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**Championing the poor: Branding  
around poverty reduction as a  
response to electoral competition in  
Malawi, 2005-2014**

Sam Hamer

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#### About the author:

Sam Hamer graduated from the University of Cape Town in 2015, having got a distinction for his Masters thesis on "Political Branding in Botswana and Malawi: Electoral Competition and the Welfare Agenda, 1994-2014". His research in Botswana and Malawi was funded by the UK Department for International Development, through the DfID/Economic and Social Research Council Joint Fund for Poverty Alleviation

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# Championing the poor: Branding around poverty reduction as a response to electoral competition in Malawi, 2005-2014

## Abstract

*Malawian national politics since 2005 has featured two presidents, Bingu wa Mutharika and Joyce Banda, who quit their respective former parties when political rivals impeded their paths to power. Both leaders thereafter established new political parties and opted to “brand” them as prioritising poverty reduction. These brands—which had programmatic, rhetorical, and symbolic components—allowed Mutharika and Banda the possibility of achieving a broader national appeal, whereas presidential elections before 2009 had been decided on the basis of regional patronage networks. Mutharika’s brand suggested how he would empower smallholder farmers to be able to ensure their own food security. Mutharika achieved this outcome in his first term and the voters overwhelmingly returned him to office. A collapsing economy in his second term, however, intensified national poverty. Banda’s brand was a response to this poverty and suggested how she would be committed to alleviating poverty for Malawi’s marginalised groups including women. Her “handout” programmes endeared her to some poor Malawians who had not benefitted from Mutharika-era growth. The 2014 election result, in which 36 percent of the vote was enough to win the presidency, indicates how no candidate’s political brand had earned the appeal of a majority of voters. Analysis of Afrobarometer survey data reveals that Malawi’s citizens tend to prefer government action to address food shortages over the redress of poverty directly. Mutharika’s successful efforts to combat food insecurity were relatively salient to voters in 2009. Banda’s destitution-centred efforts were less successful in the 2014 election.*

## Introduction

In the 2009 election, Malawi’s president Bingu wa Mutharika scored an overwhelming victory, winning 66 percent of the vote and clear majorities in

the country's three regions—North, Centre, and South. The margin of victory was itself noteworthy: Mutharika won by 35 points over John Tembo of the Malawi Congress Party (MCP), by far the widest margin of Malawi's five presidential elections to date. More extraordinary still was the fact that the previous three presidential elections had all featured outcomes in which a candidate's regional identity strongly predicted his electoral performance. Indeed, no candidate had before earned a plurality of votes outside of his home region. Since a plurality of the country inhabits Malawi's Southern region, the three presidential elections prior to 2009 all featured southern winners. Mutharika, candidate for the southern-based United Democratic Front (UDF) party, had been the latest beneficiary of this regionalism, which had allowed him one of the slimmest margins of electoral victory in 2004.

Between 2004 and 2009, it was Mutharika's ability to champion the interests of the country's largest social demographic—smallholder farmers—that allowed the president to transcend the entrenched regional tendencies characterising Malawi's three prior presidential elections.<sup>1</sup> The likeliest cause of this electoral breakthrough was the Agricultural Input Subsidy Programme (AISP) that the Mutharika government (2004-2012) introduced in 2005.<sup>2</sup> AISP, which was the culmination of previous input subsidy programmes of lesser scope, distributed vouchers that farmers could use to purchase fertiliser and food crop seeds at (initially) one-quarter of the commercial price. Though the government had sponsored input programmes in the past, Mutharika's unprecedented scope of investment in fertiliser subsidies, which more than doubled the country's maize yield from 2005 to 2006, transformed the country from being perennially dependent on imported food aid to being secure in its own agricultural capacity.<sup>3</sup> "Indications of positive impact ... of the programme," Chinsinga (2007) noted at the time, "are raising its profile as the magic wand to the

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<sup>1</sup> In Malawi the ratio of rural to urban dwellers is about 4-to-1. Agriculture is by far the most common source of livelihood for rural Malawians. Of rural farmers, approximately 9-out-of-10 practice smallholder agriculture.

<sup>2</sup> The name of the programme was changed to Farm Input Subsidy Programme (FISP) in 2010. Dyton Maliro, "Comparison of Agricultural Input Subsidies and Social Cash Transfers as Policies for Reducing Vulnerability to Hunger in Malawi" (University of East Anglia, 2011), 2, <http://core.kmi.open.ac.uk/download/pdf/2778813.pdf>.

There has been significant literature devoted to the links between AISP/FISP and Mutharika's electoral success. For recent explorations of this topic, see Ferree and Horowitz (2010) and Brazys *et al.* (2015). This paper extends the analyses of these scholars backwards in time, elucidating how political competition motivated Mutharika (and then Banda) to brand themselves around particular poverty reduction strategies that comprised their respective policy agendas.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 118.

problem of food insecurity.”<sup>4</sup> By the end of 2006, not only had Malawians produced enough food to feed the country, but when other countries in the region were suffering from drought, the government of Malawi was able to export maize to them, a pride-affirming phenomenon for a nation that had long been accustomed to importing food to meet deficits. When in 2009 Mutharika stood for a second term as president, though this time as the candidate for the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP), a large majority of voters believed for the first time that, in the president’s words, “it is possible for Africa to become the food basket of the world.”<sup>5</sup>

The extraordinary risk that Mutharika took in 2005 to offer subsidised fertiliser to farmers, which ultimately engendered a “Green Revolution” across Sub-Saharan Africa, was the product of Malawi’s particular political circumstances in the mid-2000s.<sup>6</sup> Though AISP/FISP and the electoral outcomes it has engendered have been extensively documented, most notably by Ferree and Horowitz (2010) and Brazys *et al.* (2015), insufficient attention has been paid to the role that electoral competition and the donor agenda have played in prompting Mutharika to brand himself as the “food security president.”<sup>7</sup> This paper thus extends the analyses of these scholars backwards in time, elucidating how political competition motivated Mutharika to brand himself around an enhanced food production-based poverty reduction strategy.

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<sup>4</sup> Blessings Chinsinga, “Reclaiming Policy Space: Lessons from Malawi’s 2005/2006 Fertilizer Subsidy Programme,” *Policy Brief No 13* (2007): 17, [http://r4d.dfid.gov.uk/pdf/outputs/futureagriculture/fac\\_research\\_paper\\_no6.pdf](http://r4d.dfid.gov.uk/pdf/outputs/futureagriculture/fac_research_paper_no6.pdf).

<sup>5</sup> Molalet Tsedeke, “‘It Is Possible for Africa to Become the Food Basket of the World,’ Says Mutharika,” *Nepad.org*, October 28, 2010, <http://www.nepad.org/foodsecurity/news/1786/%E2%80%9Cit-possible-africa-become-food-basket-world%E2%80%9D-mutharika>.

<sup>6</sup> Jeffrey D. Sachs, “How Malawi Fed Its Own People,” *The New York Times*, April 19, 2012, <http://www.nytimes.com/2012/04/20/opinion/how-malawi-fed-its-own-people.html>.

The idea that AISP had sparked a ‘Green Revolution’ across Africa is likely not to have been an exaggeration. Chinsinga noted that input subsidy programmes “hardly featured on the policy landscape in 2000, [but] by 2011 10 African countries were spending roughly US\$1.05 billion on ISPs, amounting to 28.6% of their public expenditure on agriculture.” Blessings Chinsinga and Colin Poulton, “Beyond Technocratic Debates: The Significance and Transience of Political Incentives in the Malawi Farm Input Subsidy Programme (FISP),” *Development Policy Review* 32, no. s2 (November 1, 2014): 123, doi:10.1111/dpr.12079.

<sup>7</sup> Instead of understanding voters as being concerned with particular election issues or specific programmes, this analysis understands candidates and parties to be offering particular political brands. Voters may understand a candidate to be “pro-poor”—one example of a brand—for a variety of reasons that could include consideration of the candidate’s programmatic agenda, policy proposals, rhetoric vis-à-vis poor citizens, and party/campaign symbolism. Viewing candidates as being representative of political brands offers a more holistic paradigm for understanding how and why citizens vote the way they do.

This instance of political branding, moreover, foreshadowed the political branding of Malawi's most recent former president, Joyce Banda (2012-2014). Despite the fact that Mutharika and Banda both founded political parties from which they contested for election, there has been a dearth of scholarship comparing the two presidents and how they both strove to achieve support from a national electorate. Like her predecessor, Banda responded to circumstances of intense political competition by pursuing her own poverty reduction brand, though hers centred on social protection rather than on food production.<sup>8</sup> With more competitive candidates in the 2014 race than ever before, Banda was under even more pressure than Mutharika to distinguish her candidacy from the offerings of her three main political rivals. Though these two cases of presidential branding were followed by very different electoral outcomes in 2009 and 2014, patterns in the behaviour of presidential candidates in the face of political competition offers more fundamental insights into the nature of elections in Malawi.

## Ethno-regional politics in Malawi

Though perhaps competitive by regional standards, presidential elections in Malawi's first decade of multiparty competition were altogether predictable. Following a 1993 referendum that felled the one-party state of "Life President" Hastings Kamuzu Banda (MCP), there emerged among Malawians, noted Osei-Hwedie (1998), a "strong perception and belief that they can only benefit from government jobs, finances and resources if fellow clansmen are in control of the political system."<sup>9</sup> From 1964 to 1994, Banda pursued a systematic elevation of ethnic Chewa leaders—predominant in the Central region—into the civil service while generally excluding leaders from other ethnic groups who inhabit Malawi's Northern and Southern regions.<sup>10</sup> After three decades of Chewa favouritism, the new political parties that emerged after 1993, including the UDF and Alliance for Democracy (AFORD), sought to redistribute the

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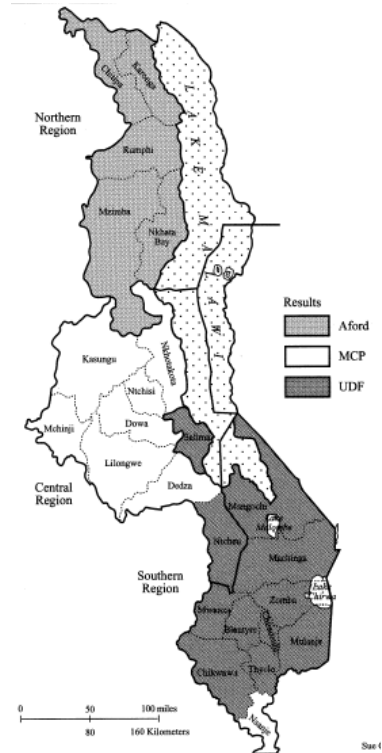
<sup>8</sup> There is no consensus definition of which programmes constitute "social protection" in Malawi. For the purposes of this paper, social protection programmes refers to programmes that are often characterised as "social safety nets" or "cash transfers." The poverty reduction programmes that Joyce Banda introduced as president were either in fact examples of or in the style of these kinds of social protection programmes. Though Mutharika's agricultural subsidy programme has sometimes been referred to as "social protection," for the purposes of this analysis AISP/FISP should not be construed as a social protection programme but rather as a productivity-enhancing poverty reduction programme.

<sup>9</sup> Bertha Osei-Hwedie, "The Role of Ethnicity in Multi-Party Politics in Malawi and Zambia," *Journal of Contemporary African Studies* 16, no. 2 (1998): 204–241. Hastings Kamuzu Banda is of no relation to the subsequent president, Joyce Banda.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 227–228.

country's social and political capital to their constituents who were generally not Chewa.<sup>11</sup>

This balkanised electoral map after 1994 awarded the presidency essentially by default to Bakili Muluzi, a Yao tribesman from the populous Southern region. After the election, in which he won 47 percent of the vote, Muluzi adopted Banda's practice of neopatrimonial politics, shoring up support in his native region. For instance, as Phiri and Edriss (2013) documented, the Muluzi presidency featured far higher levels of corruption in the civil service than what the country had experienced under Banda, allowing the UDF to strengthen its ties with tribal leaders from across the South.<sup>12</sup> The UDF's war chest, largely pilfered from government tenders, allowed Muluzi, as Gaynor (2010) argued, to extend a "seemingly compassionate" handout campaign toward "needy" Malawians.<sup>13</sup> The UDF government also acted to root out whatever grassroots networks the old Banda regime had established in the South, Cammack *et al.* (2007) argued, by abolishing local government councils altogether.<sup>14</sup> These practices further strengthened support for the president in his home region and can largely explain Muluzi's successful election and re-election bids. The fact that Muluzi's tactics had in this way favoured Malawians of the South over residents of other regions perpetuated the system of patronage politics that had theretofore characterised Malawi's political economy.



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<sup>11</sup> Karen Ferree and Jeremy Horowitz, "Ties That Bind? The Rise and Decline of Ethno-Regional Partisanship in Malawi, 1994–2009," *Democratization* 17, no. 3 (June 1, 2010): 534–63, doi:10.1080/13510341003700394.

<sup>12</sup> Horace Phiri and Abdi Khalil Edriss, "Neopatrimonialism and Agricultural Protection," *International Food Policy Research Institute*, November 2013, <http://www.ifpri.org/sites/default/files/publications/masspwp1.pdf>.

<sup>13</sup> Niamh Gaynor, "Between Citizenship and Clientship: The Politics of Participatory Governance in Malawi," *Journal of Southern African Studies* 36, no. 4 (December 1, 2010): 801–16, doi:10.1080/03057070.2010.527637.

<sup>14</sup> Diana Cammack et al., "Neopatrimonial Politics, Decentralisation and Local Government: Uganda and Malawi in 2006," *Good Governance, Aid Modalities and Poverty Reduction: Linkages to the Millennium Development Goals and Implications for Irish Aid, Research Project (RP-05-GG) of the Advisory Board for Irish Aid*. Dec, 2007, <https://blids.ids.ac.uk/files/dmfile/CammacketalGAPWP2.pdf>.

With an entrenched patronage system presenting strong incentives for voters to favour the candidate from their home region, early presidential elections did not principally hinge on issues or the policy performance of the UDF-led government. Ferree and Horowitz noted how Malawians throughout the Northern and Central parts of the country generally approved of Muluzi's performance as president, but at the same time said they would vote for other parties in an election.<sup>15</sup> The results of one 1994 election exit poll showed how regionalised the electorate in fact was: candidates from the North (Chakufwa Chihana – AFORD), Centre (Banda), and South (Muluzi) were supported by at least two-thirds of voters from their respective home regions.<sup>16</sup> Muluzi followed his election in 1994 with re-election in 1999 again with robust support from Southern voters, despite winning only 11 percent of votes from outside of his home region.

In 2004, the UDF won a third-consecutive presidential contest, though this time with Muluzi's protégé Mutharika leading the ticket. While the 2004 race featured more presidential contenders than had contested previously, no candidate was able to make significant inroads into areas other than where he had originated. This allowed Mutharika, Ferree and Horowitz argued, to squeak by his rivals with just 36 percent of the vote, predominantly owing to a bloc of Southern support.<sup>17</sup> Had Mutharika not opted to found his own party (the DPP), which measurably increased the competition of Malawi's elections, the 2009 electoral map might have looked altogether similar to that of the first three elections.

## **The UDF brand: inclusivity for poor Malawians**

Though the UDF conducted its politics in a way that reinforced patronage networks, Muluzi's rhetoric and government policies, paradoxically, seemed to have been tailored to foster a more universal base of support. This was clear to van Donge (1995), who argued that viewing candidates as “merely regional phenomena ... would overlook their attempts to portray themselves as [being] of much wider significance.”<sup>18</sup> With the emergence of political competition in 1994, political parties have crafted party documents and pursued particular policies in office that have been distinctive from the offerings of other parties.

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<sup>15</sup> Ferree and Horowitz, “Ties That Bind?”

<sup>16</sup> Afrobarometer, “A Country Turning Blue?: Political Party Support and the End of Regionalism in Malawi,” Briefing Paper, (November 2009).

<sup>17</sup> Ferree and Horowitz, “Ties That Bind?”

<sup>18</sup> Jan Kees van Donge, “Kamuzu's Legacy: The Democratization of Malawi: Or Searching for the Rules of the Game in African Politics,” *African Affairs*, 1995, 227–57.



Though the thematic resonance between parties may at times make them seem interchangeable, Chunga (2014) argued, increases to political competition over time have accompanied candidates' efforts to become increasingly specialised in their policy offerings.<sup>19</sup> Branding may not have profoundly altered the outcomes of Malawi's first three presidential elections, but the UDF's increased emphasis on poverty reduction and food security for all Malawians differentiated the party from its more elitist MCP rivals and laid the groundwork for Mutharika to later foster his own political brand around food production.

As a self-described "underground movement" that liberated Malawi from the regime of the autocratic Kamuzu Banda, Muluzi strove to market the UDF as a populist response to the classist society over which the old MCP had presided.<sup>20</sup> Muluzi developed a presidential agenda that prioritised poverty alleviation and inclusive growth for the masses whose development had been suppressed by the *ancien régime* and its corporatist policies.<sup>21</sup> Muluzi's pursuit of a "pro-poor" brand contrasted with that of Banda, whose regime Chinsinga (2012) described as being "probably the most repressive regime in the entire southern African region."<sup>22</sup> The former government had harboured "no commitment to poverty reduction and an aggressive economic growth strategy based on industrialisation."<sup>23</sup> Banda's agricultural policies, moreover, favoured an elite class of civil-servant farmers who consolidated tracts of customary land and leased it to smallholder farmers, further exacerbating rural poverty.<sup>24</sup> Muluzi's brand, which was in part based in the government programmes he endorsed, implied that he would undermine these limitations that Banda had erected as barriers to inclusive growth. By abolishing the Special Crops Act, for instance, Muluzi liberated smallholder farmers to produce cash crops, most notably burley tobacco. The previous government had restricted cultivation of cash crops to (often white and/or foreign) commercial farmers so as to maximise the foreign exchange reserves that facilitated the industrial development projects

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<sup>19</sup> Joseph J. Chunga, "Examining the Relevance of Political Parties in Malawi," 2014, [http://afrobarometer.org/files/documents/briefing\\_papers/afrobrieffno125.pdf](http://afrobarometer.org/files/documents/briefing_papers/afrobrieffno125.pdf).

<sup>20</sup> "Malawi Ex-President Muluzi Farewell Speech at UDF Convention," *Malawi Nyasa Times - Malawi Breaking News in Malawi*, accessed June 1, 2015, <http://www.nyasatimes.com/2012/10/31/malawi-ex-president-muluzi-farewell-speech-at-udf-convention/>.

<sup>21</sup> Blessings Chinsinga, "The Political Economy of Agricultural Policy Processes in Malawi: A Case Study of the Fertilizer Subsidy Programme," 2012, <http://mobile.opendocs.ids.ac.uk/opendocs/handle/123456789/2249>.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

<sup>23</sup> Mick Foster et al., "Poverty Reduction Strategy and Public Expenditure in Five African Countries," 2002, 5, <http://www.odi.org/sites/odi.org.uk/files/odi-assets/publications-opinion-files/2051.pdf>.

<sup>24</sup> Phiri and Edriss, "Neopatrimonialism and Agricultural Protection," 1.

taking place in Lilongwe.<sup>25</sup> Branding against the legacy of this top-down regime, Muluzi suggested that the UDF would be a populist “Front” that was dedicated to uplifting poor Malawians.

In addition to undoing the old MCP policies that marginalised poor farmers, Muluzi pursued an extensive social protection infrastructure prioritising poverty alleviation for the able-bodied poor. According to Chirwa and Dorward (2013), the “failures by [Banda’s] policies in dealing with core poverty/vulnerability and food security problems” affirmed Malawi’s place as the poorest country in southern Africa.<sup>26</sup> In 1998, over 65 percent of the country still lived on less than US\$1 per day (“poor”) while nearly 29 percent were living on half of that (“extremely poor”).<sup>27</sup> In an open letter headlining the party’s 1999 manifesto (“Eradicating Poverty”), Muluzi stated how the party had “in line with our 1994 campaign pledges ... decided to make poverty alleviation priority number one in all our development policies.”<sup>28</sup> He highlighted in the letter two programmes that were targeted at Malawi’s able-bodied poor. The first programme was the “now famous and highly successful” Starter Pack Scheme (SPS), which provided to farmers 2.86 million packs containing enough seeds and fertiliser to farm 0.1ha of land.<sup>29</sup> The government’s initial (1998) share of spending on the programme was 56 percent (US\$14.5 million) with the rest being supported by a consortium of donors led by DFID.<sup>30</sup> The programme was able to achieve in its earliest manifestation, Devereux and Macauslan (2006) noted, sufficient output to furnish 16 percent of all smallholder farming yield.<sup>31</sup> This was “not enough for national self-sufficiency, but enough to close the food gap substantially.”<sup>32</sup> By the 1999 election, Malawians were remarking on “Muluzi maize,” and the SPS “featured highly in the political campaigns of both

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<sup>25</sup> Ibid.; UDF Election Manifesto, 1994.

<sup>26</sup> Ephraim Chirwa and Andrew Dorward, *Agricultural Input Subsidies: The Recent Malawi Experience* (Oxford University Press, 2013), 69.

<sup>27</sup> “1998 Integrated Household Survey and Poverty Analysis” (National Statistics Office, 1998), <http://www.nsomalawi.mw/publications/integrated-household-survey/1998-integrated-household-survey.html>.

<sup>28</sup> UDF Election Manifesto, 1999.

<sup>29</sup> Catherine Longley, John Coulter, and Roy Thompson, “Malawi Rural Livelihoods Starter Pack Scheme 1998-99 Evaluation Report,” *ODI, London, 1999, 1*, <http://www.reading.ac.uk/ssc/n/TIP%20Archive%20CD/related%20materials/SP1/SPS1%20evaluation%20report/evaluation%20report.pdf>.

<sup>30</sup> Jane Harrigan, “Food Insecurity, Poverty and the Malawian Starter Pack: Fresh Start or False Start?,” *Food Policy* 33, no. 3 (June 2008): 245, doi:10.1016/j.foodpol.2007.09.001.

<sup>31</sup> Stephen Devereux and Ian Macauslan, “Review of Social Protection Instruments in Malawi,” *Desk Study for DFID Malawi*, 2006, 4, <http://www.ids.ac.uk/files/MalawiSocialProtectionReview.pdf>.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

government and opposition candidates.”<sup>33</sup> Not only did SPS help to characterise the Muluzi brand, but it supplied an important programmatic precedent for Bingu wa Mutharika’s more expansive AISP.

In addition to prioritising the empowerment of smallholder farmers, Muluzi emphasised relief and inclusivity for Malawians not otherwise engaged in farming practices. The other programme that Muluzi touted in the UDF manifesto was the Malawi Social Action Fund (MASAF). A public employment programme funded largely by the World Bank, MASAF was the central pillar of the “Poverty Alleviation Programme” that Muluzi launched in August 1996. An infusion of US\$68 million from the World Bank in 1999 to ensure that the programme (MASAF II) would continue through 2003 transformed the programme into Malawi’s “major social safety net,” according to Maliro (2011).<sup>34</sup> Muluzi’s characterisation of MASAF, moreover, as a “delivery vehicle for reaching out to the masses” and “a true example of bottom-to-top democracy” further evidenced the president’s attempts to build up the UDF’s pro-poor brand.

Both SPS and MASAF benefitted poor Malawians who had generally been ignored under the *ancien régime*, yet their respective shortcomings perhaps limited their usefulness in driving a broader base of support for the ruling party. In the case of SPS, the effectiveness of the programme to target the poorest households was limited. Because of the untargeted (or universal) nature of the programme, much of the smallholder production was achieved by relatively wealthier households who had the requisite baseline of land and labour to cultivate a higher output.<sup>35</sup> As the 1998-1999 ODI review of the SPS concluded, many households at the more extreme end of the vulnerability spectrum received starter packs, but they lacked sufficient land on which to cultivate a yield sufficient enough to surmount food insecurity. Moreover, while SPS did enhance yield across many thousands of households, Malawi was still running a deficit of between 500,000 and 600,000 tonnes of maize every year.<sup>36</sup> While SPS undoubtedly improved conditions for farmers across the country who had suffered Banda’s exclusivist policies, the benefits were not sufficient to prompt a significant change in the party’s electoral support base.

Nor did the UDF seem able to translate benefits from the MASAF employment programmes into support from a wider base of voters. MASAF, like SPS,

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<sup>33</sup> Longley, Coulter, and Thompson, “Malawi Rural Livelihoods Starter Pack Scheme 1998-99 Evaluation Report,” 42–43.

<sup>34</sup> Maliro, “Comparison of Agricultural Input Subsidies and Social Cash Transfers as Policies for Reducing Vulnerability to Hunger in Malawi,” 65.

<sup>35</sup> Devereux and Macauslan, “Review of Social Protection Instruments in Malawi,” 5.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 4.

suffered from operational shortcomings, often failing to target communities with deeper levels of poverty. Kishindo (2000) found that Blantyre District—the South’s largest district and at the time a UDF stronghold—had received the largest proportion of MASAF funding in the country.<sup>37</sup> Moreover, the fact that 45 percent of total MASAF spending went to projects in the South likely served only to reinforce Muluzi’s existing electoral support base. This programmatic reinforcement of regional loyalties in fact probably stymied the party’s attempts to foster a more geographically diverse mix of supporters.

Whatever improvements to food security that the Muluzi government had achieved through SPS were short-lived, however. Donor pressure forced the SPS to be scaled back to almost one-quarter of its original budget (US\$7.2 million) in 2001, according to Harrigan (2008), ostensibly out of concern that the programme was inhibiting rural livelihood diversification away from maize production.<sup>38</sup> Led by the IMF and USAID, these donors successfully pressured government to cancel SPS and adopt the more limited Targeted Input Programme (TIP) that could better target extreme poverty. The transition reduced yields to such a degree that total smallholder production owed to government subsidies fell from 16 to 3 percent.<sup>39</sup> In addition to decreasing overall food availability, the fall in output also sparked a near quintupling of maize prices from October 2001 to March 2002. For smallholder farmers who must rely on purchased maize during the lean months of the year (December-February), this price hike precipitated thousands of hunger-related deaths between 2000 and 2002, which was only partially mitigated by (late-arriving) emergency food aid totalling 195,000 tonnes in 2002.<sup>40</sup>

This crisis of the early decade deepened political elites’ suspicions that the donors could not be trusted to ensure Malawi’s food security.<sup>41</sup> With the 2004 election on the horizon, according to Chirwa and Dorward (2013), “fertiliser politics” became the main feature of the campaign.<sup>42</sup> While the donor agenda demanded greater austerity toward smallholder development, political elites

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<sup>37</sup> Paul Kishindo, “Community Project Funding in Malawi under the Malawi Social Action Fund (MASAF) Demand-Driven Approach: Potential for Perpetuating Imbalances in Development,” *Journal of Social Development in Africa* 15, no. 1 (2000): 11–13.

<sup>38</sup> Harrigan, “Food Insecurity, Poverty and the Malawian Starter Pack,” 244.

<sup>39</sup> Malawi’s GDP declined by 5.0 percent in 2001. Devereux and Macauslan, “Review of Social Protection Instruments in Malawi.”

<sup>40</sup> “Unravelling the ‘miracle’ of Malawi’s Green Revolution” (GRAIN, January 14, 2010), <http://www.grain.org/article/entries/4075-unravelling-the-miracle-of-malawi-s-green-revolution>.

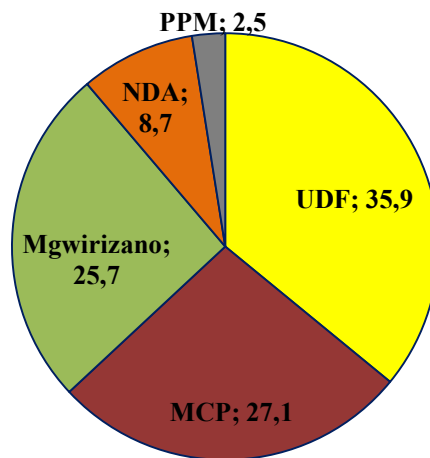
<sup>41</sup> Chinsinga, “The Political Economy of Agricultural Policy Processes in Malawi.”

<sup>42</sup> Chirwa and Dorward, *Agricultural Input Subsidies*, 67–68.

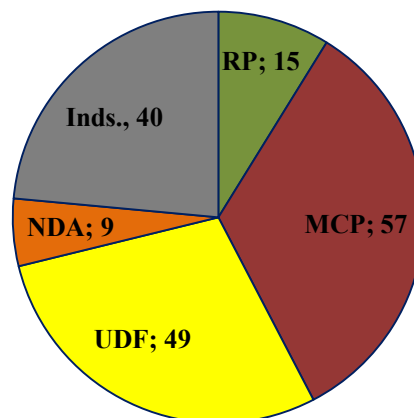
including the UDF's new presidential candidate Mutharika were undoubtedly considering different approaches.

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*Presidential election results, 2004*



*National Assembly election results, 2004*



## **Bingu wa Mutharika, champion of the smallholder farmer**

With the announcement on 25 May that Bingu wa Mutharika had won the 2004 presidential election, Malawi was at the cusp of a new era. The UDF stalwart and co-founder of the party with Muluzi was the latter's choice to succeed him as president, especially after attempts to change the Constitution to allow for Muluzi to run for a third term were thwarted in the constitutional court.<sup>43</sup> Mutharika had trained overseas in Development Economics and served

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<sup>43</sup> Janet Chikaya-Banda, "Duty of Care: Constitutional and Law Reform, in Malawi," *Africa Research Institute*, Policy Voices, September 2012.

thereafter as a civil servant in Banda's MCP government.<sup>44</sup> But he soon became an activist against the government he purported to represent and thereafter was forced into exile in Zambia, joining that country's corps of technocratic elites. He joined the UDF in 1992 (before it became a sanctioned political party), having re-entered Malawi via postings as UN Director of Trade and Development Finance for Africa and as Secretary General of COMESA during the 1990s. After a falling out with Muluzi, Mutharika tested the waters of presidential politics in 1999 as the candidate for the United Party (which he founded), though he garnered less than 1 percent of the vote in the election. After a rapprochement between the two UDF men in 2000, a re-elected Muluzi tendered Mutharika a deputy governorship in the Reserve Band of Malawi and later a cabinet position as Minister of Economic Planning and Development before hand-picking him as his presidential successor.

Following the food crisis of the early decade, food security was a top issue in the 2004 election.<sup>45</sup> Though both major parties supported input subsidies of some variety, language in the MCP manifesto suggested that the SPS had been "prone to waste and abuse" and that an MCP government would "work to implement targeted subsidies for those that [*sic*] really need them."<sup>46</sup> For their part, the UDF had rebelled against the narrower TIP, promising in 2004 to implement a nationwide fertiliser subsidy—though, according to Booth *et al.* (2006), without having undertaken technical analysis of how it would be implemented.<sup>47</sup> Yet a new focus on fertiliser stood to resonate strongly with the populace. Longley *et al.* (1999), in their evaluation of the SPS, emphasised how "there is little doubt that there will be need for greatly increased inputs as suggested for the supply of fertilisers."<sup>48</sup> In another study, Bookstein and Lawson (2002) recorded how in discussion groups in Zambia and Malawi, access to fertiliser was mentioned more often than even hunger as being a chief societal concern.<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> "Bingu Wa Mutharika | Biography - President of Malawi," *Encyclopedia Britannica*, accessed May 28, 2015, <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/1016527/Bingu-wa-Mutharika>.

<sup>45</sup> Chirwa and Dorward, *Agricultural Input Subsidies*, 68. The fact that Mutharika won just 36 percent of the vote and the UDF less than a plurality of parliamentary seats suggests that political factors other than the fertiliser issue (e.g. regional patronage networks) largely determined the election outcome.

<sup>46</sup> MCP Election Manifesto, 2004.

<sup>47</sup> David Booth *et al.*, "Drivers of Change and Development in Malawi," 2006, 22, <http://41.87.6.35:8080/xmlui/handle/123456789/280>.

<sup>48</sup> Longley, Coulter, and Thompson, "Malawi Rural Livelihoods Starter Pack Scheme 1998-99 Evaluation Report," 24.

<sup>49</sup> Amelia Bookstein and Max Lawson, "Briefing: Famine in Southern Africa," *African Affairs* 101, no. 405 (October 1, 2002): 639.

Though Muluzi and Mutharika had just barely earned the UDF a presidential third term, their partnership ended within nine months of Mutharika's entering office. Muluzi, who had been declared ineligible for a third term, took a page out of his Zambian counterpart Frederick Chiluba's political playbook, campaigning on behalf of a hand-picked successor over whom he intended to wield ultimate control.<sup>50</sup> Intimating his intention to metaphorically keep the keys to the State House, Muluzi had after 2004 maintained his leadership of the party.<sup>51</sup> This allowed him to once again pen the opening letter of the UDF manifesto, though he did so without ever mentioning Mutharika's name. Not many Malawians either expected to see Mutharika demonstrate ultimate leadership. Noted one observer, Mutharika "was seen as somebody who was going to be led by Muluzi."<sup>52</sup> To the surprise of many observers therefore, Mutharika decided to disavow his patron Muluzi. In February 2005, while serving as state president, Mutharika resigned his membership in the UDF and founded the DPP.<sup>53</sup>

In addition to the intraparty competition that motivated the politically ambitious Mutharika to found the DPP, interparty competition also lowered the opportunity cost for the new president to establish his own party. Though the UDF had claimed a third presidential victory in 2004, the party in the election lost its parliamentary plurality, winning 49 seats to the MCP's 57 seats (of 187 total seats) despite getting about 15,000 more votes. With such a weak mandate to rule, Mutharika suffered little risk to his personal political capital in divorcing himself from the UDF mantle.

Lacking much support in parliament and without grassroots party structures, Mutharika had little choice but to foster an electoral base that relied on policy performance in lieu of patronage politics. To achieve this goal, Mutharika cultivated a political brand that could appeal to the largest demographic of Malawians; i.e., smallholder farmers. Extending the food security platform that the UDF had fostered as a response to the Banda-MCP's restrictive agricultural policies, Mutharika marketed the DPP as Malawi's champion of smallholder farmers. Resonant with the fertiliser debate that had been a seminal part of the 2004 campaign, Mutharika chose for his DPP a party logo featuring four maize cobs, suggesting that food production would occupy the principal focus of his

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<sup>50</sup> Daniel Vencovsky, "Presidential Term Limits in Africa," 2007, 8, [http://reference.sabinet.co.za/webx/access/electronic\\_journals/accordc/accordc\\_2007\\_n2\\_a4.pdf](http://reference.sabinet.co.za/webx/access/electronic_journals/accordc/accordc_2007_n2_a4.pdf).

<sup>51</sup> In very few cases since 1994 has the president of the country not simultaneously served as president of his/her political party.

<sup>52</sup> "Malawi's President Rules 'His Way,'" *BBC*, September 1, 2004, sec. Africa, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/africa/3618948.stm>.

<sup>53</sup> Chikaya-Banda, "Duty of Care: Constitutional and Law Reform, in Malawi."

party's platform. Within the first three years of his presidency, moreover, Mutharika had taken over the Minister of Agriculture and Food Security portfolio himself, a post he retained until April 2010.<sup>54</sup> Remarking on his vision for the country, Mutharika declared:

‘In 2004, this government inherited an agricultural sector that was characterised by chronic food deficits and this resulted in perpetual food insecurity. In addition, the country did not have sufficient seed, particularly maize and relied heavily on seed importation. ... Right from the beginning, we had to convince Malawians that this country had the potential to feed itself’.<sup>55</sup>

The fact also that Malawians were suffering in 2005 the worst drought in recent memory—farmers produced just 37 percent of the country's food requirement—meant that Mutharika's recognition of food security as a paramount issue proved particularly auspicious.<sup>56</sup>

The chief policy manifestation of Mutharika's food security brand was AISP. In advance of the 2005/06 growing season (December-April), the Mutharika government launched AISP with an infusion of US\$32 million, or about two-and-a-half times the government's expenditure on SPS in 1998/99. Each of the 2.8 million beneficiaries (about 50% of smallholder farmers) in the programme's first year was allotted vouchers that would subsidise two 50-kg bags of fertiliser and 2.0 kg of hybrid or 4.5 kg of open pollinated seed at a quarter of the market price.<sup>57</sup> As compared to SPS and TIP, the AISP packs were much larger and allowed more farmers the materials they needed to achieve food sufficiency, which was not to same degree the case with SPS.<sup>58</sup> Mutharika's decision to leverage such a considerable amount of funding to subsidies given Malawi's constrained budget space was risky, but it was only with this scope of financing that maize yields could elevate to the point of making Malawi's poor farmers self-sufficient. In the following fiscal year (2006/07), spending on AISP more than doubled to US\$73.9 million, comprising nearly half of the Ministry of Agriculture (MoAFS) budget and almost 7 percent of the national budget.<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>54</sup> “Malawi Announces Cabinet Reshuffle,” *Scotland Malawi Partnership*, May 11, 2007, <http://www.scotland-malawipartnership.org/news.html?newsid=34>.

<sup>55</sup> State of the Nation Address, 2008.

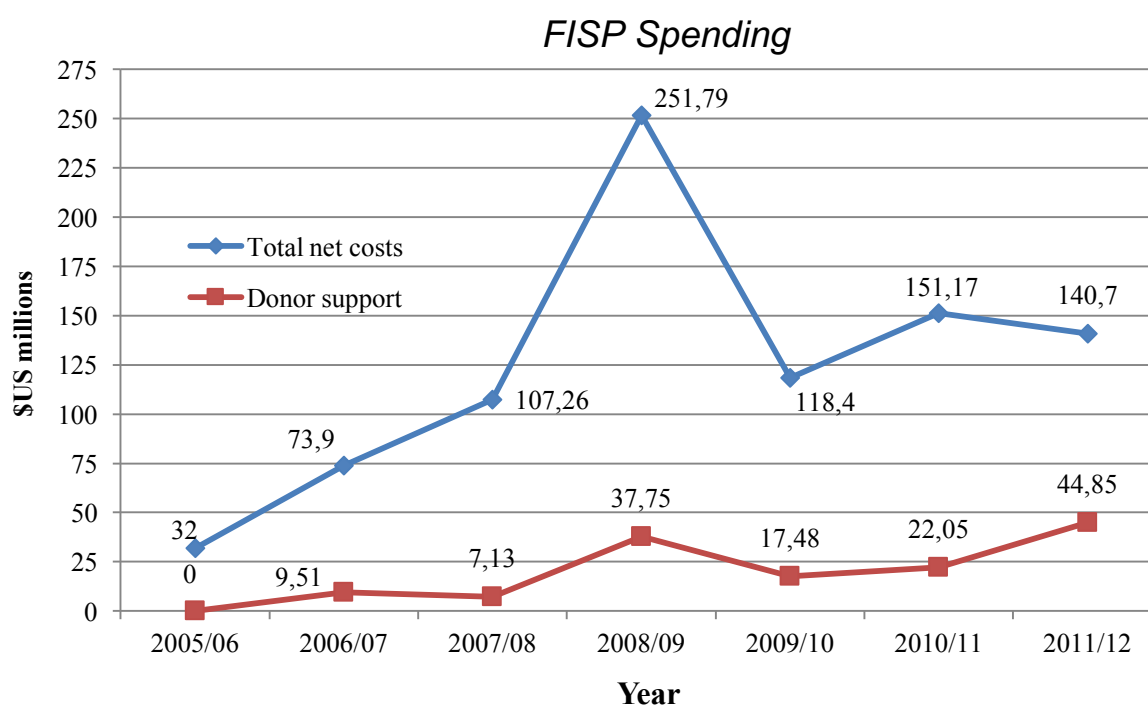
<sup>56</sup> “Food Crises in Africa in the Last 30 Years,” 2013, <http://www.harvesthelp.org.uk/>.

<sup>57</sup> “Unravelling the ‘miracle’ of Malawi's Green Revolution.”

<sup>58</sup> Harrigan, “Food Insecurity, Poverty and the Malawian Starter Pack.”

<sup>59</sup> Chart adapted from Chirwa and Dorward, *Agricultural Input Subsidies*, 120. Malawi's fiscal begins in July.





The risk may have been high, but so was the reward, as it turned out. Maize yields more than doubled from 1.2 million metric tons in 2004/05 before the introduction of the subsidies to 2.7 million in 2005/06 and then 3.4 million in 2006/07.<sup>60</sup> Chirwa and Dorward (2013) found that households receiving subsidised fertilisers were able to achieve food adequacy in about 22-percent more cases than non-recipient households.<sup>61</sup> Food security on the whole increased for an estimated 67 percent of AISP farmers. Production for many smallholders was sufficient in fact to allow them to become net sellers of maize, able to market their surplus production during the year without having to purchase maize during the lean period.<sup>62</sup> For a nation that had run food production deficits for several years prior to 2005, the fact that the nation's farmers were thereafter growing surplus food year after year was a considerable change for the once perennially food-starved country.<sup>63</sup> Moreover, by the late

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Though the opportunity to join the DPP did motivate some MPs to defect from their parties along with Mutharika, the president in his early term still did not have a majority in parliament. To pass the budget each year therefore, the president lobbied (successfully) a number of independents and opposition members. Even with this effort, budgets often passed only with a slim majority. Interview with Maxton Tsoka, Lecturer, Chancellor College, University of Malawi.

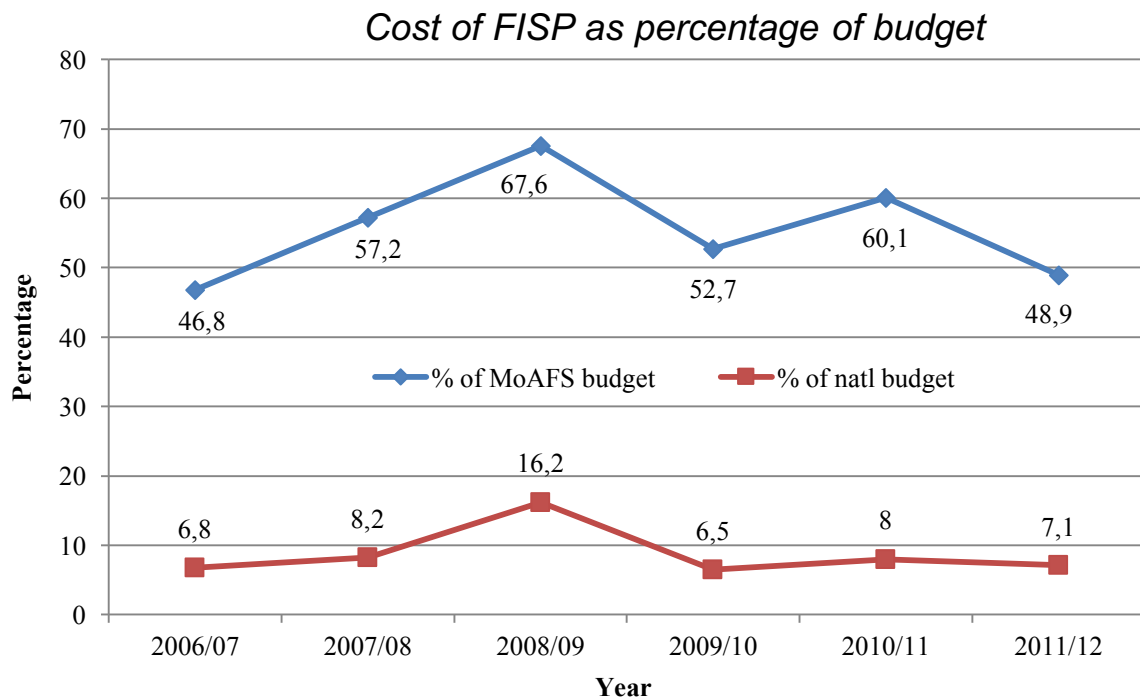
<sup>60</sup> Maliro, "Comparison of Agricultural Input Subsidies and Social Cash Transfers as Policies for Reducing Vulnerability to Hunger in Malawi," 118.

<sup>61</sup> Chirwa and Dorward, *Agricultural Input Subsidies*, 133.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid.

<sup>63</sup> Andrew Dorward et al., "Evaluation of the 2012/13 Farm Input Subsidy Programme, Malawi," *Report Prepared for the Ministry of Agriculture and Food Security, Lilongwe*,

2000s, as Cammack (2012) noted, subsidies had allowed more smallholders farmers to produce tobacco and cotton, the export of which facilitated the rise of many farmers above smallholder status.<sup>64</sup> Mutharika had ensured the confidence of his people that Malawi would not starve, but perhaps more powerful still was the belief that Malawi’s farmers could grow themselves out of poverty.



## Mutharika and the donors

Not only did partisan competition from both intraparty and interparty sources provide strong impetus for Mutharika to brand himself around enhancing food productivity, but competition with donors over Malawi’s development strategy underpinned the president’s decision to champion smallholder farmers. When donors led by the IMF and USAID shifted tack in the early 2000s and pushed for the narrower TIP as a replacement for SPS, the price of maize rose significantly.<sup>65</sup> Muluzi at the time had acceded to the donor agenda, perhaps trusting that his robust support base in the Southern region would be sufficient to guarantee that the UDF would continue at the head of government. Indeed, despite the food crisis that had transpired under his watch in 2001-2002, Muluzi still enjoyed an 82-percent approval rating among Southerners in 2003,

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2013, 105,  
[http://wadonda.com/Dorward\\_et\\_al\\_2013\\_FISP\\_Evaluation\\_2012\\_13\\_Final\\_Report.pdf](http://wadonda.com/Dorward_et_al_2013_FISP_Evaluation_2012_13_Final_Report.pdf).

<sup>64</sup> Diana Cammack, “Malawi in Crisis, 2011–12,” *Review of African Political Economy* 39, no. 132 (June 1, 2012): 376, doi:10.1080/03056244.2012.688651.

<sup>65</sup> Chinsinga, “Reclaiming Policy Space,” 13.

according to Afrobarometer data.<sup>66</sup> Mutharika, by contrast, lacked the grassroots support that Muluzi had enjoyed, especially once he had dropped the UDF mantle. According to the Afrobarometer survey recorded in 2005, the newly-minted DPP leader had just a 48-percent approval rating among southerners. Mutharika's political career could thus ill-afford another food-related catastrophe like the ones that had occurred earlier in the decade. With fertiliser subsidies having been a seminal election issue in 2004, moreover, inaction was not a realistic option. The incentives were therefore aligned for Mutharika to pursue an input subsidy programme that was of a much grander scope than what Muluzi before him had attempted.

Though upsetting the donors carried with it the risk of losing the critical budgetary support that sustains Malawi's public programmes, Mutharika determined nonetheless that the risk was justified. For Mutharika, subsidies were a means by which the nation could emerge from donor dependency and enhance national pride. As the president enunciated in his 2008 State of the Nation Address, "Government placed the highest priority on agriculture to guarantee national and household food security ... because a nation that depends on others for food cannot achieve 'national sovereignty.'"<sup>67</sup> Following a poor crop season in 2004-2005 from which nearly 40 percent of the country (5 million people) became unable to meet their basic food needs, Mutharika decided that he would take Malawi on a bolder policy course than any that had been followed before.<sup>68</sup> When the donors insisted in 2005 that the government accept more food aid instead of offering subsidies, the president reportedly declared, "Enough is enough. I am not going to go on my knees to beg for food. Let us grow the food ourselves."<sup>69</sup>

Following the first round of fertiliser subsidies in 2005, after which it became clear that Mutharika would not be changing tack, the donors began to provide limited financial support for AISP/FISP. Ahead of the 2009 election, the first test for the DPP, Mutharika defended his insistence on offering subsidies to smallholder farmers:

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<sup>66</sup> See Ferree and Horowitz, "Ties That Bind?," 551 for survey data.

<sup>67</sup> State of the Nation Address, 2008.

<sup>68</sup> Chirwa and Dorward, *Agricultural Input Subsidies*, 161. Gondwe in his 2006 Budget Address called the mid-decade drought "one of the worst disasters in [Malawi's] history, when daily, many Malawians were subjected to living dangerously close to death." See Teresa Buerkle, "Malawi Facing Serious Food Crisis: More than 4.2 Million People in Need of Assistance," *FAO Newsroom*, August 11, 2005, <http://www.fao.org/Newsroom/en/news/2005/107298/index.html>.

<sup>69</sup> "Unravelling the 'miracle' of Malawi's Green Revolution."

‘I knew we were right. If you look at the smallholder farmers here, using a hoe... I mean a poor woman with a baby on her back, struggling the whole day and she cannot afford to buy improved seeds, she cannot afford to buy fertilisers ... she cannot even afford small improvements in agricultural implements other than a hoe and then you [the development partners] come and say ‘that woman does not need subsidy.’ Then you take the farmers in Europe and North America with modern trucks ... you say they need subsidy and this woman doesn’t? ... I say “No, they are not serious.... With or without your support, I’ll go ahead and do it anyway”’.<sup>70</sup>

Goodall Gondwe, the longstanding Minister of Finance and architect of AISP, echoed Mutharika’s insistence that all Malawians be empowered to grow food themselves. In his 2007-2008 Budget Address, Gondwe reflected on how AISP had driven a “huge increase in our maize production ... a remarkable achievement for the country.” He noted further how Malawians “no longer have to beg for handouts from our neighbours or our overseas friends.” Fertiliser subsidies, he declared further, were “transforming the country, beginning with maize, from a consuming and importing country to a producing and exporting country.”<sup>71</sup> Indeed, the boon to maize yields over the first three years of the programme had allowed MoAFS to purchase 400,000 tonnes of surplus maize for export to Zimbabwe, Kenya, and other neighbouring countries facing drought.<sup>72</sup>

## **The Mutharika brand and the 2009 presidential election**

Three aspects of political competition thus precipitated Mutharika’s efforts to foster a political brand around food security. First, intraparty competition between Muluzi and Mutharika prompted the latter to assert his independence through the founding of a new political party. Mutharika inherited the UDF’s redistributive food security platform, expanded it through programmatic and symbolic means, and cultivated it as a new political brand around the DPP. Second, interparty competition forced Mutharika to abandon the strategy of patronage politics that had driven electoral outcomes over the past decade because his upstart DPP had no established grassroots support. The intense

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<sup>70</sup> Interview with Bingu wa Mutharika. See *EXCLUSIVE: Malawi President - Bingu Wa Mutharika*, 2009, [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Mzi\\_5iOVixc&feature=youtube\\_gdata\\_player](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Mzi_5iOVixc&feature=youtube_gdata_player).

<sup>71</sup> Budget Address, 2007-2008. See <http://www.fanrpan.org/documents/d00365/>

<sup>72</sup> Chirwa and Dorward, *Agricultural Input Subsidies*, 150.

interparty competition reflected in the 2004 presidential election result also lowered the cost to Mutharika's defection from the UDF as he did not inherit a plurality (let alone a majority) in the National Assembly. Third, competition between the Mutharika government and the IMF-led donors who had put Malawi on a course of limited agricultural development with disastrous unintended consequences earlier in the decade spurred Mutharika to assert his independence through bold policies that defied the agenda of these donors. Mutharika's decision to forge a unilateral development agenda further burnished his credentials as Malawi's food production president.

The president's political and financial gamble in unilaterally implementing AISP bore fruit. Whereas in 2004-2005 the nation faced the prospect of famine, within two years the country's smallholder farmers were producing enough maize to feed themselves. The president's popularity among the rural masses soared, Chirwa and Dorward noted.<sup>73</sup> Mutharika soon acquired popular monikers such as *Mose wa lero* ("a modern Moses") for his ability to deliver the people from food insecurity and *Chitsulo cha njanji* ("an iron rail") for having confronted the IMF and other development partners who had insisted Malawi take a more conservative course.<sup>74</sup> East China Normal University in 2010 awarded the president an honorary professorship in Economics for his development vision, for which Mutharika thereafter stylised himself as "Professor."<sup>75</sup> This title soon accompanied *Ngwazi* (the "Conqueror") for his having conquered hunger, a title which Mutharika apparently adopted himself but one that nonetheless entered public discourse.<sup>76</sup> This title, which only the autocratic Banda had embraced before Mutharika and foreshadowed the latter's more authoritarian path, came to Mutharika by way of the Ngoni tribe who inhabit the Northern and Central regions of Malawi. The fact that Mutharika, who was Lomwe by tribe and a southerner, stylised himself *Ngwazi* suggests perhaps how the president intended to appeal to a geographically broader array of voters.

In the lead-up to the 2009 election, Mutharika as presidential candidate for the DPP upped the government's ante in promoting agricultural self-sufficiency. The prior year, the DPP government scaled up spending on AISP to more than 230 percent of what it had spent on inputs during the prior fiscal year (2007/08).

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<sup>73</sup> Ibid., 82.

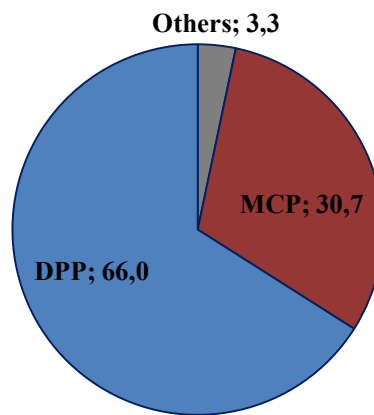
<sup>74</sup> Wellman Kondowe, "Presidents and Ideologies: A Transitivity Analysis of Bingu wa Mutharika's Inaugural Address," *International Journal of Language and Linguistics* 2, no. 3 (2014): 177, doi:10.11648/j.ijll.20140203.16.

<sup>75</sup> Z. Allan Ntata, *Trappings of Power: Political Leadership in Africa* (AuthorHouse, 2012), xviii.

<sup>76</sup> Reuben Makayiko Chirambo, "Democracy as a Limiting Factor for Politicised Cultural Populism in Malawi," *Africa Spectrum*, 2009, 87.

The approximately US\$250 million that government spent on subsidies in that year alone comprised more than 16 percent of all government expenditure, exceeding the budgets of entire ministries including that of Health and Education (respectively).<sup>77</sup> Much of Mutharika’s campaign was also focused on his government’s food production achievements. In the DPP’s 2009 election manifesto, Mutharika declared that the government would “ensure that we feed ourselves ... continuing its policy focus towards enabling more people to grow their own food.”<sup>78</sup> Indeed, the government announced before the election that it would be increasing the rate of subsidy from 75 to 90 percent, providing a strong incentive, argued Maliro (2011), for smallholder farmers to support the DPP in 2009.

*Presidential election results, 2009*

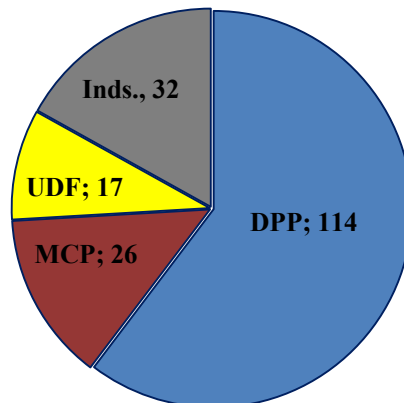


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<sup>77</sup> Maliro, “Comparison of Agricultural Input Subsidies and Social Cash Transfers as Policies for Reducing Vulnerability to Hunger in Malawi,” 135.

<sup>78</sup> DPP Election Manifesto, 2009.

### *National Assembly election results, 2009*



## **Malawi's economic collapse and the fall of Bingu wa Mutharika, 2009-2012**

Following the 2009 election in which voters overwhelmingly returned the Mutharika to the presidency and elected 114 of the DPP's parliamentary candidates, a once-ascendant Malawi began to slip into social discord. Whereas political competition had motivated the president to advance a policy vision based on national food security, Mutharika in his second term, Chinsinga and Poulton (2014) argued, lost the political incentive to lead a government predicated on performance and not patronage.<sup>79</sup> As Shawa (2012) and many others have documented, Mutharika after 2009 adopted an increasingly "big man" style of politics.<sup>80</sup> Mutharika's decision to purchase a presidential jet and mausoleum with public funds, his shuttering of Chancellor College when faculty there made critical statements about his leadership, and his attempt to position his brother Peter Mutharika—a law professor in the United States who had returned to Malawi to become a Cabinet minister—as presumptive DPP presidential candidate in 2014 were just some of the ways in which Mutharika deepened public criticism of his leadership, especially among the urban middle class and international observers.

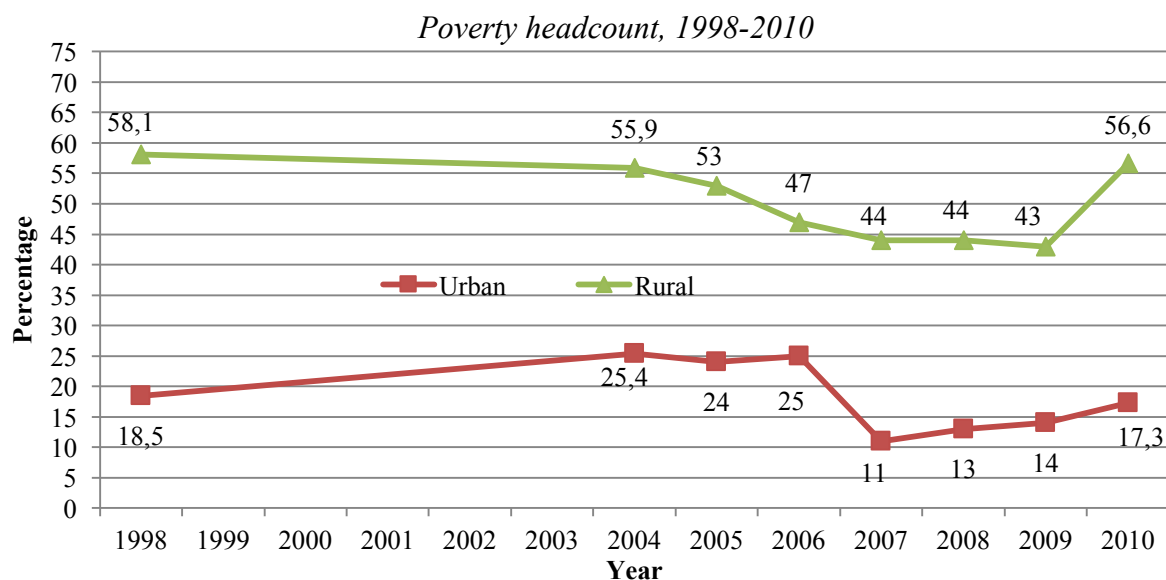
Whatever popularity Mutharika had fostered by the end of his first term was quickly eroding in his second term. Mutharika's decision to impose national price floors on burley tobacco, ostensibly to support smallholder farmers,

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<sup>79</sup> Chinsinga and Poulton, "Beyond Technocratic Debates."

<sup>80</sup> Lester Brian Shawa, "The Big-Man Syndrome as a Security Threat in Malawi: A Critical Theory Perspective.," *Southern African Peace and Security Studies* 1, no. 2 (2012): 44–56.

backfired when wholesalers refused to pay high prices and left the country. Without tobacco sales, which are Malawi's principal source of foreign exchange, currency reserves plummeted and the government could no longer import sufficient quantities of petroleum, medicine, and manufacturing inputs. Cammack (2012) noted too how many farmers who had expanded into commercial production with the help of fertiliser subsidies suffered as the country lacked sufficient fuel that they needed to bring their crops to market.<sup>81</sup> Government also faced challenges in transporting fertiliser to rural markets for sale. The economic and social consequences of Mutharika's brazenness proved dire. Hospitals exhausted medical supplies, factories shuttered, and taxis queued for days in wait for fuel, spurring protests. Mutharika lost further credibility when suppression of the 20-21 July 2011 protests in several cities resulted in the deaths of 20 people.<sup>82</sup>



Turmoil in the economy as well as the diminishing marginal returns of FISP—which had faced procedural issues for years—also proceeded to erase the reductions to poverty that the Mutharika government had theretofore achieved. Growth of the economy, which had reached an impressive rate of nine percent in the mid-2000s, had by 2012 slipped to nearly four percent.<sup>83</sup> Poverty also had fallen during Mutharika's first term, but slippages in growth forced many tens of thousands of vulnerable Malawians back into poverty, especially in the rural areas.<sup>84</sup> The 2010/11 Integrated Household Survey (IHS) showed that the national poverty rate (50.7%) had decreased only marginally since 2004/5

<sup>81</sup> Cammack, "Malawi in Crisis, 2011–12," 376.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid.

<sup>83</sup> Dorward et al., "Evaluation of the 2012/13 Farm Input Subsidy Programme, Malawi."

<sup>84</sup> Adapted from Chirwa and Dorward, *Agricultural Input Subsidies*, 163.



(52.4%).<sup>85</sup> This was likely because, as Dorward and Chirwa concluded in a 2013 evaluation of the programme, FISP “helps poor people with problems of food insecurity ... but the scale of the programme ... is not large enough to ... allow people to advance their livelihoods. This may be characterised as helping people to ‘hang in’ but not ‘step up’ or ‘step out’ [from poverty].”<sup>86</sup> FISP may have saved lives, but the fact that it had not resulted in changes to the structure of the economy left most Malawians unable to emerge from livelihood insecurity.

With Malawi’s economy in a tailspin, the country was desperate for stability to return. Yet Mutharika in 2011, as he had in 2005, once again spurned the IMF-led development partners when they tried to intervene in the country’s economic affairs. The IMF, having declared the kwacha to be overvalued, offered the Malawian government a US\$79 million relief package in exchange for the government’s devaluation of the currency. Mutharika balked, claiming that “unless the IMF tells me how I will protect my people, I will not devalue the Kwacha.”<sup>87</sup> Prices continued to increase and shortages worsened when the donors decided to withhold all direct foreign budgetary assistance to the government in the 2011-12 fiscal year, highly problematic for a country that relies on donors to supply about 40 percent of its annual budget.<sup>88</sup> Mutharika exacerbated the situation when he expelled the British High Commissioner, who had criticised the president for “becoming ever more autocratic and intolerant of criticism.”<sup>89</sup> As a result, Britain withdrew about US\$30 million in aid from Malawi. The president, who by this time had well established as part of his leadership brand a resistance to foreign involvement in Malawi’s economic affairs, publicly embraced the donor freeze as part of his “Zero-Deficit Budget” to get the country on a path to financial independence.<sup>90</sup> But when on 5 March 2012 Mutharika told a group of development partner representatives to “go to hell,” every Malawian recognised that the country was indeed on shaky footing.<sup>91</sup>

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<sup>85</sup> Ibid.

<sup>86</sup> Dorward et al., “Evaluation of the 2012/13 Farm Input Subsidy Programme, Malawi,” 103.

<sup>87</sup> “Bingu Rejects IMF Devaluation Call, Speaks on Fuel Crisis,” accessed June 9, 2015, <http://maravi.blogspot.com/2011/06/nyasatimes-bingu-rejects-imf.html>.

<sup>88</sup> Anthony Ware, *Development in Difficult Sociopolitical Contexts: Fragile, Failed, Pariah* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), 128.

<sup>89</sup> Mwangi S. Kimenyi, “The Erosion of Democracy in Malawi: President Bingu Wa Mutharika’s Unholy Conversion,” *The Brookings Institution*, accessed June 9, 2015, <http://www.brookings.edu/research/opinions/2012/03/09-democracy-malawi-kimenyi>.

<sup>90</sup> Blessings Chinsinga, “The Reality of the Zero-Aid Budget in Malawi,” *Effective States*, accessed June 13, 2015, <http://www.effective-states.org/the-reality-of-the-zero-aid-budget-in-malawi/>.

<sup>91</sup> Kimenyi, “The Erosion of Democracy in Malawi.”

Then suddenly, to the shock of all, though perhaps not to their dismay, President Mutharika suffered a heart attack and died on 5 April 2012.

## Joyce Banda and Malawi's newest "pro-poor" brand

After Mutharika's death, a very different kind of leader emerged to take his place. It was clear that the vice-president Joyce Banda, who was sworn in as president on 7 April, would bring a different approach to national governance as compared to her high-handed predecessor. "The Joyce Banda I have come to know," commented blogger Kondwani Munthali shortly after the new president had entered office, "is the mother who speaks on empowering the poor ... who removed all the trappings of the Vice Presidency and went to sit down on a mat in Ndirande to console a ... victim of Police brutality."<sup>92</sup> Against the backdrop of Mutharika's ostentation and the spiralling state of the economy, it seemed that Banda would offer the succour that the nation's poor majority needed.

Mutharika had chosen Banda as his running mate in 2009 to "support women in the country and because of her experience," but the president had little interest in keeping Banda around once the election had ended.<sup>93</sup> When the vice-president would not kowtow to Mutharika's wishes that she endorse his brother Peter to be the next DPP nominee, the president ejected her from the party in December 2010. Despite her banishment from the DPP, Banda resisted calls for her resignation, declaring that "her responsibility ... constitutionally mandates her to fight for the well being [*sic*] of the ordinary Malawian."<sup>94</sup> It was this dedication to the welfare of Malawi's ordinary citizens—a stark contrast with what Mutharika had offered the country in his final years—that characterised the Banda political brand.

As had been the case in the mid-2000s, circumstances of political competition shaped how Banda came to market her particular vision for the country. When competition within the DPP forced her out of the party, Banda took a page out of Mutharika's own political playbook and in September 2011 founded the People's Party (PP) with herself as party president. Interparty competition too

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<sup>92</sup> Ndirande is a peri-urban township in Blantyre District that is widely known for its high level of poverty.

<sup>93</sup> "Malawi Leader Chooses Foreign Minister as Running Mate," *Reuters*, February 6, 2009, <http://www.reuters.com/article/2009/02/06/ozatp-malawi-election-idAFJQE5150KO20090206>.

<sup>94</sup> "Malawi: Vice President Joyce Banda Launches New Party," accessed June 3, 2015, <http://vibeghana.com/2011/09/08/malawi-president-joyce-banda-launches-new-party/>.

moved Banda to project a different kind of brand. With three major parties, each of which having provided Malawi with one of its presidents, dominating the electoral space, Banda's ambitions for a presidential term of her own in 2014 necessitated that she demonstrate to the electorate how her PP would be distinctive of what the other parties could offer. Distancing herself from her more socially elite peers, Banda professed to best understand the challenges that ordinary Malawians face:

I know the kind of suffering that women are going through in this country. Their suffering does not need any introduction to me. I am the best advocate of the poor because I know what poverty is. I have fought against this, and will continue to fight.<sup>95</sup>

Banda's pursuit of a "pro-poor" agenda as president proceeded from a career spent advocating for improvements to the welfare of poor Malawians. A Yao and native of Zomba District in Malawi's Central region, Banda's ability to overcome significant odds and achieve social and material success underlay her dedication to helping others surmount the kinds of challenges she had faced. Banda managed to finish secondary school all while mothering three children by the age of 25.<sup>96</sup> She thereafter left an abusive marriage, remarried, and opened a textile manufacturing company workshop that came to employ over one hundred people. The future president was by this point "empowered on many levels" and made it her "mission in life to assist women and youth to gain social and political empowerment."<sup>97</sup> In the 1980s, Banda founded the National Association of Business Women (NABW)—the largest network of rural women in the country with more than 50,000 members—and co-founded the Young Women Leaders Network and the Hunger Project.<sup>98</sup> The Joyce Banda Foundation, which since 1997 has provided meals and care for thousands of orphans and vulnerable children, earned Banda a Goodwill Ambassadorship for Safe Motherhood from the African Union.<sup>99</sup>

The future president's decision to join politics was as an outgrowth of her work as an activist and philanthropist. "For me," Banda noted, "the motivation in

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<sup>95</sup> "JB Attacks Poverty: 'I Know Malawians Are Suffering,'" *Malawi Nyasa Times - Malawi Breaking News in Malawi*, accessed June 9, 2015, <http://www.nyasatimes.com/2013/07/22/jb-attacks-poverty-i-know-malawians-are-suffering/>.

<sup>96</sup> Interview with Joyce Banda, in "Why We Care," accessed March 23, 2015, <http://www.why-we-care.org/global-leaders-council/joyce-banda>.

<sup>97</sup> *President Joyce Banda on Women's Health & Empowerment in Malawi.*, 2013, [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EzcoHYNR0yA&feature=youtube\\_gdata\\_player](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EzcoHYNR0yA&feature=youtube_gdata_player).

<sup>98</sup> "The Journey of Dr Joyce Hilda Banda, the President of Malawi," *Women Presidents*, accessed March 16, 2015, <https://wethewomenourjourneys.wordpress.com/2013/11/28/dr-joyce-hilda-bandathe-president-of-malawi/>.

<sup>99</sup> Joyce Banda interview in "Why We Care."

taking up that opportunity [to pursue a career in politics] was to be involved in influencing laws that have a big impact on women and children.”<sup>100</sup> Banda entered politics in the 1990s as an MP with the UDF and joined the DPP in the mid-2000s.<sup>101</sup> She entered Cabinet mid-way through Mutharika’s first term, first as Minister of Gender, Child Welfare and Community Development and then as Minister of Foreign Affairs before being elected the vice-president in 2009. Despite her rapid climb up the political ladder, Banda drew condemnation from political rivals who insinuated that her background did not befit a president. “She will never be president,” commented Mutharika’s widow and government official Callista Chimombo.<sup>102</sup> “How can a *mandasi* [fritter] seller be president?” But Banda turned around the characterisation, declaring that “she is right, because I’ve spent thirty years of my life empowering rural women. If I am aligned with the majority of women who struggle everyday ... that’s fine, that’s my mission.”<sup>103</sup> Whereas her predecessor Mutharika had been a bombastic male leader and technocrat, Banda efforts to portray herself as sympathetic to the plight of poor women offered Malawian politics a new presidential brand.

Banda indicated in her first State of the Nation Address (May 2012) how her government would be different from that of her predecessor. If Mutharika’s presidency had centred on food security and corruption, the new president declared how the “main policy thrust of this Administration [will be] ... transforming the structure of the economy in order to achieve economic growth, accelerated job creation and the protection of the vulnerable and the excluded.” To this end, Banda declared that she would pursue a “people’s development agenda that ... overcomes poverty through its political, social and economic programs.” Banda in her address also made a populist appeal to the masses of whom she was purportedly a member: “As a Malawian woman who knows the humiliation of Malawian women; as a Malawian who has championed the plight of rural poor,” Banda announced that she would champion the causes of those Malawians who had fallen through the cracks under Mutharika.<sup>104</sup>

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<sup>100</sup> Joyce Banda, Malawi’s former President Dr Joyce Banda on life in politics, November 24, 2014, <http://blogs.lse.ac.uk/africaatlse/2014/11/24/interview-malawis-former-president-dr-joyce-banda-on-life-in-politics/>.

<sup>101</sup> Jonathan Said and Khwima Singini, “The Political Economy Determinants of Economic Growth in Malawi” (BWPI, The University of Manchester, 2014), 15, [http://businessenvironment.org/dyn/be/docs/291/esid\\_wp\\_40\\_said\\_singini.pdf](http://businessenvironment.org/dyn/be/docs/291/esid_wp_40_said_singini.pdf).

<sup>102</sup> Raphael Tenthani BBC News and Blantyre, “Joyce Banda: Malawi’s First Female President,” *BBC News*, accessed June 10, 2015, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-17662916>.

<sup>103</sup> *Madam President: Meeting Malawi’s Joyce Banda*, 2012, [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qBmaeOMlomY&feature=youtube\\_gdata\\_player](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qBmaeOMlomY&feature=youtube_gdata_player).

<sup>104</sup> State of the Nation Address, 2012.

## **Banda, the development community's "darling"**

Though the new president maintained that it was her enduring mission to support Malawi's most marginalised groups, economic exigencies pulled Banda away from her self-prescribed duties to alleviate poverty and empower women. With the economy in a tailspin, Banda in her 2012 State of the Nation promised to devote urgent attention to the "foreign exchange shortage, tobacco industry crisis, fuel shortages, energy crisis, bad governance and poor human rights record, unemployment and diplomatic crisis among others."<sup>105</sup> The president proposed as part of her Short Term Economic Recovery Plan to "liberalise our currency and to restore our relations with the international community." Just weeks into her presidency, Banda agreed to a package with the IMF and World Bank in which government would adopt a floating exchange rate and devalue the kwacha by 33 percent.<sup>106</sup> Once the kwacha had been devalued, fuel, medicine, and electricity flowed back into the country. The new president also reversed several Mutharika-sponsored laws curtailing political freedoms, which prompted the return of budget support from the development partners.<sup>107</sup> Whereas Mutharika had shunned the IMF and other donors' involvement in Malawian economic affairs in 2005 and 2011, Banda took an antithetical approach. For her conciliatory attitude toward Malawi's development partners and for her progressive stance on women's rights, Banda became something of a "development darling" in the international community.<sup>108</sup>

While Banda insisted that structural adjustment was a necessary step, the on-the-ground effects of devaluation clashed with the pro-poor brand she had brought to government. Devaluation had begotten massive inflation and soaring prices made many of the goods that poor Malawians rely on unaffordable. The price of maize, for instance, skyrocketed from US\$7 per 50kg bag prior to May

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<sup>105</sup> Ibid.

<sup>106</sup> The government devalued the currency on 7 May 2012, exactly one month after Banda took office. World Bank, "Malawi Public Expenditure Review," Poverty Reduction and Economic Management 1 Africa Region, November 2013, 3.

<sup>107</sup> "Joyce Banda Has Bigger Problems than Madonna," *Africa Is a Country*, accessed June 10, 2015, <http://africasacountry.com/joyce-banda-madonna/>. Budgetary support to Malawi comes from a consortium of donors organised as the Common Approach to Budget Support (CABS). The individual donors as of 2013 were the European Union, UK Aid, the World Bank, the Norwegian government, the German government (KfW), the African Development Bank, and Irish Aid. Budget Address, 2013.

<sup>108</sup> Ware, *Development in Difficult Sociopolitical Contexts*, 128.

2012 to nearly US\$13 by the end of the year.<sup>109</sup> The country's smallholder farmers were not able to grow their way out of food insecurity that year with the World Food Programme reporting that by year's end 1.63 million people (11% of the population) faced severe food shortages.<sup>110</sup> Urban dwellers were also hard hit when fuel prices climbed 150 percent in a matter of months. Inflated prices moved civil servants to strike for higher wages until government agreed to salary increases of on average 19 percent.<sup>111</sup> Disgruntled Malawians took to the streets in January and February 2013, protesting sustained high prices and what they perceived to be Banda's careless concessions to the IMF.

Banda strove to convince her constituents that her actions were necessary given the perilous state of the economy she had inherited from the previous government. The president noted in one interview how she had signs produced in every one of Malawi's languages, explaining how she had needed to give the Malawian economy—which she analogised as a fever patient—an injection that would hurt initially but ultimately prove beneficial for the nation.<sup>112</sup> But the president did not stop at rhetoric and took actions to demonstrate her sympathy with the suffering she saw Malawians facing:

‘To get back on track, we needed to make some bold decisions ... that resulted in some negative impact on the poor and therefore we had to come up with the social programmes that cushioned that shock. ... Even if it costs me the next elections ... all I wanted to do at the end of the day is to demonstrate to my fellow Malawians that I am prepared to suffer with them’.<sup>113</sup>

To this end, Banda ordered the government to shed its fleet of Mercedes-Benz automobiles and she reduced her own salary by one-third. She also sold the airplane Mutharika had purchased, applying the US\$15 million in proceeds to

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<sup>109</sup> “IMF Reforms Spark Malawi Consumer Backlash,” *Equal Times*, accessed June 10, 2015, <http://www.equaltimes.org/imf-reforms-spark-malawi-consumer-backlash>.

<sup>110</sup> Masimba Tafirenyika, “What Went Wrong? Lessons from Malawi's Food Crisis” (Africa Renewal Online, January 2013), <http://www.un.org/africarenewal/magazine/january-2013/what-went-wrong-lessons-malawi%E2%80%99s-food-crisis>.

<sup>111</sup> World Bank, “Malawi Public Expenditure Review,” 8.

<sup>112</sup> Joyce Banda, Talk Africa: Live interview with Dr. Joyce Banda, August 28, 2013, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yS0FR2XDDSU>.

<sup>113</sup> “Malawi Leader Defends China Links, Tells the West: ‘Don't Tell Us What to Do’,” *Malawi Nyasa Times - Malawi Breaking News in Malawi*, accessed June 12, 2015, <http://www.nyasatimes.com/2013/03/22/malawi-leader-defends-china-links-tells-the-west-dont-tell-us-what-to-do/>.

purchase maize and farm inputs for vulnerable citizens.<sup>114</sup> “I had to look at the situation of my fellow Malawians. If we are going to ask Malawians to make sacrifices, I must be the first to do it,” Banda noted. Paradoxically perhaps, it was the effects of Banda’s economic austerity policies that allowed the president to highlight further her compassion for poverty reduction.

To demonstrate further her commitment to fixing the economy while also softening the blow from the effects of devaluation, Banda increased government’s investment in several donor-driven social protection programmes.<sup>115</sup> “I asked them [the World Bank] to provide resources in order for us to implement public works programs, cash transfer programs, school feeding programs,” Banda noted, “to ensure that we take care of the shock of the devaluation.”<sup>116</sup> Beginning in late 2012, the government scaled up the Public Works Programme (PWP), organised through MASAF, by US\$2.5 million.<sup>117</sup> The Social Cash Transfer scheme, School Feeding programme, and FISP were also scaled up in conjunction with the passage of the National Social Support Policy in July 2012.<sup>118</sup> Banda was apparently “very euphoric [*sic*] on how the social protection programme has ... acted as a cushion against devaluation.”<sup>119</sup> She did not acknowledge however, as MP George Chponda of the DPP pointed

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<sup>114</sup> “Malawi Sells Presidential Jet to Feed Poor,” *The Sydney Morning Herald*, accessed March 18, 2015, <http://www.smh.com.au/world/malawi-sells-presidential-jet-to-feed-poor-20130906-2t944.html>.

<sup>115</sup> World Bank, “Malawi Public Expenditure Review,” 8.

<sup>116</sup> “President Banda Outlines Her Vision for Malawi,” *VOA*, accessed March 18, 2015, <http://www.voanews.com/content/president-banda-outlines-her-vision-for-malawi/1588981.html>.

<sup>117</sup> MASAF had by this point been renamed the Local Development Fund (LDF). “Malawi President Launches K10bn Public Works Programme: Economic Recovery,” *Malawi Nyasa Times - Malawi Breaking News in Malawi*, accessed May 25, 2015, <http://www.nyasatimes.com/2012/12/09/malawi-president-launches-k10bn-public-works-programme-economic-recovery/>.

<sup>118</sup> World Bank, “Malawi Public Expenditure Review,” 45; Republic of Malawi, “National Social Support Policy,” July 2012.

Though the president in several public speeches touted her government’s commitment to the Social Cash Transfer (SCT) scheme, in reality the programme did not markedly increase during her presidency. A pilot programme in Mchinji District since 2006, the government contributed 10 percent of the programme’s budget through the Ministry of Gender. SCT was on paper set to expand to all of Malawi’s 28 districts by the end of 2014. However, expansion did not occur to more than 7 districts before the May 2014, suggesting that Banda’s stated enthusiasm for the donor agenda did not necessarily reflect her dedication to its immediate implementation. Interviews with several development partner representatives including Patience Kanje (KfW), Chipso Msowoya (EU), and Lovely Chizimba (Irish Aid).

<sup>119</sup> Chponda, Response to the State of the Nation Address, Parliamentary Hansards, 20 May 2013.

out in one parliamentary debate, that without exception these programmes had been initiated under previous governments.<sup>120</sup>

In addition to scaling up donor-funded programmes, Banda implemented through her presidential office a separate set of social protection initiatives that could supplement her “pro-poor” credentials, especially amongst women. “While I’m trying to bring the country back on track,” Banda explained, “I’m also very mindful of my mission—to make sure that I continue to empower women.... For me, that is what being a leader is all about.”<sup>121</sup> Within one month of becoming president, Banda launched her Presidential Initiative on Maternal Health and Safe Motherhood that, among other ends, reduced childhood mortality by establishing “safe motherhood committees” that supported pregnant women and infants.<sup>122</sup> In her third month as president, Banda launched the Presidential Initiative on Poverty and Hunger Reduction (PIPaHR), a poverty alleviation programme that principally targeted rural women.<sup>123</sup> Banda announced in her May 2013 State of the Nation Address that PIPaHR had in the prior year benefitted 100,000 farmers with distribution of 1,570 metric tonnes of legume seeds.<sup>124</sup>

## Cow-a-Family initiative

One PIPaHR programme that became strongly associated with the president ahead of the 2014 election was the Cow-a-Family programme. Announcing the

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<sup>120</sup> Ibid.

<sup>121</sup> Janet Fleischman and Julia Nagel, “President Joyce Banda: New Focus on Women’s Health and Empowerment in Malawi,” January 8, 2013, <http://www.smartglobalhealth.org/blog/entry/president-joyce-banda-new-focus-on-womens-health-and-empowerment-in-malawi/>.

During her presidency, Banda did not initiate any social protection programmes through government ministries, but rather pursued poverty reduction through her presidential office. Attempting to explain this decision, Said and Singini (2014) contended that a newly inaugurated Banda faced an entrenched DPP-appointed bureaucracy that was deeply loyal to the deceased Mutharika and the party’s new president, Peter Mutharika, and did not therefore trust bureaucrats to implement her (proposed) agenda. Said and Singini, “The Political Economy Determinants of Economic Growth in Malawi,” 25.

<sup>122</sup> “Malawi’s Leader Makes Safe Childbirth Her Mission,” *Opinionator*, accessed May 20, 2015, <http://opinionator.blogs.nytimes.com/2013/02/06/malawis-leader-makes-safe-childbirth-her-mission/>.

<sup>123</sup> “Presidential Initiative on Hunger Reduction to Realize K7 Billion | Banthu Times: Breaking News, Sports, Business, Entertainment, Online Malawi News,” accessed March 18, 2015, <http://banthutimes.com/presidential-initiative-on-hunger-reduction-to-realize-k7-billion/>.

<sup>124</sup> State of the Nation Address, 2013. There are no published statistics on PIPaHR or other programmes that emanated from Banda’s presidential office.



launch of the programme in the peri-urban township of Namitete outside the capital city Lilongwe, Banda declared once more her commitment to eradicating poverty and hunger as her “main priority” and articulated how she believed Cow-a-Family would help the country achieve that goal.<sup>125</sup> “This [is] the time for poor families to own a dairy cow so that in the long run [they] can come out of poverty,” Banda declared. In what became a regular practice, Banda arranged for ceremonies to be held at which she would personally distribute livestock to beneficiaries.<sup>126</sup> Cow-a-Family had reportedly distributed 756 dairy cows to citizens across 24 districts by the end of April 2014, and Banda announced her intention for the program to benefit 1.5 million Malawians over the next five years.<sup>127</sup> Together with her government’s distribution of 8,680 goats and sheep through the parallel Small Stock Project, Banda insinuated her personal dedication to delivering basic livelihood-generating resources to the poorest citizens.<sup>128</sup>

The president used Cow-a-Family moreover to emphasise her commitment to alleviating the plight of poor women in particular. Banda tasked prominent women including Dr. Susan Chikagwa-Malunga (an agricultural scientist) and Flora Kaluwile (an NGO management consultant) with coordinating the PIPaHR. Chikagwa-Malunga, who also oversaw the Small Stock project, noted how Banda’s programmes were “targeting communities and ... vulnerable groups, particularly women who benefit through increased household incomes.”<sup>129</sup> As the 2014 election approached, it was clear that Banda had cultivated a “pro-women” brand that no other candidate could match. Noted one observer, “A-cow-for-every family [programme] is effective with female voters

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<sup>125</sup> “JB Says ‘one Cow per Family’ to Benefit 1m Families in Malawi,” *Malawi Nyasa Times*, accessed June 8, 2015, <http://www.nyasatimes.com/2013/04/05/jb-says-one-cow-per-family-to-benefit-1m-families-in-malawi/>.

Shortly after Banda announced the prospective launch of Cow-a-Family, President Ian Khama of Botswana—a president noted for social protection programmes perceived by many Batswana to be the outcome of his personal initiative—declared that he would donate 150 cows to the programme. Khonanu Ontebetse, “Khama to Donate 150 Cattle to Malawi,” *Sunday Standard*, April 2, 2013, 1.

<sup>126</sup> Henry Nyaka, “Malawi: One Cow a Family Initiative Goes to Rumphi,” *Malawi News Agency (Lilongwe)*, <http://allafrica.com/stories/201307170205.html>.

<sup>127</sup> Memory Kutengule, “756 Cows Distributed to vulnerable farm families,” *Malawi Voice*, April 29, 2014, <http://joycebanda2014.org/?p=518>.

<sup>128</sup> Photo taken from “JB Says ‘one Cow per Family’ to Benefit 1m Families in Malawi.”

<sup>129</sup> “JB Launches ‘a Cow a Family’ Initiative: Pledges Houses for Malawi Flood Victims,” *Malawi Nyasa Times - Malawi Breaking News in Malawi*, accessed June 8, 2015, <http://www.nyasatimes.com/2013/02/28/jb-launches-a-cow-a-family-initiative-pledges-houses-for-malawi-flood-victims/>.

especially.... No one else is courting that half of the electorate.”<sup>130</sup> Indeed, Banda touted the programme as a hallmark of her unparalleled dedication to poor Malawians. “I am especially talking about a cow per family initiative and Mudzi trust in which I am constructing houses for the poor: it is a known fact that anyone who will come after me will not continue these projects. So for the continuation, vote for me,” Banda beseeched voters at one 2014 election rally.<sup>131</sup>

## Mudzi Transformation Trust

The *Mudzi* (Village) Transformation Trust (MTT) was another hallmark programme of Banda’s “people-centred development agenda.” As a conclusion to her 2013 State of the Nation, Banda announced that she would be launching MTT in response to the sustained level of national poverty that had been



documented in the 2010/11 IHS. “Against this concern of deep levels of poverty ... I have decided that for the first time, the Government will specifically target the individual villages across the country with comprehensive high impact interventions that will accelerate the betterment of well being of rural and urban poor,” Banda declared.<sup>132</sup> Promising to “mobilise accessible, responsive and flexible resources to support social and economic projects for the transformation of the lives of Malawians,” the president called on the private sector to finance the MTT’s several development initiatives, which in practice became concentrated on building houses for the rural and peri-urban poor. While Banda often pitched Mudzi projects as the work of government, in reality the funding

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<sup>130</sup> Patrick McGroarty, “Malawi President Looks to Ride Free Cows to New Term,” *Wall Street Journal*, May 20, 2014, sec. World, <http://www.wsj.com/articles/SB10001424052702304908304579565453088446512>.

The naming inconsistency with which the programme was referenced is important and suggests the informality with which the president pursued the programme.

<sup>131</sup> “JB Vows to Continue pro-Poor Initiative: Seeks Her Own Mandate,” *Malawi Nyasa Times - Malawi Breaking News in Malawi*, accessed May 26, 2014, <http://www.nyasatimes.com/2014/05/11/jb-vows-to-continue-pro-poor-initiative-seeks-her-own-mandate/>.

<sup>132</sup> State of the Nation Address, 2013.

for projects was sourced through party structures or the Joyce Banda Foundation.<sup>133</sup>

Marketed nonetheless as a personal initiative of her presidential office, Banda devoted considerable energy and attention to her mission of advancing poverty alleviation through MTT. “As a mother,” the president explained, “it is my sincere wish that Malawians must have decent, adequate and affordable accommodation. ... That is why I have established the Mudzi Transformation Trust to make sure that our development is inclusive with shared prosperity.”<sup>134</sup> To this end, Banda travelled to the United Nations in September 2013 with a delegation featuring “ordinary villagers and the Chairperson of the Mudzi Transformation Trust” to lobby development partner to assist her in financing the programme.<sup>135</sup> Upon her return, Banda was documented on several occasions presenting “Mudzi houses” directly to constituents.<sup>136</sup> Referencing her mission to ensure a social floor for all Malawians, Banda referred to MTT as “a dream, and the dream is now a reality, and I am happy as a leader that people can now live in a decent home.”<sup>137</sup>

By the end of 2013, MTT had delivered 500 houses and roughly US\$2.5 million in total spending toward associated projects in both rural and urban areas.<sup>138</sup> As one traditional authority in the northern Mzimba District articulated after Banda led a Mudzi ceremony in his district, “I am tongued [*sic*] tied. We have never

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<sup>133</sup> “Mudzi Transformation Trust to Continue,” *Malawi24*, accessed June 12, 2015, <http://malawi24.com/2014/07/07/mudzi-transformation-trust-to-continue-pp/>.

According to an official with the Joyce Banda Foundation, the MTT “became so popular because their founder had become the first citizen and the money was not from the government.” Banda’s foundation has continued the work she had begun as president after the 2014 election.

Photo from “Malawi Leader Lay Foundation Stone for 7,500 Houses: Chinese Company to Build,” *Malawi Nyasa Times*, accessed June 7, 2015, <http://www.nyasatimes.com/2013/07/02/malawi-leader-lay-foundation-stone-for-7500-houses-chinese-company-to-build/>.

<sup>134</sup> “Malawi Leader Lay Foundation Stone for 7,500 Houses.”

<sup>135</sup> “Malawi President Banda Leaves for US for UN General Assembly,” *Malawi Nyasa Times - Malawi Breaking News in Malawi*, accessed June 7, 2015, <http://www.nyasatimes.com/2013/09/16/malawi-president-banda-leaves-for-us-for-un-general-assembly/>.

<sup>136</sup> “JB Hands over Mudzi House to Gogo Nyasoko of Kasungu,” *Malawi Nyasa Times - Malawi Breaking News in Malawi*, accessed June 7, 2015, <http://www.nyasatimes.com/2013/12/03/jb-hands-over-mudzi-house-to-gogo-nyasoko-of-kasungu/>.

<sup>137</sup> Ibid.

<sup>138</sup> Memory Kutengule, “Malawi: Almost K1 Billion Spent on Mudzi Transformation Trust Project,” *Malawi News Agency*, November 25, 2013, <http://allafrica.com/stories/201311260092.html>.

dreamt that some of our people would have decent houses and have access to clean portable [*sic*] water. This is a dream.”<sup>139</sup> It was, this tribal authority noted moreover, because of MTT that he believed for the first time that government cared for all of its citizens. Active in more than just rural areas however, the president strove to reach poor Malawians in urban areas as well. “Some people wrongly think it is only people in rural areas; in the villages that are living in abject poverty,” the president remarked at one Mudzi ceremony. “No; it’s not only them because people in townships like in Ndirande here are worse off, too.”<sup>140</sup> It seemed that wherever she went, Banda’s implied that it was only her government that could ensure citizens’ basic needs would be met.

Despite positive regard for Banda amongst her programme’s beneficiaries, many Malawians slammed the president for her “handout” programmes. Government Platform, a consortium of domestic civil society organisations, called the “Mudzi Transformation Trust and one family one cow ... not only suspicious but also not ... worthy investing in though [they are] politically popular.”<sup>141</sup> The organisation further declared that Malawi needs “choices and decisions that transcend political considerations.” Ephraim Munthali, a prominent journalist, in an article questioned wherein MTT operated; as “a public body or a charity organisation that will operate outside the country’s systems?”<sup>142</sup> He also questioned Banda’s decision to implement a programme that in its characteristics matched the government’s longstanding Local Development Fund, the implementation arm of MASAF, and pointed out how the president had tasked traditional authorities and not bureaucrats to select programme beneficiaries.<sup>143</sup> Academic observer Ernest Thindwa articulated a

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<sup>139</sup> “Mzimba Chiefs Happy with Mudzi Trust,” *Malawi Nyasa Times - Malawi Breaking News in Malawi*, accessed June 7, 2015, <http://www.nyasatimes.com/2013/09/22/mzimba-chiefs-happy-with-mudzi-trust/>.

<sup>140</sup> “JB Storms Ndirande, Assures Better Life for Malawi Citizens,” *Malawi Nyasa Times - Malawi Breaking News in Malawi*, accessed June 7, 2015, <http://www.nyasatimes.com/2013/12/09/jb-storms-ndirande-assures-better-life-for-malawi-citizens/>.

<sup>141</sup> “CSOs Thrash JB on Mudzi Transformation Trust, One Family One Cow: We Need Decisions That Transcend Political Considerations,” accessed March 18, 2015, <http://malawivoice.com/2013/06/20/csos-thrash-jb-on-mudzi-transformationtrust-one-family-one-cow-we-need-decisions-that-transcend-political-considerations-81875/>.

<sup>142</sup> “‘Cut the Chaff’: JB’s Mudzi Trust Will Either Duplicate LDF or Kill It off,” *Malawi Nyasa Times - Malawi Breaking News in Malawi*, accessed June 11, 2015, <http://www.nyasatimes.com/2013/06/01/cut-the-chaff-jbs-mudzi-trust-will-either-duplicate-ldf-or-kill-it-off/>.

<sup>143</sup> Banda’s decision to task traditional authorities (“chiefs”) with beneficiary targeting and not bureaucrats suggests further, as Said and Singini (2014) argued, how the president did not have the support of the bureaucracy in implementing programmes. Gabay (2014) argued furthermore that working through traditional authorities allowed Banda to build grassroots support for the PP by cultivating a patronage network. Clive Gabay, “Two ‘transitions’: The

common observation that Banda's ceremonies were more about cultivating her brand than truly about poverty alleviation. "This [the size of Banda's entourage] gives an impression that the government has a lot of money," Thindwa noted.<sup>144</sup> "In my view the president is just trying to popularise herself [through the entourages and the branding of the items]." Indeed, in some cases bags of maize were stamped "Joyce Banda."<sup>145</sup> Banda's tactics also made waves in parliament where the DPP's Chaponda commented on the floor that "the President's cost of travel alone ... to distribute one cow per household costs the taxpayer K12 million [US\$30,000], per day. This excludes the cost of the cow."<sup>146</sup>

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Political Economy of Joyce Banda's Rise to Power and the Related Role of Civil Society Organisations in Malawi," *Review of African Political Economy* 41, no. 141 (July 3, 2014): 374–88, doi:10.1080/03056244.2014.901949.

<sup>144</sup> Face of Malawi, "Queries over Joyce Banda Maize," *Face of Malawi*, accessed March 23, 2015, <http://www.faceofmalawi.com/2012/11/queries-over-joyce-banda-maize/>.

Bracketed items are original to the document.

<sup>145</sup> "A Long Way to Go," *The Economist*, March 19, 2013, <http://www.economist.com/blogs/baobab/2013/03/malawi>. For more on the significance of "Banda maize" in the 2014 election, see Gabay, "Two 'transitions.'"

<sup>146</sup> Chaponda, Response to the State of the Nation Address, Parliamentary Hansards, 20 May 2013. "JB Takes Food Distribution Exercise to Mangochi," *Malawi Nyasa Times - Malawi Breaking News in Malawi*, accessed May 26, 2015, <http://www.nyasatimes.com/2012/11/09/jb-takes-food-distribution-exercise-to-mangochi/>.



Instead of disavowing these characterisations however, Banda embraced the notion that she was the only leader willing to ensure that Malawians' basic needs were being met. Vowing to continue her pro-poor initiatives, Banda claimed that “even in Western countries there are ultra-poor people who survive on handouts” and promised that if elected she

would “continue to give help to those in need.”<sup>147</sup> Nor did she disavow any criticisms that it was she and the PP rather than the government that was pursuing poverty alleviation. “I want all of you to know,” she proclaimed at a November 2012 food distribution event, “that I will continue distributing maize to the needy people of this country. There is no way I can stand by and drink tea when people are suffering, so I will not tire, myself and various members of the People’s Party will continue to distribute maize where it is needed most.”<sup>148</sup> Images of Banda personally delivering bags of maize, dancing with rural women, and sitting with elderly villagers—reifying her effusive rhetoric around poverty reduction—percolated through the media in the weeks leading up to the election.<sup>149</sup> Everywhere Banda went around the country, the PP’s open lock and key logo was present. This symbol, which adorned PIPaHR maize bags and Mudzi houses, reinforced the president’s mission, as she articulated in her 2013 State of the Nation, to “unlock the potential of the Malawian people to regain their freedom, dignity and sense of pride.”<sup>150</sup>

With ambitions for a full term but just twenty-five months in office before the 2014 election, Banda toured the country, touting her record on poverty alleviation. At several “development rallies” where she would distribute “maize, livestock, houses for the poor and elderly and even motorbikes to the youth” (Dulani and Dionne, 2014), Banda furthered the notion that she would be the champion of poor Malawians.<sup>151</sup>

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<sup>147</sup> “JB Vows to Continue pro-Poor Initiative.”

<sup>148</sup> “JB Takes Food Distribution Exercise to Mangochi.”

<sup>149</sup> *Madam President*.

<sup>150</sup> State of the Nation Address, 2013

<sup>151</sup> Boniface Dulani and Kim Yi Dionne, “Presidential, Parliamentary, and Local Government Elections in Malawi, May 2014,” *Electoral Studies* 36 (December 2014): 219, doi:10.1016/j.electstud.2014.08.005.

‘I have built houses for the needy ... [and] we have distributed several cows to the poor. We have done such projects and several others for the benefit of Malawians. ... I will continue to build houses for the poor. I will continue to distribute cows for families and in particular to help the poor people of this country.... My fellow Malawians you know what I have done for this country. I have come to ask for your vote. If you want the programmes we have been doing for the people of Malawi like the ones I have mentioned to continue, vote for me’.<sup>152</sup>

Though her tactics may have elicited contentious public views of her leadership style, Banda’s spearheading of several initiatives through her presidential office—to which she could claim personal credit—furthered the associations between the president and her pro-poor programmes. “The president loves handouts,” noted one



observer. “She says she’s a charitable president and would like to give to people to alleviate their poverty. ... She’s been distributing cows, goats, shoes ...”<sup>153</sup> This public commitment to charity was what Banda hoped would carry her to victory in 2014.

## Election 2014

As had been the case during the early part of Mutharika’s term, Banda pursued poverty alleviation through programmes that she hoped would earn her the support of a national electorate. However, she faced considerable governance challenges. Though Banda managed by February 2013 to recruit 77 MPs (40% of members) to the PP’s caucus in parliament, the president lacked an established grassroots network and a reliable bureaucracy that could implement a wide-scale poverty alleviation programme.<sup>154</sup> Her response to these conditions

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<sup>152</sup> “JB Increasingly Upbeat to Win Malawi Elections,” *Malawi Nyasa Times - Malawi Breaking News in Malawi*, accessed March 18, 2015, <http://www.nyasatimes.com/2014/05/11/jb-increasingly-upbeat-to-win-malawi-elections/>.

<sup>153</sup> Interview with Henry Chingaipe, Director, Institute for Policy Research & Social Empowerment

<sup>154</sup> Many in the PP camp defected (back) to other parties during the “Cashgate” scandal that emerged in September of 2013. For more information about the practice of party-switching in

was to pursue various “handout” programmes through which she could personally demonstrate her commitment to poverty reduction. The fact also that Banda had acceded to the donor agenda, whereas Mutharika had emphatically rejected it, contrasted her brand from that of her controversial predecessor.

For their parts, the major opposition parties were all outspoken in opposition to these handout programmes and insisted that economic growth was the only way to achieve poverty alleviation.<sup>155</sup> The president’s fiercest critic was probably the MCP’s Lazarus Chakwera, a reverend in the Assemblies of God church and a newcomer to national politics. In his letter opening the MCP election manifesto (“Nothing for Us, Without Us”), Chakwera harangued “personalized politics” and “a dependency syndrome which unfortunately is being exploited by the leaders to gain political popularity through handouts.”<sup>156</sup> In one stump speech, Chakwera characterised Banda’s programmes as actually increasing poverty, though they were ostensibly dedicated to reducing it. “Malawians are poor not just because of God’s will but ... due to the spirit of hand-outs which has grown roots among Malawians,” Chakwera declared.<sup>157</sup> “No country in the world can develop through the spirit of giving its citizens Cows, Houses and any other Materials, but [rather by] teaching people to work hard.”<sup>158</sup> Though the MCP manifesto lacked mention of a specific poverty reduction strategy beyond increasing macroeconomic growth, Chakwera in one speech called for “programmes beneficial to Malawians and not mere distribution of cattle,” an implicit criticism of the Cow-a-Family programme.<sup>159</sup> On Election Day, Chakwera beseeched prospective voters to “vote for me ... not because I am

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Malawi, see Daniel J. Young, “An Initial Look into Party Switching in Africa: Evidence from Malawi,” *Party Politics* 20, no. 1 (2014): 105–15.

<sup>155</sup> According to Chunga (2014), the structure of the MCP manifestos has remained unchanged through the years from 1999 to 2009, and neither does the 2014 manifesto does not deviate much from this mould. One theme that transcends all of the manifestos is the party’s desire to demonstrate its qualification to lead on the basis of having been “the Party which liberated every Malawian from the colonial bondage and brought Independence and human dignity to Malawi.” Chunga, “Examining the Relevance of Political Parties in Malawi,” 12; MCP Election Manifesto, 2014.

<sup>156</sup> MCP Election Manifesto, 2014. Emphasis is original.

<sup>157</sup> “Southern Region Shuns MCP Once More, As Chakwera Scorns JB’s One Cow Per Family Initiative,” *Malawi Voice*, accessed March 23, 2015, <http://malawivoice.com/2014/05/08/southern-region-shuns-mcp-chakwera-scorns-jbs-one-cow-per-family-initiative/>.

<sup>158</sup> Ibid.

<sup>159</sup> “Chakwera Attacks JB on Hand-Outs in Zomba,” *Malawi Nyasa Times - Malawi Breaking News in Malawi*, accessed March 19, 2015, <http://www.nyasatimes.com/2014/05/08/chakwera-attacks-jb-on-hand-outs-in-zomba/>.



giving you handouts in this campaign but because you desire to see change of things in a Malawi to come.”<sup>160</sup>

Peter Mutharika’s campaign theme, in the words of his brother’s former legal counsel Z. Allan Ntata, was to “continue from where my brother left off.”<sup>161</sup> DPP party leaders clearly sought to continue the party’s Bingu-era food production branding, adding to their party regalia portraits of Bingu alongside the maize cob motif. To this end moreover, the DPP offered to double down on the successes of FISP, proposing to “make subsidized fertilizer available for every maize subsistence farmer that [*sic*] needs it.”<sup>162</sup> Subsidies were still needed, the newcomer Mutharika explained, “so that every Malawian can afford the means to produce food while earning the dignity of labouring to feed [themselves].”<sup>163</sup> Resonant with Minister Gondwe’s 2007-2008 Budget Address, the DPP in its manifesto enunciated further its collective vision to transform Malawi “from being a predominantly importing and consuming country to a predominantly producing and exporting country; and a food-sufficient country where hunger is eliminated.”<sup>164</sup> Not only would the nation’s farmers experience food security with the DPP in government, the party’s branding suggested, but Malawians would be able to achieve that food security by their own efforts. Gondwe also distinguished between what he believed the DPP and PP, respectively, would offer the country. “We [the DPP] will subsidize the price of ... cement and empower Malawians to build what they want by themselves,” he noted, “not *apa mbofyo, apa mbofyo!* (Here a small unplanned house, there another house).”<sup>165</sup> The manifesto also included a promise that a DPP government would pass a Law on Handouts in order to “phase out the spirit of dependency.”

As the election approached, Banda attempted to keep the public’s attention on her ambitions to reduce poverty. The PP manifesto (“Transforming Malawi Together”) in its first chapter trumpets the president’s successes in “modernizing rural areas and fighting poverty” through MTT. “In the short time

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<sup>160</sup> “Chakwera Bemoans Handouts,” *Afriem.org*, accessed March 23, 2015, <http://www.afriem.org/2014/05/chakwera-bemoans-handouts-2/>.

<sup>161</sup> “The Spirit of Bingu and a Leadership without an Agenda: Z Allan Ntata,” *The Maravi Post*, accessed June 22, 2015, <http://www.maravipost.com/national/opinions/general-scope/8810-the-spirit-of-bingu-and-a-leadership-without-an-agenda-z-allan-ntata.html>.

<sup>162</sup> DPP Election Manifesto, 2014. Emphasis is original.

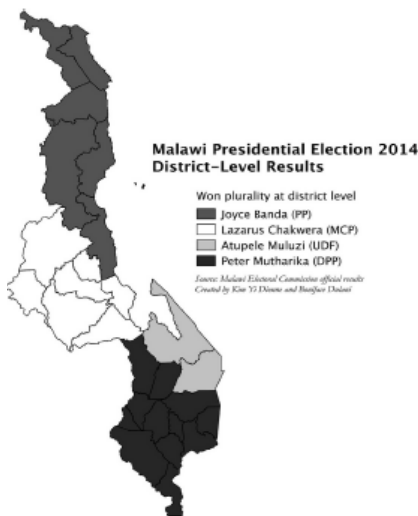
<sup>163</sup> “Mutharika Wants Feedback on Proposals to Tackle Malawi ‘intellectual Crisis,’” *Malawi Nyasa Times - Malawi Breaking News in Malawi*, accessed March 24, 2015, <http://www.nyasatimes.com/2013/04/19/mutharika-wants-feedback-on-proposals-to-tackle-malawi-intellectual-crisis/>.

<sup>164</sup> Emphasis is original.

<sup>165</sup> “Goodall Mocks JB’s Mudzi Transformation Trust,” *The Malawi Oracle Times*, accessed June 11, 2015, <http://www.orakonews.com/goodall-mocks-jbs-mudzi-transformation-trust/>.

I have been President,” Banda penned in a letter opening the manifesto, “we have taken decisive action to recover the economy, build a foundation for growth and deal with corruption.... I am committed to continue to champion the cause of the rural and urban poor.”

Yet new crises emerged during the final quarter of Banda’s term that distracted the general public from the poverty-oriented brand she had striven to project. Most notably, in September 2013 it was revealed that a number of civil servants had stolen about US\$30 million from government coffers. In response, donors withheld about US\$150 million in budgetary support from the government.<sup>166</sup> “Cashgate,” as the scandal came to be known, included the mysterious shooting of a senior budget official and the arrest of more than 60 government officials including senior ministers in the Banda government. Though never legally implicated in a scandal that likely predated her presidency, Banda received harsh criticism in the media for her handling of Cashgate.<sup>167</sup> In addition to Cashgate, the return of drought in the last quarter of 2013 left 1.46 million people (9.5% of the population) unable to meet their annual food requirements and caused the price of maize to climb from US\$0.37 to US\$0.60 per kg in January 2014.<sup>168</sup> Both of these issues presented major public relations stumbling blocks for a president who sought to portray herself as being sympathetic to the plight of the poor.



With scandals swirling and the economy stuttering, Banda won 20 percent of the vote, failing to win the election and the pan-regional mandate she had no doubt endeavoured to earn. Peter Mutharika won the election with just 36.4 percent of the vote, winning majorities in only Southern districts in which fellow Lomwes predominate. In this way, the outcome mirrored Malawi’s election results prior to 2009. However, a deeper investigation of the election outcome reveals a twist. Without winning a majority of any Northern or Central district,

Mutharika nonetheless placed second in both of those regions, suggesting how residual support for Bingu and/or the party’s food production branding may

<sup>166</sup> Ware, *Development in Difficult Sociopolitical Contexts*, 128.

<sup>167</sup> Ibid.

<sup>168</sup> The Malawi Vulnerability Assessment Committee, “National Food Security Forecast: April 2013 to March 2014,” 2013, <http://www.wfp.org/content/malawi-national-food-security-forecast-april-2013-march-2014>.

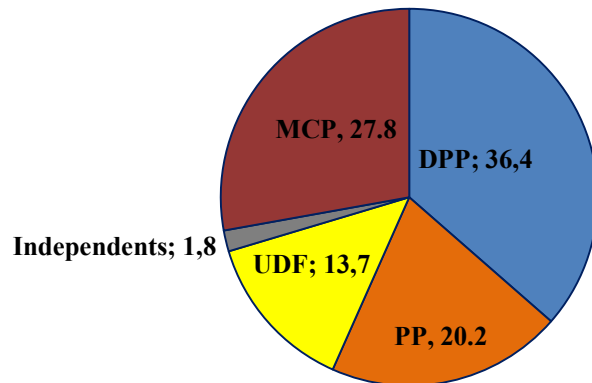
have buoyed support for the DPP in those regions.<sup>169</sup> In other ways too the 2014 outcome reflected the multifaceted concerns of the Malawian electorate. Chakwera won only (and all) Central districts, thanks to the support of fellow Chewas, while Atupele Muluzi, son of the former president, earned pluralities in south-eastern districts where fellow Yao Muslims predominate. Banda, though she comes from the Central region, won pluralities in every Northern district. Though her husband's ethnic Tonga and northerner identity may have augmented her support there, the fact that the Northern region lacked strong partisan ties after the collapse of AFORD in 2009 suggests alternatively how a plurality of voters chose Banda on the basis of her performance as president.<sup>170</sup>

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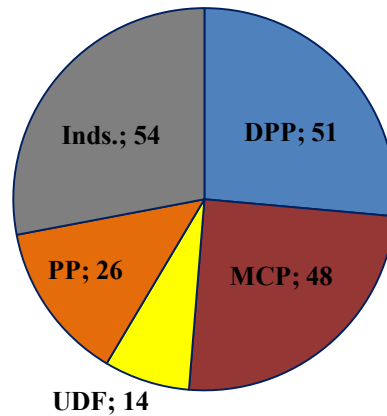
<sup>169</sup> Michael Wahman Nandini Patel, "The Presidential, Parliamentary and Local Elections in Malawi, May 2014," *Afrika Spectrum: Deutsche Zeitschrift Für Gegenwartsbezogene Afrikaforschung* 50, no. 1 (2015): 88.

<sup>170</sup> The hypothesis that Richard Banda's identity was salient in the 2014 election was offered by Dulani and Dionne, "Presidential, Parliamentary, and Local Government Elections in Malawi, May 2014," 222. The hypothesis that President Banda earned the support of northern voters on account of her grassroots campaign tactics was offered by Cammack, "Malawi in Crisis, 2011–12," 382. AFORD had been the dominant party in the North, but after its collapse after the 2009 election, no party had earned widespread support there.

### Presidential election results, 2014



### National Assembly election results, 2014



While the data presented in this branding analysis cannot explain the motivations of the marginal voter in 2014, it seems likely that salient issues as well as ethno-regional ties are both, to variable degrees, potential determinants of election outcomes. This was also the conclusion of Brazys *et al.* (2015) who commented on how “ethnicity is a fluid ascription [that] can fluctuate as other factors become more or less salient.”<sup>171</sup> Going forward therefore, the political window of opportunity for new pro-poor champions to win a pan-regional mandate remains open.

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<sup>171</sup> Samuel Brazys, Peter Heaney, and Patrick P. Walsh, “From the Great Lakes to the Great Rift Valley: Does Strategic Economic Policy Explain the 2009 Malawi Election?,” Working Paper (University College Dublin. Geary Institute, February 28, 2014), 51, <http://researchrepository.ucd.ie/handle/10197/5612>.

## Discussion

Regardless of whether candidates are in fact able to earn a national support base in a particular election however, it is clear that Malawi's recent presidential incumbents have operated under the belief that they can achieve national consensus around their respective political brands. As Banda noted—perhaps mistakenly—in a 2014 interview, “I thank God—in some places, elections go on tribal lines. In Malawi we have gone beyond that.”<sup>172</sup> Indeed, for Banda and Mutharika, neither of whom had established patronage networks initially, governing in a fashion that could earn them national appeal was a political necessity. To this end, both candidates branded themselves in ways that they hoped would resonate with a broader base of voters—food production in Mutharika's case and basic social protection coverage for more marginalised groups in Banda's case. This analysis ultimately supports the findings of van Donge (1995) who argued that candidates in Malawi have, despite the undercurrent of patronage politics, attempted “to portray themselves as [being] of much wider significance.”

Furthermore, candidate and party branding can be understood not as a series of discrete events, but rather as a continuum of branding and counter-branding exercises in response to perceived gaps in the electoral space. Muluzi and Mutharika both cultivated brands suggesting how they would emphasise food security, yet it was the latter's decision to defy the demands of Malawi's development partners in implementing AISP that set the Mutharika/DPP brand apart. The brand thereafter became not just about ensuring food security but about empowering farmers to the point at which they could graduate from smallholder status and the country from dependency. To this end, Mutharika demanded donor disengagement from Malawi's economic affairs, though it was this aspect of his brand that ultimately put the country on a path to financial ruin and deepening poverty. Joyce Banda, even before taking office, branded herself as a president who would take the country in the opposite direction. Mutharika spurned the donors; Banda embraced them. Mutharika championed able-bodied workers; Banda championed women and other marginalised Malawians for whom export-driven growth had not been inclusive. In the 2014 election, the challengers Chakwera and Peter Mutharika reacted to Banda's “maternal” brand by advocating labour-based empowerment as a means to achieving poverty alleviation.

Though this analysis elucidates how Malawian political elites engage in political branding, it does little to clarify the relative favourability of different poverty brands to voters. Secondary literature on attitudes toward poverty

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<sup>172</sup> Joyce Banda, Talk Africa: Live interview with Dr. Joyce Banda.

reduction instruments in Malawi and across the region offer some important insights, however. There is an enduring belief throughout much of the developing world, Ward (1999) argued, that poor people are poor simply because they are unwilling to work.<sup>173</sup> For many citizens therefore, poverty eradication programmes that promote personal initiative are preferred to programmes that deliver benefits directly.<sup>174</sup> The analysis of Kalebe-Nyamongo and Marquette (2014) supported this observation. Among Malawian political elites, “there is preference for productive forms of social protection, such as input subsidies or public works that support the ‘active’ poor, and policy strategies that enable the poor to become economically active.”<sup>175</sup> In agrarian Malawi, non-elite attitudes toward poverty and work suggest too that farm subsidies are an ideal mechanism for poverty alleviation. Dorward *et al.* (2009) noted how a pilot programme that delivered an input package to smallholder farmers was received with a high level of satisfaction among 86 percent of participants and “was more popular ... than food or cash for work.”<sup>176</sup>

These commonplace attitudes toward the poor and anti-poverty instruments suggest that politicians who brand themselves as being supportive of farm subsidies stand a greater chance of appealing to the electorate. This suggests further that Banda was misguided in her belief that a focus on direct transfers (“handouts”) would endear her to poor voters. Indeed, the fact that Malawians seem to favour labour-based solutions to poverty rather than transfer-based solutions implies that a Chakwera-MCP or Mutharika-DPP brand would be received more favourably than the Banda-PP brand. Yet relative favourability of poverty brands does not add insight about whether these brands were even at all salient to voters in 2009 and 2014. Absent public opinion data on the salience of election issues in Malawi, data from the Afrobarometer-Malawi survey could provide some insights into the relative salience of candidates’ poverty-centred political brands during these two elections.

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<sup>173</sup> This idea, Ward argues, arose principally from the 1834 English Poor Law Act that shaped welfare policy across the historical Commonwealth, including Malawi.

<sup>174</sup> Michael Ward, “Perceptions of Poverty: The Historical Legacy\*,” *IDS Bulletin* 30, no. 2 (1999): 23.

<sup>175</sup> Chipiliro Kalebe-Nyamongo and Heather Marquette, “Elite Attitudes Towards Cash Transfers and the Poor in Malawi,” 2014, 18, <http://publications.dlprog.org/EliteAttitudesCTs.pdf>.

<sup>176</sup> Andrew Dorward, Bruce Guenther, and Rachel Sabates-Wheeler, “Agriculture and Social Protection in Malawi,” 2009, 9–10, <http://opendocs.ids.ac.uk/opendocs/handle/123456789/2358>.

## Data Analysis

As the prior section has evidenced, Malawian presidential candidates have responded to the heightened political competition through the development of political messaging centred on poverty eradication. To understand the possible effects that such branding exercise have in changing voting behaviour however, it first becomes necessary to know what salience particular societal issues have amongst voters. In this regard, public opinion data from the Afrobarometer-Malawi (AB) survey can offer some insights into what issues were salient to voters ahead of a given election.

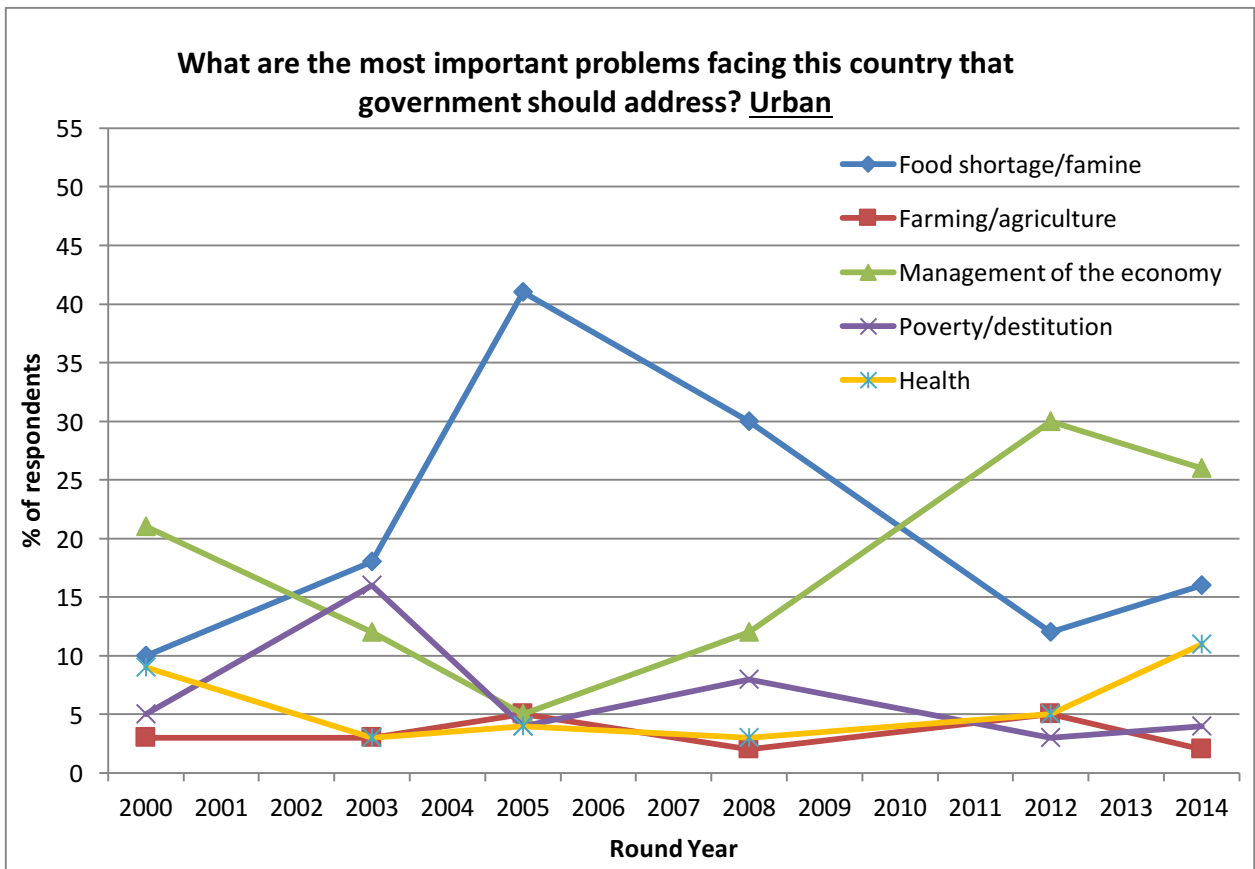
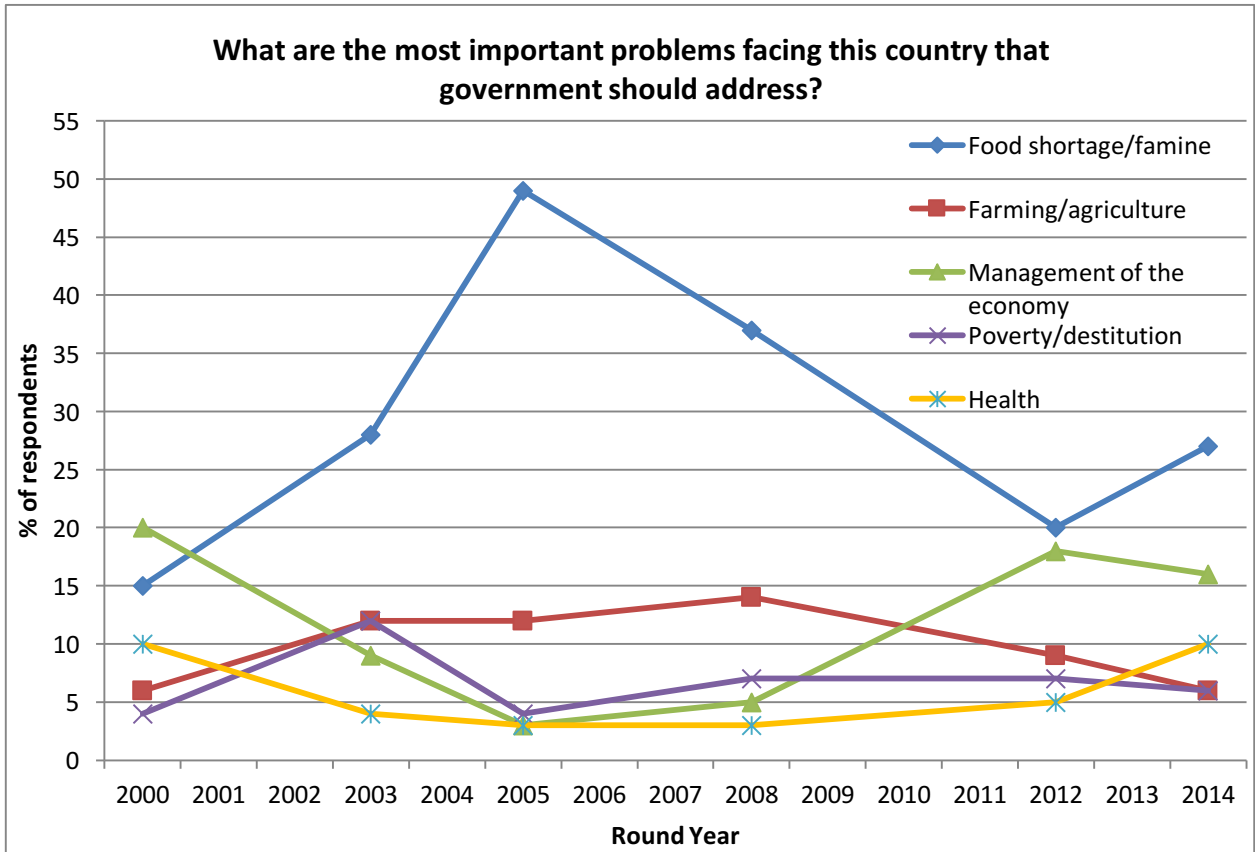
The hypothesis is that if a particular issue (e.g., food security) is salient to voters, then a candidate's public commitment to resolving that issue (i.e., his/her brand) will be influential—relative to branding around other issues—in shaping voting behaviour. By contrast, if a particular election issue is not salient to voters, then branding around that issue will not be influential in shaping voting behaviour. In Malawi, the issues to which survey respondents have expressed concern are numerous, but they tend to centre on management of the economy, food security, corruption, and public health. Depending on the relative importance of these issues to voters, particular issue brands may or may not resonate with voters' concerns. If the issues around which candidates cultivate brands are not the crux of voters' concerns in fact, but rather are secondary to other factors such as candidate ethno-regional identity, then branding will be less influential than these factors in determining the election outcome.

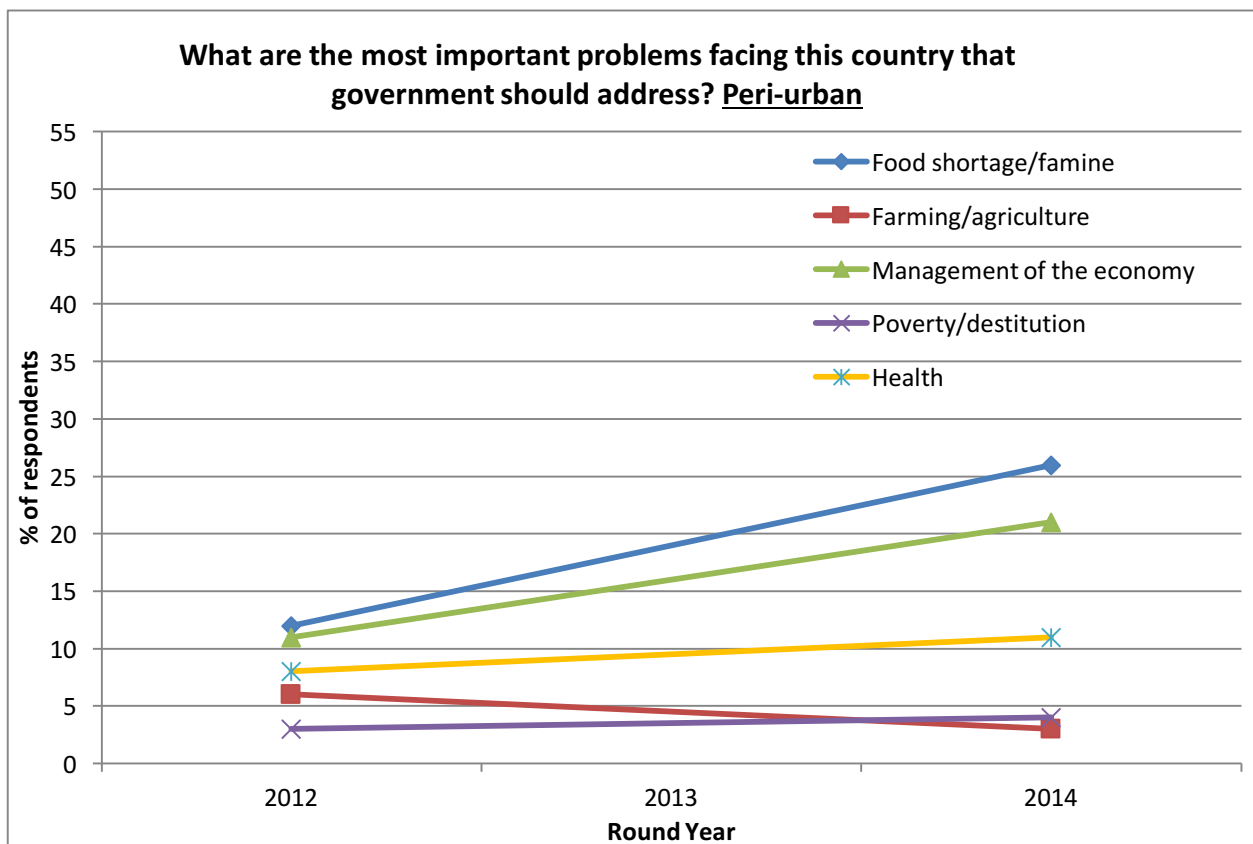
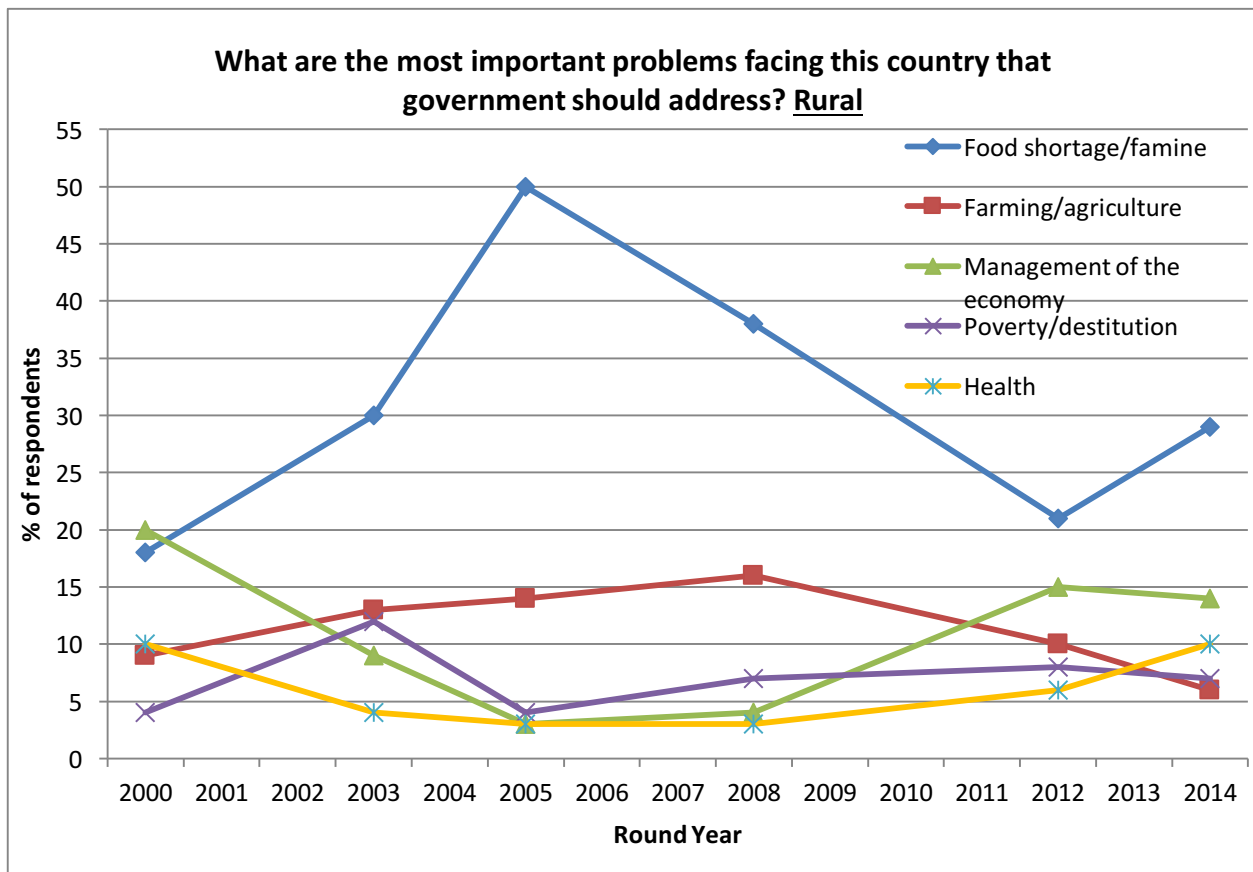
## What issues do Malawians care about? The Bingu wa Mutharika era

For a plurality of Malawians, “Food shortage/famine” has consistently been the most important societal challenge that government should address (see below). This is not surprising given how Malawi is an overwhelmingly agrarian society in which many millions of subsistence farmers survive under conditions of heightened vulnerability. Concerns about food insecurity have always been relatively high during the period, according to the data, but the significant variation over time can likely be attributed to the efforts of government to assuage food-related crises. In 2000, when the first AB survey was recorded, the UDF government of President Bakili Muluzi had implemented the Starter Pack Scheme (SPS). The SPS considerably increased the availability of food in Malawi and can be identified as the reason for why only 15 percent of respondents (18 percent of rural respondents) believed that “Food

shortage/famine” was the most important issue that government should address. However, the IMF and USAID successfully lobbied government to scale-down SPS in favour of the more narrowly-targeted Targeted Input Programme (TIP), which has been attributed to exacerbation of the effects of the drought that hit the country in 2001-2002. As a likely consequence, the percentage of Malawians in 2003 identifying food shortages as the most important problem that government should address nearly doubled to 28 percent of respondents.



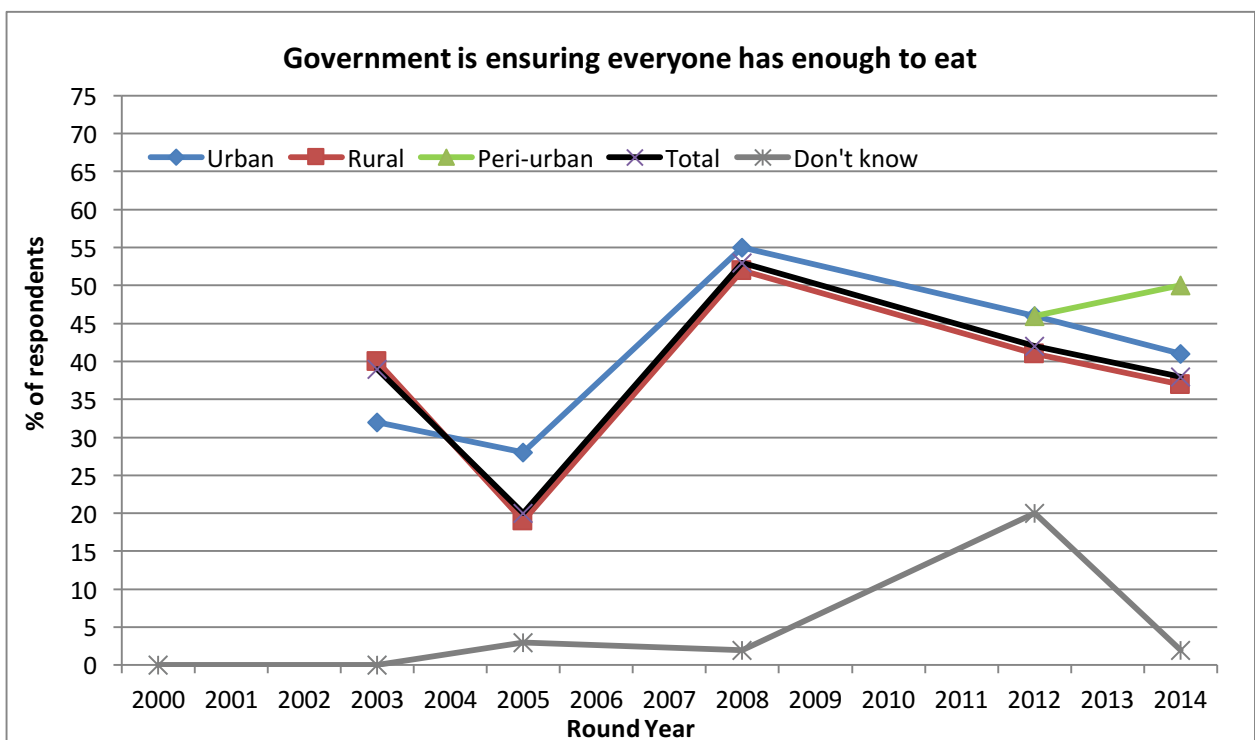


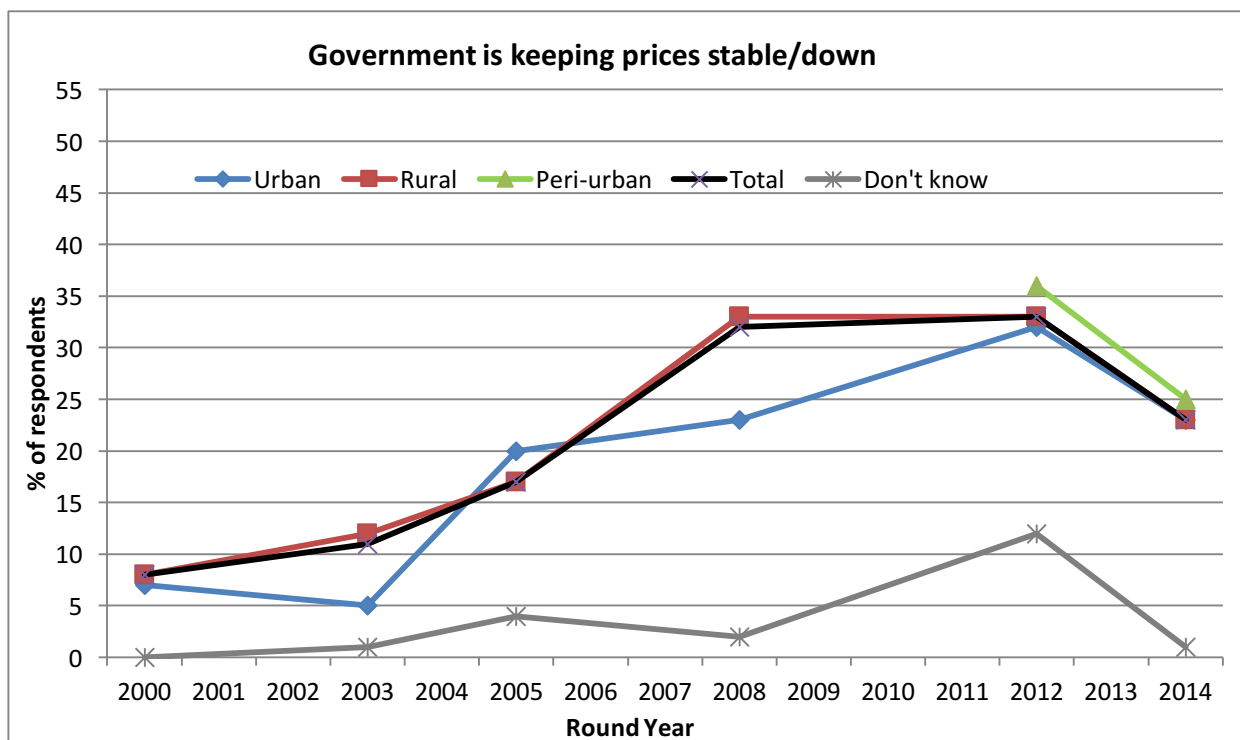


During the first Mutharika term (2004-2009), the correlation strengthened between government's action to combat potential famine and the decline in

respondent concerns about food shortage. In 2005, a year when only 37 percent of Malawians were able to meet their food requirements due to severe drought, nearly half of respondents noted how food shortage was the concern that government should prioritise. In addition, “Farming/agriculture” was chosen by the next largest grouping (12%). No other option was chosen by more than 4 percent of respondents. By the year of the next AB survey (2008), government fertiliser subsidies disseminated through AISP had catalysed substantial increases to maize production in the country, with the quantity nearly tripling over the course of two growing seasons. Though concerns about food remained high, the fact that food availability had increased markedly was without doubt the principal cause for the decline in food shortage concerns among rural respondents, from 50 percent in 2005 to 21 percent by 2012.

The Mutharika government’s efforts to address food insecurity through agricultural productivity translated to considerable improvements in public favourability toward the government and president, according to the data. Drought in the early to mid-2000s had resulted in relatively severe food shortages. Though a spike in food aid from the World Food Programme to Malawi had undoubtedly assuaged some hunger, only 20 percent of AB respondents in 2005 said that the government was ensuring everyone had enough food to eat. After fertiliser subsidies had massively increased crop yields, the percentage who said government was in fact ensuring people had enough to eat rose to 53 percent. Critically, this was the only recorded moment in the period when a majority of respondents said government was succeeding in ensuring food security.



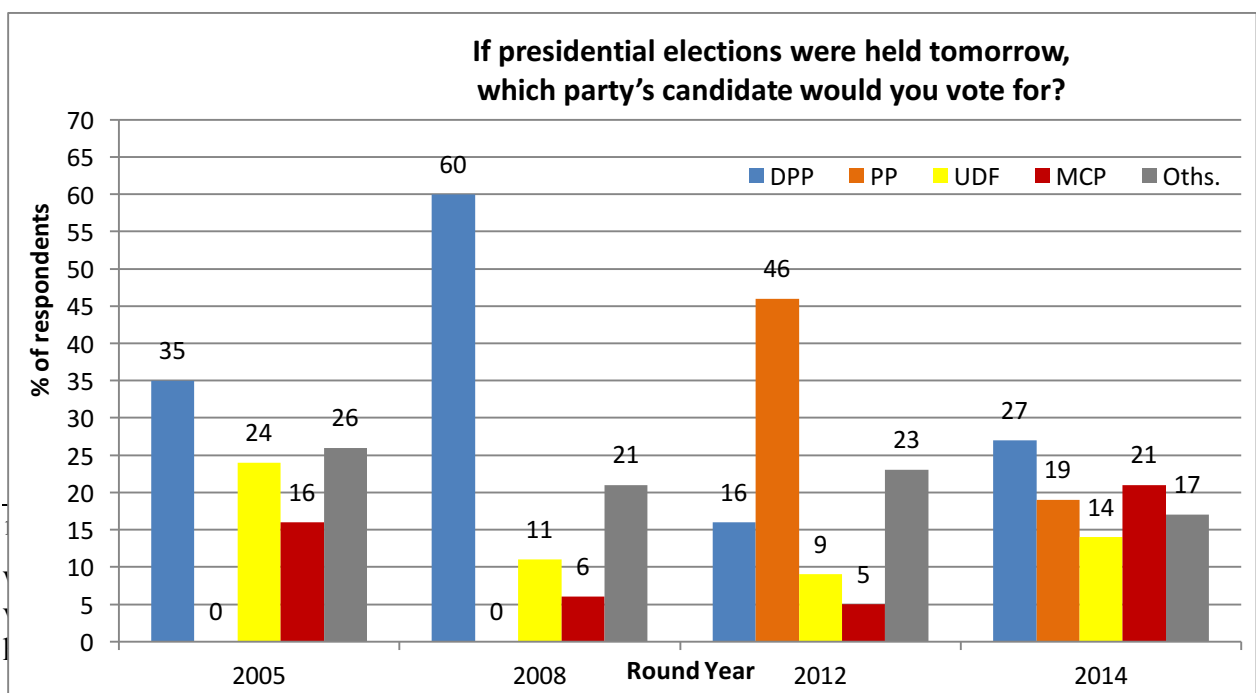
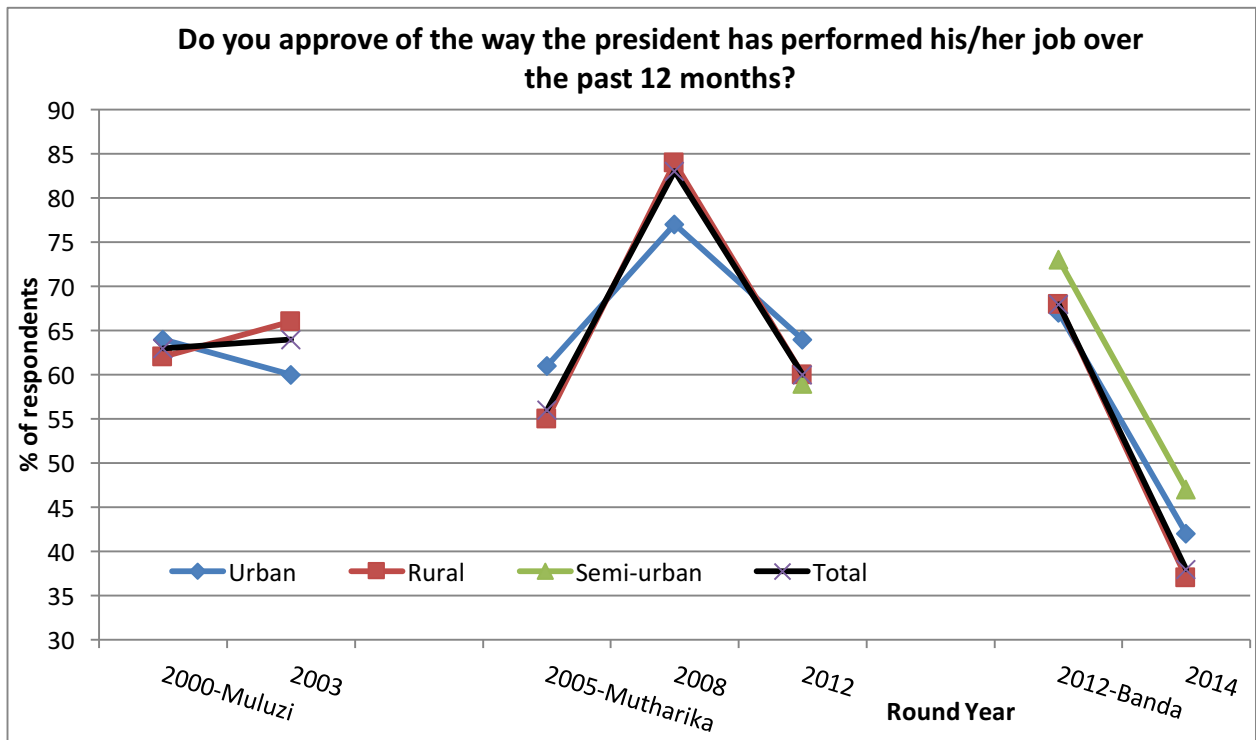


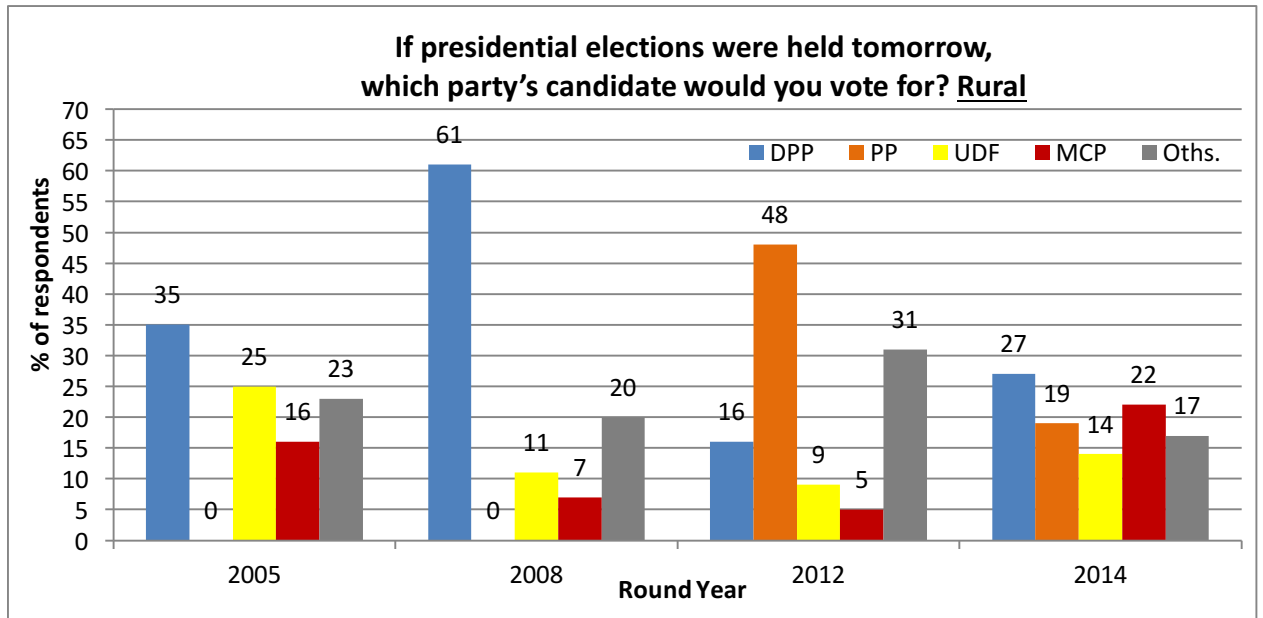
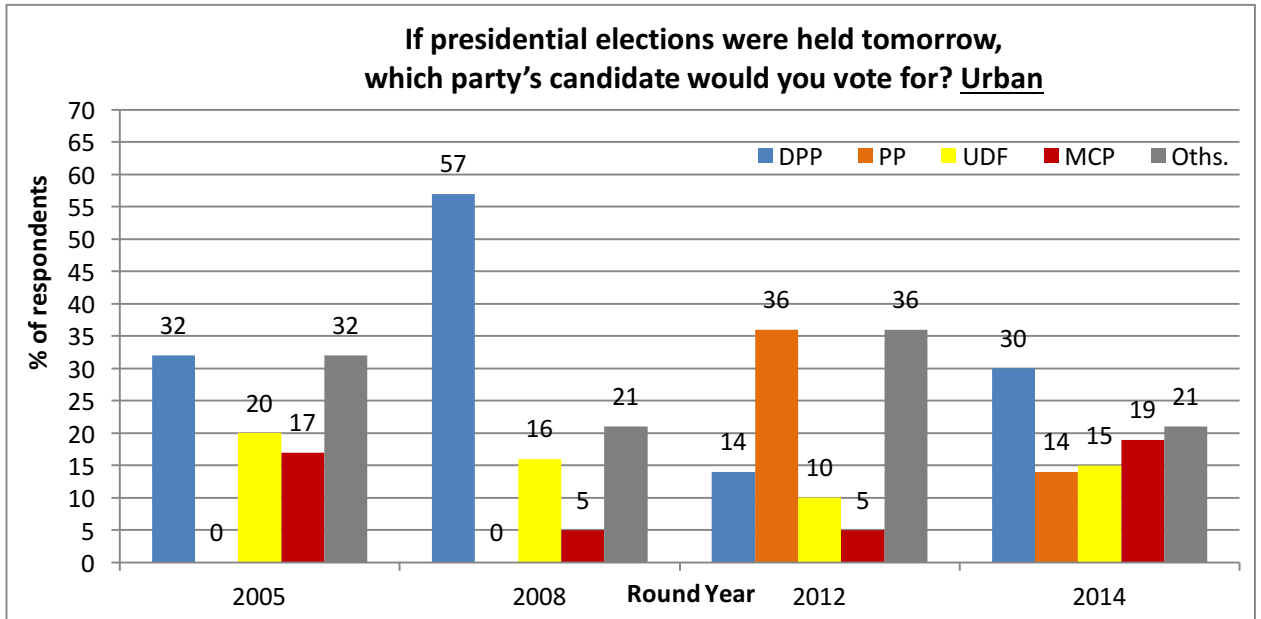
On price stability, which was also an important concern of poor rural Malawians who rely on purchased maize for part of the year, Mutharika’s government improved its standing with respondents. During the early decade, national crop shortages caused principally by reductions to state-delivered fertiliser subsidies through SPS had resulted in high maize prices. Accordingly, only 12 and 17 percent of respondents in 2003 and 2005, respectively, indicated that government was doing a satisfactory job keeping prices stable or holding them down. That percentage virtually doubled to 33 percent in 2008, a rate that was sustained in 2012. Though respondents were still on the whole disapproving of government’s price control efforts, they were more approving in 2008 and in 2012 than at any other recorded interval during the 14-year period.

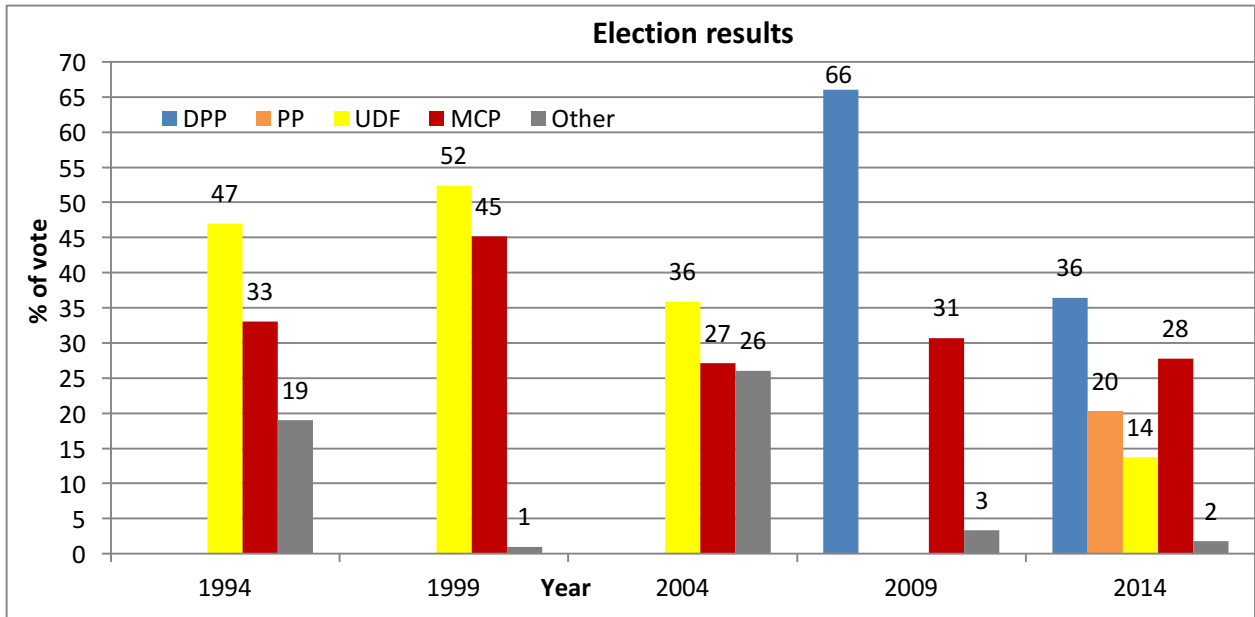
## Presidential approval and the 2009 election

The emphasis that Mutharika placed on food production especially after 2005 was very likely to have been a factor in boosting his presidential approval rating. One year into the president’s first term, a middling 56 percent of AB respondents believed that Mutharika had performed his job well over the prior twelve months. By 2008, the president’s approval rating among AB respondents had climbed to 83 percent. Given the large percentage of Malawians who in 2005 had identified “Food shortage/famine” as the most important issue that government should address, Mutharika’s decision to brand his DPP as being

principally concerned with food production set him up for considerable popular approbation. Having addressed in a profound way an issue that a large proportion of Malawians consider to be of paramount importance (“Food shortage/famine”), Mutharika’s political stock rose dramatically. When respondents were asked in 2008 which party they would vote for in an election, 60 percent said they would vote for the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP). In the following year’s presidential election, Mutharika got the support of 66 percent of voters (see below).<sup>177</sup>







Following the 2009 election, Mutharika experienced a significant decline in public approval rating from 83 percent to 60 percent among AB respondents. With the government having addressed during the late 2000s to a considerable degree the country's food insecurity concerns, Malawians' concerns had shifted considerably by the beginning of the 2010s. Proper management of the economy had become by 2012 a topmost concern for nearly as many people (18%) as those who indicated that food shortage was their top concern (20%). There were, indeed, reasons for Malawians to be concerned with the state of the economy. Mutharika's inability to bring foreign exchange into the country drastically reduced critical imports including fuel and medicine, causing the national economy essentially to grind to a halt. As a likely consequence, economic management had become the most important problem for government to address for urban Malawians especially.

## The institutionalisation of subsidies

By the time Joyce Banda became president in April 2012, a "Green Revolution" had eliminated the food security concerns that Malawians had experienced in the mid-2000s. After years of stunted yields due to a lack of soil nitrogen concentration, Mutharika's fertiliser subsidies had allowed most farmers to produce enough of a crop to at least meet their basic food requirements, and allowed many others to become net sellers of maize. This economic transition undoubtedly reduced food shortage concerns around the country, as reflected in the fact that by 2012 only 20 percent of AB respondents listed food shortages as an issue of foremost societal concern. With the destructive effects of drought having been limited as a result of FISP, branding around ending food shortages

was perhaps no longer as politically potent by 2012 as it had been in the mid-2000s.

Moreover, while Mutharika had taken a political gamble in offering fertiliser subsidies on the scale and scope that AISP in 2005, by 2012 their provision had become politically sacrosanct. The president had initially stood alone in supporting fertiliser subsidies while both opposition political parties and the donor community criticised his aggressive agenda. Mutharika had thus striven to market the DPP as the party that would champion the food security issue for smallholders. The salience of that issue at the time is what allowed the president to leverage his brand into a 2009 election victory that featured pan-regional support. Since the election of 2009 however, no national politician has suggested publicly that fertiliser subsidies be withdrawn, though there has been ample debate about reforms relating to its implementation. The fact that political elites have reached consensus on the notion that government should provide subsidies has therefore had the effect of depoliticising the issue.

By 2012 consequently, the potency of branding around subsidies had diminished for two reasons. First, a consistently higher crop yield nationwide than what the country had produced in 2005 meant that food sufficiency was more commonplace than it had been. Second, with subsidies continuing after Mutharika's death as an institutionalised offering of government, discussion of food security had become an essential aspect of all parties' manifestos. Cultivating a related political brand therefore was not likely to have been as beneficial for presidential candidates in 2014 as it had been during the 2000s.

## **Joyce Banda: emphasising poverty and economic reform**

Southern Africa's first female president rode into office on a wave of hope and optimism following the death of a president whose mismanagement of the economy and autocratic tendencies had contributed to general frustration and angst. In an April 2012 opinion piece, Mwangi Kimenyi described how Banda against this backdrop was "a sign of hope" and prompted Malawians to "talk of a better future."<sup>178</sup> Accordingly, Banda entered office with the enthusiasm of a frustrated people behind her. When the Round 5 AB survey was recorded in June 2012, Banda enjoyed a presidential approval rating of 68 percent (see above). The People's Party (PP) too, which she had founded in September 2011

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<sup>178</sup> Mwangi S. Kimenyi, "To Malawians, Joyce Banda's Presidency Brings Relief, Hope," *The Brookings Institution*, April 18, 2012, <http://www.brookings.edu/research/opinions/2012/04/19-banda-malawi-kimenyi>.



in anticipation of contesting the May 2014 election, also received high praise from AB respondents in 2012. When asked which party they would vote for if an election were held tomorrow, 46 percent of respondents reported they would vote for PP, compared to 16 percent for the formerly ruling DPP.<sup>179</sup> This high level of approbation would be short-lived, however, as Banda's popularity declined precipitously since the mid-2012 poll was taken.

The Banda presidency, though it lasted less than half of a full presidential term, was characterised in its public emphasis by a complex set of policy priorities. On the one hand, Banda strove to portray herself as a leader who would champion the welfare of Malawians who had not benefitted from the country's economic growth and had suffered under its recent decline. This was Banda's "social brand." Among other pursuits, she lobbied for greater women's rights, advocated maternal and children's health, and lobbied for an expanded public recognition of women's roles in all economic and social spheres generally. This self-portrayal was shaped in part by her pre-political career as an activist and social progressive. Though pursuing these objectives was her ostensible "mission," Banda at the same time followed a reconciliatory approach with the donor community and pursued a reformist economic agenda. This was her "economic brand." Her immediate outreach to donors for collaboration in Malawi's national development placed her in stark contrast to Mutharika who had repeatedly spurned the IMF on several occasions when they insisted on structural adjustment. In an effort to "counterbrand" against her predecessor, Banda emphasised in several interviews how in her early presidency she had to "clean up the mess that I have found" (March 2013) left by the previous administration.<sup>180</sup>

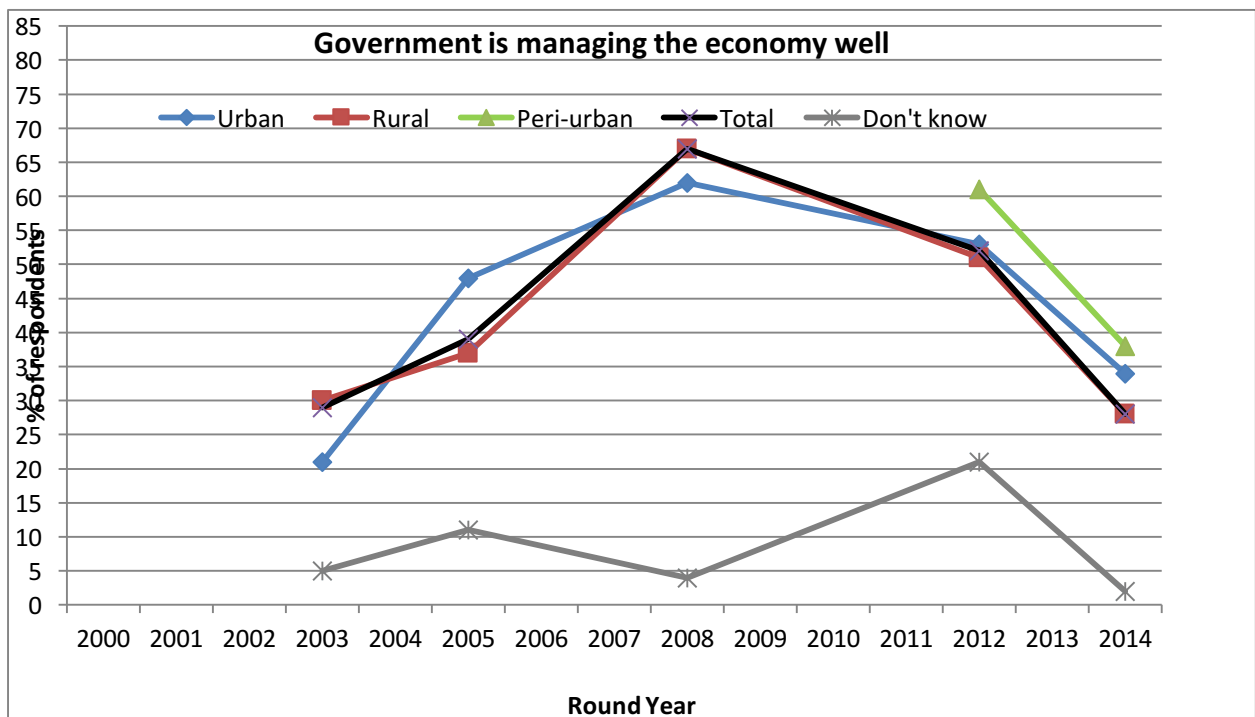
These public priorities of the Banda government can thus be summarised as addressing the societal problems (listed in the AB survey) of "Poverty/destitution," "Management of the economy," "Health," "Discrimination/inequality," "Gender issues/women's rights," and "Violence against women." Among these several problems to which she had committed solving, the one that had the greatest salience to urban voters was management of the economy. With 30 percent of urban respondents in 2012 reporting that government should prioritise fixing the economy, the fact that Banda had promised to urgently address the 2011-2012 foreign exchange crisis set her up

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<sup>179</sup> In the 2012 AB survey, 6 percent of respondents refused to divulge which party they would vote for; 10 percent said they did not know; 6 percent said they would not vote.

<sup>180</sup> "Malawi Leader Defends China Links, Tells the West: 'Don't Tell Us What to Do'," *Malawi Nyasa Times - Malawi Breaking News in Malawi*, March 22, 2013, <http://www.nyasatimes.com/2013/03/22/malawi-leader-defends-china-links-tells-the-west-dont-tell-us-what-to-do/>.

to win over a considerable percentage of the urban electorate.<sup>181</sup> But after devaluing the kwacha and implementing a government austerity plan, services were cut and prices remained high. Though Banda and the development partners had expected a faster rate of economic recovery, the expected growth rate did not return. In response, observers commented on how the IMF-supported structural adjustment programme may not have had achieved the promise of economic improvement that the reformers had expected it to. As development economist Thandika Mkandawire commented in the midst of the turmoil in 2013 for instance, “The social consequences of the [adjustment] policies are dire.”<sup>182</sup>

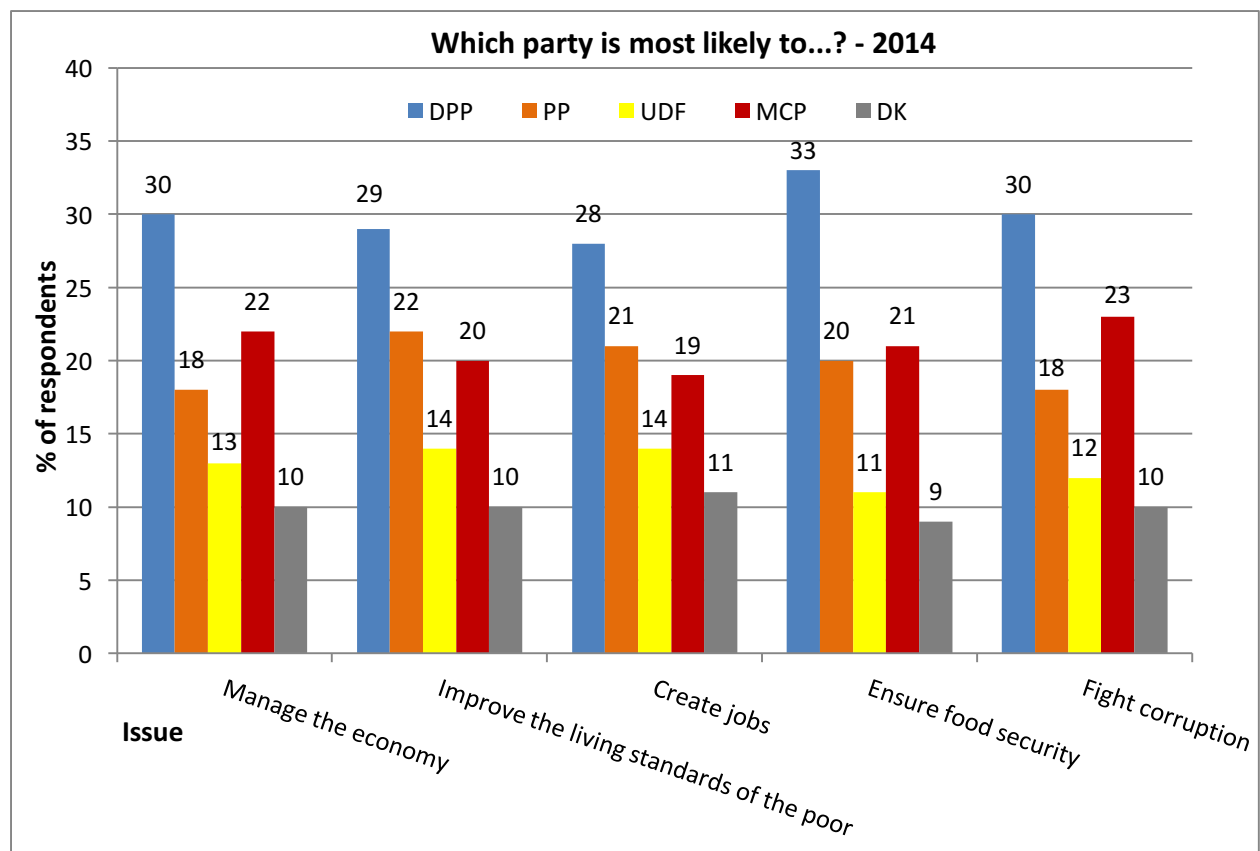


By 2014, many urban Malawians undoubtedly felt betrayed that the president had not followed through on her statements surrounding economic reform. Whereas 52 percent of respondents in 2012 had indicated the early PP government was managing the economy well, by 2014 only 28 percent said so. Survey-takers in 2014 also believed other parties could do a better job of managing the economy. Just 12 percent of urban respondents believed the PP was the party most likely to manage the economy well. This suggests how Banda’s economic reformist branding effort did not convince many prospective voters that her party’s approach offered improvements over what other parties would do. In fact, 33 percent of urban respondents believed that the DPP would

<sup>181</sup> The president declared in her first State of the Nation Address how she would prioritise economic reforms.

<sup>182</sup> Elliot Ross, “Joyce Banda Has Bigger Problems than Madonna,” *Africa Is a Country*, April 24, 2013, <http://africasacountry.com/joyce-banda-madonna/>.

be most able among all parties to manage the economy. A greater percentage of urban respondents, moreover, selected the MCP (21%) and UDF (13%) than did the ruling party.



Another prominent aspect of the Banda brand was her advocacy for the poor. Banda since her days as vice-president had marketed the PP among Malawi's political parties as being uniquely "pro-poor." To substantiate her claims to being the candidate most committed to alleviating poverty, Banda pursued personalised programmes through her presidential office that targeted poor women and other marginalised groups. Her efforts may have somewhat increased support for her candidacy in 2014—7 percent of AB respondents identified "Poverty/destitution" as the most important issue for government to address. But most Malawians it seems did not feel Banda's *modus operandi* would best contribute to poverty eradication. When asked in 2014 which party would be most likely to improve living standards of the poor, 29 percent of respondents identified the DPP, whereas 22 percent identified the PP. This finding suggests that while Banda's "handout" campaigns including PIPaHR and Mudzi Transformation Trust may have found favour with recipients, they did not reflect back onto a "pro-poor" image for the president, at least among most prospective voters. Whereas 49 percent of respondents in 2012 who commented positively or negatively on whether government was improving the

standards of the poor indicated their approval for her government, by 2014 that percentage had fallen to less than 40 percent in this regard.

On food and other issues related to farming, which was listed as being of foremost importance to a combined 29 percent of respondents in 2012, the PP did not offer much that could distinguish it from the other parties. The PP was not strongly branded around these issues, and Banda for the most part opted to continue the policy infrastructure that had been left her by the previous administration. The one programmatic exception to this continuation was Banda's (prospective) implementation of the Farm Input Loan Programme (FILP). FILP, which the government rolled out in November 2013 as a parallel programme to FISP, was ostensibly to address some of the procedural snafus that arose from the distribution of fertiliser vouchers. The true principal purpose of the programme may have been different, however. As Brazys *et al.* (2015) noted, Banda had "built [FILP] around her and poorer districts" in an effort to cultivate a more pro-poor image of her candidacy.<sup>183</sup> FILP however had a limited impact as the government introduced the programme only about six months before the 2014 election.

The president's relative "non-focus" on food security likely diminished the public's confidence that she and the PP could ensure food availability, especially during times of increased need. At the three-month mark of her presidency, 53 percent of AB respondents who gave an opinion said that the PP government was doing well in ensuring that everyone had enough food to eat, as compared to 47 percent who said it was doing badly.<sup>184</sup> By 2014, respondents had considerably soured on the Banda government: 39 percent said her government was doing well and 61 percent said it was doing badly.<sup>185</sup> More telling perhaps was the fact that only 20 percent of respondents in 2014 believed the PP was the political party most likely to ensure everyone has enough to eat.<sup>186</sup> With a minor drought in 2012-2013 having increased angst around food availability, Banda's government responded with direct food aid. But as resounding support for Mutharika and AISP had revealed, Malawians have a strong preference for being able to grow their own food. The PP government's inability to respond in a similar fashion to how Mutharika had responded to drought in 2005 almost certainly hurt her stock with poor rural farmers who

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<sup>183</sup> Samuel Brazys, Peter Heaney, and Patrick P. Walsh, "From the Great Lakes to the Great Rift Valley: Does Strategic Economic Policy Explain the 2009 Malawi Election?" Working Paper (University College Dublin. Geary Institute, 2014), 51, <http://researchrepository.ucd.ie/handle/10197/5612>.

<sup>184</sup> In response to the question, 20 percent of respondents said they "Don't know."

<sup>185</sup> In response to the question, 2 percent of respondents said they "Don't know."

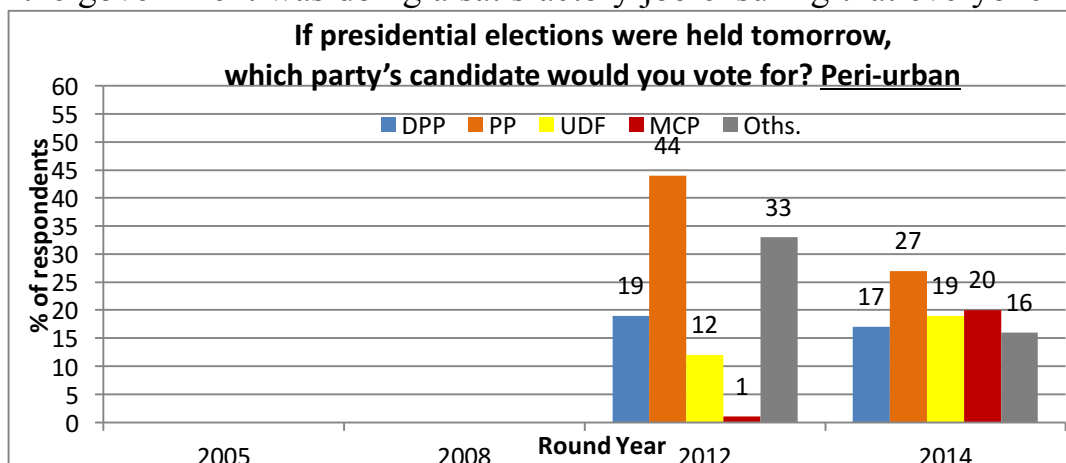
<sup>186</sup> In response to the question, 33 percent of respondents said DPP; 21 percent said MCP; 11 percent said UDF; 14 percent said None or "Don't know/Haven't heard."

were the ones most likely to identify food shortages as being the societal problem that government should address.

A still-sputtering economy, high maize prices, and a national scandal in “Cashgate” were all likely reasons for why Banda’s reputation among Malawians plummeted in a matter of twenty-two months. Among those respondents in 2012 who offered an opinion on Banda’s presidency, 76 percent had favoured the president. In 2014, that rate had fallen to 39 percent. Banda’s diminished approval rating among survey respondents reflected also a decline in support for the ruling party. The 46 percent of respondents who had identified the PP as the party they would choose in an election had fallen in 2014 to 19 percent, 8 points lower than the DPP and 2 points lower than the MCP. The actual presidential election which followed the AB poll by less than two months mirrored this result. The DPP had won albeit with a tentative 36 percent of the vote.

## Banda and peri-urban respondents

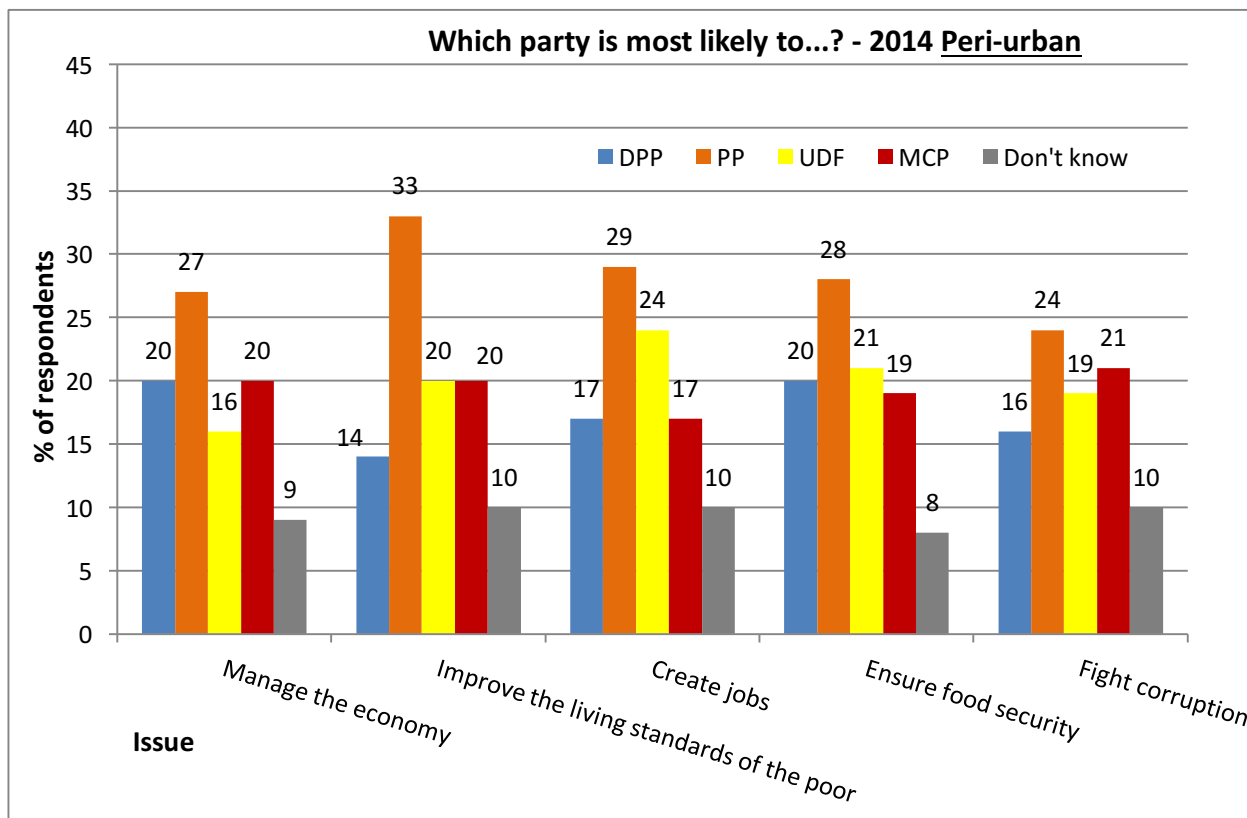
One curiosity of the AB survey data is that peri-urban respondents evaluated Banda and the PP more favourably than rural or urban Malawians across several metrics.<sup>187</sup> For instance, half of peri-urban respondents in 2014 indicated that the government was doing a satisfactory job ensuring that everyone has enough



to eat, compared to 41 percent of urban and 37 percent of rural respondents.

<sup>187</sup> The Round 5 (2012) survey includes three inhabitancy classifications: ‘Cities,’ ‘Rural,’ and a third category that is referred to interchangeably as ‘Towns’ and ‘Peri-urban.’ The latter is defined in the survey’s explanation of variables as “towns and Bomas [sprawl around district capitals].” Respondents in this third category were estimated to be 7 percent of the population. In the Round 6 (2014) survey, only the term ‘Peri-urban’ is used, though it is not further defined. This population was estimated to be 3 percent of the population. This study makes the assumption that these categories in 2012 and 2014 are the same. There is no further differentiation of residents’ inhabitancy beyond urban and rural in previous survey rounds.

The rate of approval had in fact increased since Banda had come into office. Likewise, 54 percent of peri-urban residents in 2014 approved of how government was improving living standards for the poor, compared to 47 of urban and 37 percent of rural respondents.



Increases to approval for the government’s handling of various societal issues were moreover correlated with approval for the party among peri-urban Malawians. When asked to indicate which party they believed would be the most likely to achieve six different outcomes, peri-urban respondents in 2014 selected the PP-Banda at a rate between 6 and 11 points higher than the group that was next-most favourable to the PP. For example, 28 percent of peri-urban respondents selected the PP as the party most likely to ensure people have enough food to eat. These respondents also indicated how they believed the PP would be best able to manage the economy (27%) and improve the living standards of the poor (33%). A much greater proportion of peri-urban respondents stated that the ruling party would control prices (60%) than did respondents as a whole (46%). When asked for which party they would vote in an election, a plurality of peri-urban respondents chose the PP (27%) whereas respondents as a total bloc chose the DPP (19%). Higher support for the PP and government was also correlated with higher relative support for the president among peri-urban residents, though support for her presidency on the whole did decrease. In 2014, the 47-percent approval rating that Banda had enjoyed

among peri-urban residents well exceeded the 38-percent rating that she had across all respondent groups.<sup>188</sup>

The exact reasons for this greater favourability rating among peri-urban residents are not known, in part because there is little documentation on the nature of peri-urban life in Malawi. Cammack (2012) characterised the peri-urban squatter settlements that surround Lilongwe and Blantyre as “sites of grinding poverty, unnatural hazards, and poor public goods delivery.”<sup>189</sup> Malawi’s most populous settlements include Ndirande, Mbayani, and Kachere in Blantyre, and Lauma and Cinsapo in Lilongwe. Residents of these townships are generally “impoverished translocals” whose livelihood strategies involve regular movement between villages and towns.<sup>190</sup>

The AB data corroborate some limited qualitative evidence that Banda paid special attention to which communities she was targeting her poverty programmes, ensuring that she demonstrated her pro-poor commitments to Malawians living in quasi-urban townships and towns. For instance, after having devalued the kwacha, Banda announced that she would



implement or scale up several social protection programmes that would mitigate the negative effects of structural adjustment. One example was the Public Works Programme.<sup>191</sup> PWP, which had been part of the government’s (donor-driven) social safety net agenda since 2003, was expanded in December 2012 by about US\$25 million. Banda’s decision to ceremonially launch the expansion

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<sup>188</sup> The fact that the peri-urban category was initiated in the Round 5 survey (2012) causes potential problems for data analysis. Since peri-urban respondents on the whole had considerably different views from urban respondents, their aggregation with urban respondents before Round 5 may have significantly shifted the urban respondent data.

<sup>189</sup> Diana Cammack, “Peri-Urban Governance and the Delivery of Public Goods in Malawi,” 2012, 7, <http://abdn.ac.uk/sustainable-international-development/documents/20120123-appp-research-report03-peri-urban-governance-and-the-delivery-of-public-goods-in-malawi-2009-11-by-diana-cammack-january-2012.pdf>.

<sup>190</sup> For instance, Ndirande was documented as a “squatter colony” as far back as the early 1970s; see H. C. Norwood, “Ndirande: A Squatter Colony in Malawi,” *The Town Planning Review* 43, no. 2 (1972): 135–50.

<sup>191</sup> “Malawi President Launches K10bn Public Works Programme: Economic Recovery,” *Malawi Nyasa Times - Malawi Breaking News in Malawi*, December 9, 2012, <http://www.nyasatimes.com/2012/12/09/malawi-president-launches-k10bn-public-works-programme-economic-recovery/>.

from Bangwe Township near Blantyre suggests how she had targeted her programmes especially at alleviating peri-urban poverty.

Banda's rollout of the PWP to peri-urban areas likely augmented her popularity among this demographic that had likely been relatively more marginalised during previous governments. As Chirwa and Dorward (2013) documented, between the 2004/05 and 2010/11 Integrated Household Surveys (IHS), Malawi's population had grown by around 20 percent, while rural poverty in Malawi had decreased only marginally.<sup>192</sup> This undoubtedly forced many rural dwellers to seek employment opportunities for at least part of the year in urban areas, increasing strain on public resources. Peri-urban areas, however, lie in a sort of development "no man's land": township residents generally receive lesser public goods delivery than urban residents and may also not benefit from some social protection programmes that specifically target farmers.

The president's overtures to peri-urban dwellers marked a contrast from how the previous government had tackled social challenges in peri-urban areas. "Some people wrongly think it is only people in rural areas ... that are living in abject poverty," Banda noted at a rally in Ndirande in which she touted the achievements of her Mudzi Transformation Trust. "No; it's not only them because people in townships like in Ndirande here are worse off."<sup>193</sup> Banda had travelled on multiple occasions before to Ndirande, including during her tenure as vice-president to convey her condolences to a family whose son had died at the hands of police during the July 2011 anti-Mutharika demonstrations.<sup>194</sup> During the protests, peri-urban residents were apparently "particularly agitated," Cammack (2011) noted, as "DPP pickup trucks loaded with youths carrying pangas" filled the streets to quell the unrest.<sup>195</sup> Banda, by contrast, stood in solidarity with those peri-urban dwellers whom Mutharika had apparently persecuted.

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<sup>192</sup> Ephraim Chirwa and Andrew Dorward, *Agricultural Input Subsidies: The Recent Malawi Experience* (Oxford University Press, 2013), 163.

<sup>193</sup> "JB Storms Ndirande, Assures Better Life for Malawi Citizens," *Malawi Nyasa Times - Malawi Breaking News in Malawi*, December 9, 2013, <http://www.nyasatimes.com/2013/12/09/jb-storms-ndirande-assures-better-life-for-malawi-citizens/>.

<sup>194</sup> Katie Lin, "VP Joyce Banda Visits Blantyre to Give Her Condolences - Blantyre," *Demotix*, July 27, 2011, <http://www.demotix.com/news/768186/vp-joyce-banda-visits-blantyre-give-her-condolences-blantyre>.

<sup>195</sup> Cammack (2011) recounted how "poorer peri-urban residents were particularly agitated" by the July 2011 protests in which "DPP pickup trucks loaded with youths carrying pangas" filled the streets to intimidate locals. "Background Paper," 2011, <http://r4d.dfid.gov.uk/pdf/outputs/appp/20111110-appp-background-paper-04-malawi-s-political-settlement-in-crisis-2011-by-diana-cammack-nov-2011.pdf>.



As they comprise less than 5 percent of all Malawians, peri-urban support for Banda's presidency could not have alone carried her candidacy in Malawi's largest urban districts of Lilongwe and Blantyre. Of Malawi's three largest cities, Banda only earned a plurality of votes in the northern city of Mzuzu. Nonetheless, the fact that Banda performed generally well according to peri-urban Malawians regardless of region provides significant further evidence that campaign issues—and not solely ethno-regional identity—informed voter choice in 2014.

## **Salience of election issues in 2014: what were the possibilities for national consensus?**

The data indicate that there was not likely to have been one societal challenge or issue that was of salience to voters, as there had likely been in 2009 in the form of food security. According to 27 percent of 2014 survey respondents, food security was once again the most important issue that government should address. Yet as has been argued, no candidate fronted a distinctive brand that could convince voters nationwide that his or her party would be the one to address food-related concerns. Even though the 2014 DPP had appropriated their Bingu-era messaging around food production—going so far as to literally incorporate images of the deceased president into party regalia—other parties and candidates had jumped on the food security bandwagon through their support of fertiliser subsidies. For her part, Banda built herself up as an economic reformer and anti-poverty crusader. Yet neither were these issues of principal concern to likely more than a collective fourth of the electorate. In conclusion, it was unlikely that any candidate would be able to achieve the degree of national consensus that Bingu had achieved in 2009.

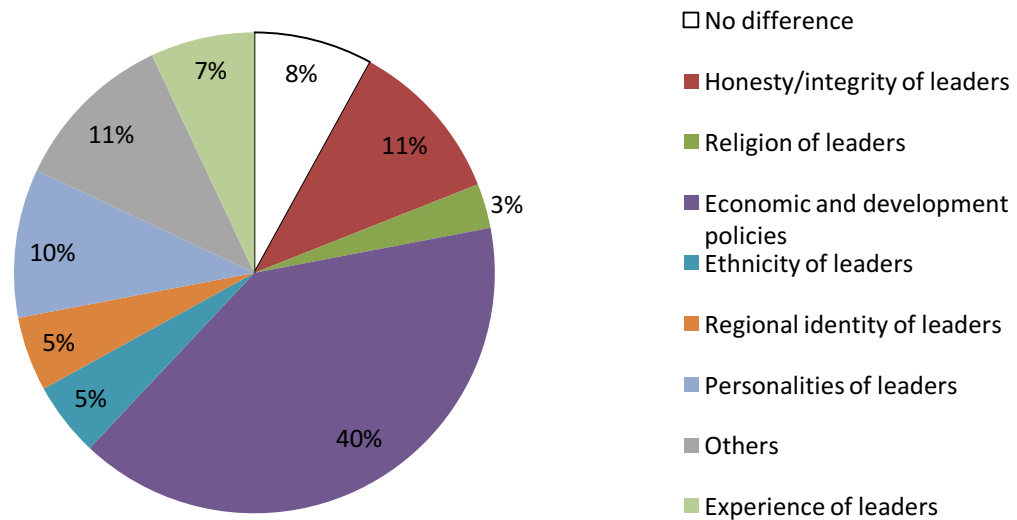
The role that other 2014-specific election issues played in determining voter choice should not be underestimated, however. Most notably, Banda's supposedly poor handling of the "Cashgate" scandal is thought to have reduced support for her candidacy in 2014.<sup>196</sup> The AB data, however, suggest how Banda's handling of Cashgate, which likely predated her tenure of office, may actually have increased her popularity. A plurality of respondents (43%) said that government's handling of Cashgate would make them likely to vote for Banda in the election as compared to 33 percent who said they would be unlikely to vote for her as a consequence. Another 11 percent said that Cashgate would not influence their vote. This finding, contrary to anecdotal observations,

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<sup>196</sup> Boniface Dulani and Kim Yi Dionne, "Presidential, Parliamentary, and Local Government Elections in Malawi, May 2014," *Electoral Studies* 36 (December 2014): 218–25, doi:10.1016/j.electstud.2014.08.005.

suggests that Cashgate did not have a strong net effect on Banda’s popularity, and if anything even increased slightly her electoral support as she cultivated her image as a reformer, having ordered dozens of arrests and commissioned an investigative report on the scandal.

**What is the most important difference between the ruling and opposition parties?**



The outcome of the 2014 election, in which candidates generally won pluralities in areas only where they had ethnic or regional ties, suggests that election issues—and branding, therefore—did not play a paramount role in determining the result. At the same time, the role of issues and candidate positions should not be discounted. According to 40 percent of 2014 AB survey respondents, candidates’ economic and development policies were the most important difference between the ruling and opposition parties. By comparison, just 13 percent of respondents identified the ethnicity or region of party leaders to be the most important difference between the parties. This finding suggests that the candidates’ positions on substantive issues—not ethno-regional identity—were of greater salience to voters in 2014. Unfortunately, these somewhat contradictory insights cannot easily be reconciled and underscore the complexity of electoral choice in Malawi.<sup>197</sup> Ultimately, further research should do more to disaggregate respondent data according to demographic characteristics other than inhabitancy type including age, gender, and class. Understanding who are Malawi’s “swing voters” would, moreover, bring

<sup>197</sup> Further issues also clouded determination of election issue salience through analysis of the AB data. Gender norms in Malawi, for instance, are still predominant and likely coloured voters’ beliefs about whether Banda was qualified to be president. Indeed, 37 percent of AB respondents agreed with the statement “Men make better political leaders than women, and should be elected rather than women.” This bias necessarily confounds any gender-independent comparison of candidates’ political brands.

additional insight into the potency of political branding to shape election outcomes.

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## Key informant interviews

Name	Organization/Position
<i>Academia</i>	
Blessings Chinsinga	University of Malawi
Boniface Dulani	University of Malawi
Joseph Chunga	University of Malawi
Maxton Tsoka	University of Malawi
<i>Development partners</i>	
Patience Kanje	KfW
Chipo Msowoya	Macroeconomist, European Union
Lovely Chizimba	Vulnerability Advisor, Irish Aid
<i>Government</i>	
Lazarus Chakwera	President, Malawi Congress Party

Mary Shawa	Principal Secretary, Ministry of Gender
Paul Kwengwere	Finance/Development advisor, Malawi Congress Party
<i>NGO</i>	
Maki Kato	UNICEF—Malawi
<i>Parastatal organisations</i>	
Wilkins Mijiga	Reserve Bank of Malawi
<i>Other</i>	
Joseph Chavula	Regional Corporate Manager, FMB Bank
Thoko Mussa	Former government official
Margaret Mukwenha	Director, The Samaritan Trust
Chantal Elmont	Resident consultant, Ayala Consulting

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