdf>.

⁸ See Section 147(5) of the Malawi Constitution, as amended in 2012.

⁹ See Section 80(6)(a and b) of the Malawi Constitution, 1995.

that all candidates provide a refundable deposit, which in 2014 was pegged at MWK1 million (about \$2500 at the rate of MWK400 to the US\$). There are no restrictions for campaign financing, and candidates are allowed to solicit unlimited campaign funds from individuals and organizations, within and outside Malawi.¹⁰

Malawi's constitution states, "the President shall be elected by a majority of the electorate," but the country does not have a second round system for electing presidents and instead relies on a first-past-the-post electoral system. The Malawi High Court ruled in 2000 that candidates only need to "obtain more votes of the votes cast at the poll than any other candidate" to satisfy the majority principle and win office (Malawi High Court, 2000). In three of the five elections since 1994, the winning presidential candidate has secured less than half of the votes.¹¹

Malawi also uses a first-past-the-post single-member district electoral system for parliamentary and local government races. Parties select MP and local government candidates by holding primary elections. Political party affiliation, however, is not required to run. Contestants are required to be 21 years old or older; demonstrate ability to speak and read English, the language of Parliament; and should be a registered voter in the constituency in which s/he will run. The same criteria apply for local government contestants.¹²

Overall management of elections is entrusted to the MEC. The MEC is led by a Chairperson, who has to be a judge nominated by the Judicial Service Commission. Other commissioners are appointed by the President in consultation with political parties represented in Parliament.

In the 2014 elections, MEC came under heavy criticism, starting with challenges in the voter registration verification exercise before the election (CSO Grand Coalition, 2014). Although the registration process passed without drama, MEC faced serious questions when political parties and other election stakeholders learned the number of registered voters exceeded adult population projections for 2014. The 2014 voter register's validity was further questioned when several errors emerged during voter verification that eventually forced MEC to suspend the process (Msokho, 2014).

MEC's inability to effectively fulfill its responsibilities carried through the course of the election with late or incorrect election materials arriving at a number of polling centers (Malawi Electoral Commission, 2014b). The polls were meant to be open on May 20, from 6 a.m. to 6 p.m., or until the last voter on the queue at 6 p.m. cast her vote, in accordance with the law. However, late delivery of voter materials delayed the opening of most polling centers. Malawi Electoral Support Network (2014) estimated only 23% of polling centers opened on time. In

one polling center in Mzimba district in northern Malawi, local government councilor elections were postponed after the center received the wrong ballot papers (Malawi Electoral Commission, 2014c). When announcing the presidential results, MEC chairperson Justice Maxon Mbendera conceded there were serious irregularities, citing a number of polling stations that recorded more votes than the number of people registered (Malawi Electoral Commission, 2014d). MEC's stumbles raised doubts about its preparedness to manage the elections, and, more importantly, the credibility of the final results.

A primary institutional actor in the 2014 elections was Malawi's courts, where much of the post-election drama unfolded. Specifically, two courts played a role: the Supreme Court of Appeal,¹³ and the High Courts in Blantyre and Lilongwe.¹⁴ The first to engage the courts was MEC, who sought and obtained a stay order to dismiss a directive by President Banda seeking a recount of the votes.¹⁵ MEC obtained a second High Court order after Joyce Banda had issued a promulgation annulling the elections (BBC News, 2014). The High Court in Blantyre upheld MEC's argument that Banda's promulgation was unconstitutional. After unofficial results aired on radio and television began to indicate Peter Mutharika was the likely winner, the MCP also petitioned the High Court to compel MEC to conduct a physical recount of ballots before announcing results. The DPP made a counter-petition and obtained an injunction from the High Court in Lilongwe, stopping MEC from doing any recount. Joining in the court fray were Friday Jumbe and Allan Ngumuya, who had contested as presidential and parliamentary candidates, respectively. These petitioned the High Court in Blantyre to order MEC to announce results without undertaking a physical recount.

Under Malawi electoral laws, MEC is required to announce results within eight days of the close of polling. Since the last polling station closed on May 22, the eight-day window technically ended May 30. However, 90 min before the deadline, it was still unclear whether the results would be announced in time. In a dramatic court decision issued at 10:30 p.m. on May 30, the High Court ruled that the eight-day requirement could not be varied, freeing MEC to announce the presidential results around midnight on May 30. The parliamentary and local government election results were released June 1.

4. Presidential election

A record 12 candidates competed in the 2014 presidential election. The four leading contenders included

¹⁰ See Section 66 of the Presidential and Parliamentary Elections Act, 1993.

¹¹ The only times a winning candidate has secured more than half of the votes were in 1999, when Bakili Muluzi won with 52% of the vote and in 2009, when late Bingu wa Mutharika won 66% of the presidential vote.

¹² See Section 51(1) of the Constitution of Malawi (1995) and section 27(1) of the Local Government Elections Act (1996).

¹³ The Supreme Court of Appeal is Malawi's superior court of record and the highest appellate court.

¹⁴ The High Court can hear and determine civil or criminal proceedings under any law and it has power to review any law and any action and decision of the government. For more on Malawi's courts, see VonDoepp (2009).

¹⁵ President Banda had called for a manual recount of ballots on May 22, listing a number of election irregularities (Banda, 2014).

incumbent president, Joyce Banda (PP), Peter Mutharika (DPP), Lazarus Chakwera (MCP), and Atupele Muluzi (UDF). African presidential elections often have a strong incumbency bias, and most analysts predicted a Banda win in a “closely fought” election ([Economist Intelligence Unit, 2014](#)). However, Mutharika won the presidential race with 36% of the popular vote. He was followed by Chakwera (28%), Banda (20%), and Muluzi (14%). None of the other candidates managed to get even one percent of the vote (see [Table 1](#)).

The results disaggregated to the district level make obvious regional patterns in support (see [Fig. 1](#)). Banda won a plurality of votes in all of the northern districts except the small island district of Likoma (Mutharika won a plurality of votes there). Chakwera won a majority of votes in most of the central region districts; he won only a plurality in Salima, and he did not carry Ntcheu (which was won by Mutharika).¹⁶ Muluzi won a majority of votes in two districts in the southern region that are UDF strongholds: Mangochi and Machinga. Mutharika won at least a plurality in the remaining districts, nearly all of which were in the southern region. With the exception of Banda, the four leading candidates drew strength in their home areas.¹⁷

With 2009 a notable exception, presidential elections in Malawi since 1994 have demonstrated ethnoregional patterns of support ([Ferree and Horowitz 2010](#)). The 2014 election is more similar to the pre-2009 elections, with some caveats. The four front-runners hail from three of Malawi's largest ethnic groups: Mutharika is Lomwe, Chakwera is Chewa, and both Banda and Muluzi are Yao. Ethnic bloc voting ([Ishiyama, 2012](#)) would attribute variation in political support based on candidates' ethnicity (e.g., Lomwes would support Mutharika, Chewas would support Chakwera, and Yaos would be split between Banda and Muluzi). Not having a northerner in the 2014 presidential race complicates analysis of ethnoregional patterns. However, looking only at districts that are predominantly populated by an ethnic group with which one of the front-runners identifies,¹⁸ all but two districts showed a plurality of support for a co-ethnic candidate. Chewa is the dominant ethnic group in the central region districts of Kasungu, Nkhonkhotakota, Ntchisi, Mchinji, Dowa, Salima, Lilongwe, and Dedza; Lazarus Chakwera won a plurality in all of these districts but Nkhonkhotakota (which was won by Banda). Yao is the dominant ethnic group in Mangochi, Machinga, and Balaka districts, and Muluzi won a majority of votes in these except for Balaka.¹⁹ Lomwe is the largest ethnic group in Zomba, Phalombe, Mulanje, and Thyolo, and Mutharika carried all of these districts. Mutharika won supermajorities in the latter three

Table 1

Malawi 2014 presidential election results.

Candidate	Party	Votes	Share
Peter Mutharika	DPP	1,904,399	36.4%
Lazarus Chakwera	MCP	1,455,880	27.8%
Joyce Banda	PP	1,056,236	20.2%
Atupele Muluzi	UDF	717,224	13.7%
Kamuzu Chibambo	Petra	19,360	0.4%
Mark Phiri	PPM	15,830	0.3%
John Chisi	UP	12,048	0.2%
George Nnensa	Mafunde	11,042	0.2%
James Nyondo	NASAF	10,623	0.2%
Helen Singh	UIP	9668	0.2%
Friday Jumbe	NLP	8819	0.2%
Aaron Katsonga	CCP	7454	0.1%

Note: 5,285,258 votes were cast in the presidential election, of which 56,675 were determined to be null and void.

Source: [Malawi Electoral Commission \(2014e\)](#).

districts, where Lomwe make up more than 75% of the population.²⁰

5. Parliamentary election

Seventeen parties fielded candidates for the 193-seat National Assembly. One parliamentary race was postponed due to the death of one of the candidates; a by-election for that race and for the parliamentary seat won by President Peter Mutharika²¹ will be held on October 7, 2014 ([Malawi Electoral Commission, 2014f](#)). A total of 1290 candidates, 20 percent of whom were women, contested in the 2014 parliamentary elections. Roughly one-third (421) of the candidates contested as independents.

Between them, the top four parties — the PP, DPP, MCP, and the UDF — won 138 of the 192 legislative seats. The DPP won 50 seats, followed by the MCP with 48. The PP won 26 and the UDF won 14. Two smaller parties (Alliance for Democracy and Chipani Cha Fuko) each won one seat. In yet another new record, independent candidates won 52 seats to become the single largest bloc in the new parliament, a sign that has been interpreted by political commentators as a loss of confidence in political parties ([Nyirongo, 2014](#)).

Like the presidential race, parliamentary races demonstrated regional patterns of support, although three of the four major parties managed to win races outside of their regional strongholds.²² The MCP won most of its parliamentary seats from the central region, but managed to win two races in the northern region (in Karonga and Mzimba districts). The PP primarily won races in the north, but also managed to win eight seats from constituencies in the southern region (five in Zomba, one in Mangochi, one in Machinga and one in Chikwawa) and five PP candidates won in the central region (one

¹⁶ Mutharika's running mate, Saulos Chilima, is from Ntcheu.

¹⁷ Though Banda carried the north, she is from Zomba district in the southern region. Her husband, however, hails from the north. Our observations alongside research by [Adida et al. \(2014\)](#) suggest his regional background may have played some role in her strong support in the north.

¹⁸ All district calculations of ethnic makeup are based on the 2008 census ([National Statistical Office n.d.](#)).

¹⁹ Mutharika barely edged out a plurality in Balaka ahead of Muluzi.

²⁰ Lomwe account for 37% of the population in Zomba district, compared to 75% of Thyolo and Mulanje districts, and 87% of Phalombe district. Mutharika won only 48% of the vote in Zomba, compared to 91%, 82%, and 79% in Thyolo, Mulanje, and Phalombe, respectively.

²¹ Presidential candidates in Malawi can simultaneously run for an MP seat. Because Mutharika won the presidency as well as his MP race, a by-election must be held to determine a new MP for Thyolo East constituency.

²² The UDF only won parliamentary races in the south, but one of these seats was in Chikwawa District, not in the three districts considered UDF strongholds (Balaka, Machinga, and Mangochi).

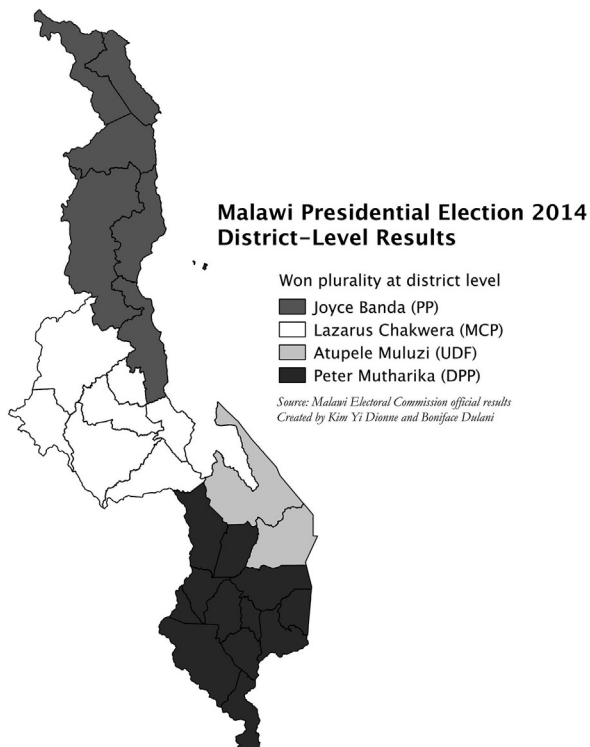


Fig. 1. Regional voting patterns in Malawi's 2014 presidential race.

in Mchinji, two in Kasungu and two in Salima). The DPP had the strongest cross-regional performance, having won parliamentary seats in 18 of Malawi's 28 districts.

Some parliamentary races were narrowly fought; eleven MPs won their seats with less than a 1% margin of victory. The closest race was on Likoma Island, where DPP candidate George Kamwanja beat MCP candidate Christopher Songwe by only seven votes.²³ Perhaps the most interesting narrow race was where former Vice President Khumbo Kachali standing as a PP candidate²⁴ managed to beat independent candidate Raymond Nkhata in Mzimba South West constituency by only 51 votes (a 0.2% margin of victory).

Malawi's first-past-the-post electoral system means many MPs represent constituencies in which few of them win a majority of voters' support. For example, in one closely fought race – Machinga Likwenu constituency – decided by only 50 votes, UDF candidate David Lally became the MP having only won 17.3% of the votes in his constituency.

²³ Likoma is a small district both in area and population. Only 6933 Malawians were registered to vote in Likoma, and of these, 5791 voted in the election. Kamwanja's margin of victory over Songwe thus translates to 0.1%. In this race, 61 votes cast were deemed null and void.

²⁴ Kachali was technically a PP candidate, though after a falling out with President Joyce Banda largely because she did not select him as her running mate for the 2014 election, he publicly endorsed DPP presidential candidate Peter Mutharika.

6. Local government elections

Since the 1994 democratic transition, Malawi has held local government elections only once, in 2000. Turnout for the 2000 local government elections was poor, at only 14 percent.²⁵ Since 2005, when the terms of the first group of local councilors expired, the country has operated without local elected officials, further concentrating power in the center. However, in 2014, voters concurrently elected local government councilors.

A total of 2398 candidates (1981 men and 417 women) competed for 462 local government seats across the country. Elections were postponed in five local government wards, due to deaths of candidates or unavailability of voting materials. By-elections will be held in these wards on October 7, 2014 (Malawi Electoral Commission, 2014f).

The four main parties dominated these elections. The DPP won 165 seats and gained control of 11 councils, all but one in the party's southern region stronghold; MCP won a total of 131 local council seats and gained control of 9 councils, all in the party's central region stronghold; PP won 65 seats and control of 4 councils, all in the northern region. The UDF won 57 local council seats and will control 3 councils in the eastern region. Other small parties won four local government seats and independent candidates won 35. No party gained outright control in eight councils.

Patterns of support across districts are consistent with what we saw in the presidential race, though like in the parliamentary races, some candidates managed to win outside their party's stronghold. There were PP councilors elected in the center and the south. A few UDF councilors won offices in the north and center. MCP candidates managed to win a few races in the northern region, but none in the south. The DPP managed to win local government seats in all but five districts.

7. Implications

The 2014 election outcomes are rather similar to those of the 1994 and 2004 races. In 2014, like in 1994 and 2004, the president won office with only a plurality of the popular vote (not a majority) and faces an opposition-controlled parliament. Should the first terms of Muluzi and Bingu wa Mutharika prove as examples, we can expect Peter Mutharika's first term to involve some compromise with opposition parties, and a focus on implementing populist policies. Without support from independent MPs, the new government is likely to face challenges in passing legislation, similar to those encountered by Bingu wa Mutharika during his first term.

Malawi's first-past-the-post electoral system has yielded another presidency with limited popular support. The current electoral system has raised questions about the legitimacy of winning candidates who fail to secure at least a simple majority. Though analysts might focus on how Peter Mutharika's limited support makes fragile Malawi's political stability, that may only be true in the very near term. We expect Mutharika will rule his first term with eyes

²⁵ Compare this to average turnout in Malawian presidential and parliamentary elections between 1994 and 2009: 78 percent.

on a second. Thus his limited popular support and his need to compromise with opposition parties and independent candidates will likely yield a policy agenda that will benefit a majority of Malawians.

Women's representation suffered a great loss in Malawi's 2014 election – beyond Banda's loss of the presidency. Despite efforts by the Gender Coordination Network and other stakeholders to boost the number of women legislators, only 30 women won parliamentary seats. Malawi's gender ratio in Parliament has declined as a result; 22% of the outgoing parliament was female, and the new parliament is only 16% female – far below the 50% target proposed in the SADC Gender Protocol,²⁶ of which Malawi is a signatory. As with the parliamentary elections, women candidates for local councilor elections fared poorly, as only 56 of the new councilors are women, making up 14% of all local councilors.

It is too early to tell the implications of Malawi's local government elections. Just having councilors, which have been absent since 2005, offers Malawians another avenue to seek assistance and voice opinions and concerns. Though the previous councilors failed to offer much to citizens, those elected in 2014 will receive small cash payments for their service (the pre-2005 crop received no remuneration), perhaps likely to be sufficient in incentivizing local councilors to devote time and effort to their official duties.

If democracy is consolidated when an incumbent loses and accepts defeat (Huntington, 1991; Cheibub et al., 1996), then the 2014 election is an important milestone for Malawi's democracy. Although President Joyce Banda tried various maneuvers to resist defeat, she eventually conceded and Peter Mutharika took office. The 2014 Malawi election is further evidence that alternation of power through elections is possible in African politics.

8. Conclusion

Malawi's 2014 elections signify how elections in democratizing contexts face simultaneously outmoded electoral influences (such as ethnoregional patterns of political support) as well as forces of democratizing institutions (like the courts ensuring rule of law). Former President Banda was seen by many as a new start for Malawi – she was a woman and she came to office by way of the constitution instead of the ballot box. However, when faced with the real possibility of losing office, Banda used handouts and her incumbency advantage during the 2014 campaign – signifying the power that remains in these older electoral strategies in Malawi's young democracy. Her loss, however, suggests incumbency and handouts are no longer sufficient to win office.

The organizational glitches in the 2014 elections were outshined by the independence and professionalism of Malawi's courts in the elections' aftermath. The Malawi courts were instrumental in ensuring the rule of law prevailed at a time when electoral institutions came under strain from both losers and winners alike. While the 2014

election results suggest a gradual consolidation of Malawi democracy, challenges still remain. Strengthening capacity of the electoral commission and increasing its independence; the need for strong and effective dispute resolution mechanisms; clarification of the rules that govern the declaration of winners, among others, need attention to ensure credibility of future elections.

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²⁶ Article 12 of the SADC Gender Protocol states that “States Parties shall endeavor that, by 2015, at least fifty percent of decision-making position in the public and private sectors are held by women, including the use of affirmative action measures as provided for in Article 5.”

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The legislative and executive elections in Colombia, 2014



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The 2014 national elections mark a drastic departure for Colombian political dynamics as a new intra-elite division emerged during the campaign that further shook the nation's traditional two party system. Fractures in the party system emerged partly due to the personalized political ambitions of key players and over the substantive issue of how best to end the longstanding conflict between the Government and the leftist guerrilla group known as the FARC. The contests saw the traditional Conservative (PC) and Liberal (PL) parties fighting hard to defend their longstanding dominance against newly

branded contenders from both the left and right of the ideological spectrum. Competition from the left had occurred before, but in 2014 competition from but the right emerged with the presence of a strong opposition led by former president Álvaro Uribe, a one-time affiliate of PL who defected to create Centro Democrático (CD) because of disagreements over making peace with the FARC. When the ballots had been counted, Unidad Nacional's Juan Manuel Santos was reelected as President and the Legislature was composed mostly by the Unidad Nacional coalition (Partido Social de Unidad Nacional, PL and Cambio Radical) which was able to secure 45% of the seats in the Senate and 49% of the seats in the House. The main opposition should come from the CD and PC which jointly amass 37% of the seats in the Senate and 29% of the seats in the House.

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