

*Full Length Research Paper*

# The performance of the Malawi Congress Party in general elections: The role of sectionalism of a regional and ethnic nature

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In this article, an attempt has been made to explain the performance of the Malawi Congress Party (MCP) in the general elections by focusing mainly on the 2009 presidential and parliamentary elections in which the MCP lost overwhelmingly. Specifically, the role of sectionalism of a regional and ethnic nature on the MCP's national level performance was examined. Different kinds of data from the Malawi electoral commission and news media are used in the analysis. Descriptive statistics are used to summarise the effects of different factors on the party's share of votes. It is found that a complex combination of factors such as district and regional sizes, education level of voters as proxied by district and regional level data, party level policies and organisation, incumbency, campaign expenditure, individual leaders personal characters and past legacy, party conduct in parliament among others, may explain the MCP's 2009 defeat. The findings may be considered as broad guidelines along which efforts to reinvigorate the party may be galvanised.

**Key words:** Democracy consolidation, Malawi Congress Party, general elections.

## INTRODUCTION

The Malawi Congress Party's (MCP) loss in the 2009 Presidential and parliamentary elections and the need to stimulate debates focussing on democracy consolidation forms the real genesis of this paper. The loss in the 2009 elections was proportionately big, sudden and to a greater extent unanticipated to its leaders and hardcore followers gathering from oral evidence sourced from supporters and leaders through news media. As will be appreciated below, since 1994 the voting pattern in presidential and parliamentary elections seems to have dwelt on regional lines with Southerners voting for a Southern region party, the North voting for Northern parties and individuals, with the centre voting generally for the MCP, other factors being equal.

Although the elections of 1994 and 1999 saw MCP losing some grip of the Central region, the party seemed always stronger and promissory in dynamic sense than its counterparts namely the united democratic front (UDF), which though based in the populous Southern region, proved inter-temporally unstable owing to their strong association with particular areas which had competing ethnic groups themselves (the Yao, the Lomwe and the Sena). Furthermore, UDF seemed inter-

temporally unstable owing to the alleged uncontrolled corruption that allegedly characterised its leaders<sup>1</sup>, (see Englund, 2002 and Madise, 2007 for a discussion on corruption in Malawi). The MCP seemed stronger, had assured continuity and seemed to continue to source its valour from its three decades of existence. On the contrary, the alliance for democracy (AFORD), one of the major parties that emerged after the end of Dr. Hastings Kamuzu Banda's autocratic rule, which seemed internally consistent at first, proved to be a party without democratic principles, where everyone that mattered in the top ruling echelon dreamt of becoming the torch bearer for the party. It is hence not surprising that a number of MCP members of parliament and followers

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<sup>1</sup>Between 1994 and 2006 many cabinet ministers and government officials under UDF's administration, including Honourable Sam Mpasu, Honorable Brown Mpinganjira, Honourable Yusufu Mwawa among others, faced corruption charges. At the time of authoring this paper the media in Malawi was constantly speculating on a possible arrest of the ex-president of Malawi, Dr Bakili Muluzi who was leader of the UDF when it was in power, on corruption charges.

considered the 2009 loss nothing short of mind boggling, preposterous and yet, thought provoking. It is the purpose of this article to chart the nature of the loss, the reasons why JZU's MCP managed to snatch defeat from the jaws of victory even in MCP's backyard as a way of contributing to the talk about democracy consolidation in Malawi.

The importance of this issue cannot be overemphasized in a society that values democracy. A democracy requires sufficient checks and balances to meet the needs of its many players in manners that are robust and satisfactory. Natural providers of such checks and balances are the opposing political parties/groupings and hence research and discourse that seek to examine their weaknesses is pertinent. If we believe that the shift from autocratic rule to political pluralism was important for governance, the political leaders that would otherwise be good leaders under democracies could end up misruling once checks and balances weaken. Given how weak the UDF now is and given MCP's loss of its political prowess, the strength of democratic leadership rests only with the Democratic progressive party (DPP). It could be argued that from political point of view, the DPP may not have incentives to do the best (knowing that their rivals are impotent) for the society as long as the opposition is practically dead. Moreover, formal analyses of causes and/or trends of elections in Malawi are non-existent either because Malawi's democracy is in its youthful stages or because most issues are generally under-researched in Malawi. This article could stimulate debates in the field, which could generate knowledge of interest for all stakeholders including politicians thereby anchoring the process of democracy consolidation. Indeed it is in the interest of long-run/inter-temporal democracy that this issue arose. The goals of this paper are as follows:

- 1) To assess the role of tribal/regional affiliation in voting.
- 2) To assess the factors that led to MCP's downfall in 2009.

The rest of this paper is organised as follows: the sections that follows present the history and the extent of the MCP loss, methods, results and discussions and conclusions.

## **THE HISTORY OF MALAWI'S GENERAL ELECTIONS**

The coming of Dr Hastings Kamuzu Banda to Nyasaland (as Malawi was then called) towards the latter part of the 1950's marked an important step in the liberation of the nation from the grip of colonialists who had ruled her as an independent colony and later under the umbrella of the federation of Rhodesia and Nyasaland (Zambia, Zimbabwe and Malawi) (Power, 1998). Upon his ascendance to power Dr. H. K. Banda and his MCP

wielded power that they nurtured until 1994 when the wind of political change blew across the nation culminating in a referendum and then the first ever democratic elections, which saw Dr Banda's party defeated in 1994.

The nature of the defeat of Dr Banda's MCP at the hands of the newly formed UDF in 1994, was such that the MCP lost most parliamentary seats throughout the nation except at the central region generally considered as the powerhouse of the MCP and home to Hasings Kamuzu Banda, but scooped circa 34% of the vote (McCracken, 1998). The UDF under Dr. Bakili Muluzi secured most of its members of parliament (MPs) in the Southern region the home to Dr Bakili Muluzi and a default stronghold for the UDF at the time. The Northern region had wholly been won by the AFORD, a party led by Mr. Chakufwa Chihana, himself a northerner. It was clear from the division of votes in 1994 that the voting had gone tribal and was conducted along regional lines.

The elections that followed in 1999 and 2004 seemed to exhibit the same patterns once other factors are accounted for. The major contestants in the 1999 general elections were Dr. Bakili Muluzi of UDF and Gwanda Chakuwamba who as a leader of the MCP after the death of Dr. H. K. Banda had taken the MCP into an alliance with Chihana's AFORD. Although Dr. Bakili Muluzi of UDF won the election, the results conspicuously showed the UDF winning in the South, the MCP getting MPs at the centre and the AFORD winning in the sparsely populated Northern region. The same pattern ensued out of the 2004 elections in which the UDF then under Dr. Bingu wa Mutharika marginally and controversially won the elections against the MCP then under Hon. John Z Tembo, and Mgwirizano coalition formed by the Republican Party under Gwanda Chakuwamba and many other small parties, all led by Gwanda Chakuwamba. Hon Chakufwa Chihana had taken his AFORD party into an unpopular alliance with the UDF in the run-up to the 2004 elections. In those 2004 elections, Hon John Ungapake Tembo won a majority of the parliamentary seats (more than 58) mostly at the central region, MCP's base; the UDF won the second highest number of seats (circa 47) and there were some independent MPs in large numbers. Mgwirizano coalition's MPs mostly came from Nsanje (Gwanda Chakuwamba's home) and the northern region, home to the other senior members of the coalition, while the AFORD lost control and won just 6 seats. Although the MCP obtained the most seats in the 2004 elections, it lost the election and all its seats were won at the central region and none in the northern and southern regions.

In the 2009 elections, the two major contesting parties were the MCP, again under JZU Tembo, the newly formed party (an offshoot of the UDF) called the DPP under Dr. Bingu wa Mutharika. The DPP overwhelmingly won the elections but the only remaining parts of the MCP and the UDF were in the central and Southern

**Table 1.** MPs won by parties in 2009.

	Northern	Central	Southern	Total
Independent	8	8	16	32
DPP	24	37	53	114
MCP	0	26	0	26
UDF	0	0	17	17
AFFORD	1	0	0	1
MAFUNDE	0	0	1	1
MPP	0	1	0	1
Total	33	72	87	192
DPP MPs proportion	21.0	32.5	46.5	100

Data source: MEC, 2009.

regions respectively. The northern region did not have any credible regional party following the extinction of the AFORD. The DPP won mostly in the Lomwe areas of the southern region (home to Bingu wa Mutharika), the northern region (home to the more senior members of the DPP at the time) and made significant inroads into the central region. In those elections, MCP, lost the entire Kasungu (home to the Ngwazi Hastings Kamuzu Banda), Ntcheu and Ntchisi districts, won only one seat in each of the districts of Dowa and Nkhotakota districts, and fared quite miserably in Salima, Lilongwe, Dedza and Mchinji districts.. Below is a pictorial presentation of the cross-sectional dynamics on the political landscape which succinctly brings to light the extent of the 2009 MCP defeat. Although there seems to be an interesting pattern of politicking on the Malawi's political scene, studies that seek to rigorously examine party success and downfall factors are hard to find. This paper's focus on the determinants of MCP's performance in the 2009 general elections and adds to the pool of the blossoming elections literature in a unique way.

## METHODOLOGY

### Data

To analyse the performance of the Malawi Congress Party in the past elections consideration of data from the 2009 elections was made. This is also supported by secondary sources of data on previous elections results and other conditioning variables. The more important variables for which data are obtained are regional and district level voting patterns for 1994, 1999, 2004 and 2010, district and regional sizes in terms of population, education level of voters as proxied by district and regional level data, gender of the presidential candidates, the years in which elections took place, qualitative data on party level policies and organisation, incumbency, campaign expenditure, leader personal character, past legacy of the leaders and party conduct in parliament.

### Analysis

Descriptive statistics are used to analyse the data using Microsoft

(MS) excel. Graphs and tables are substantially used in presentations<sup>2</sup>.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The 2009 parliamentary and presidential elections saw larger parties (MCP and UDF) tumble substantially. Table 1 shows the total number of MPs that each party won in the 2009 elections. Table 1 shows that DPP emerged from the election day as the most powerful party with 114 MPs dwarfing the MCP which amassed only 26 MPs. The UDF, a party that had been in power until 2005 only realised 17 MPs. The independent MPs (those MPs who stood on their own without any open party sponsorship) numbered 32. Most of these however leaned towards one or more of the major parties. Since the ruling party often has high affinity for independents, it is reasonable to argue that the post-2009 election left the DPP with 114 MPs plus 25 others leaning the DPP way.

Although, all of the MCP parliamentary seats were won at the central region its stronghold, the numbers were lamentable. Factors behind the MCPs mediocre performance in 2009 are discussed below.

### Regionalism

The performance of MCP relative to the other parties shows that the MCP performed very poorly in the northern region, then in the southern region, but consistently performed better at the central region. The figures below exhibit some tendency to vote with regions. Figures 1 and 2 show regional proportion of votes (votes going to a party in a region out of total votes cast nationwide). The graph shows that since 1994, MCP had

<sup>2</sup> Although not reported herein, results from exploratory regression analyses showed some interesting correlations that seemed to support the descriptive findings. The only reason why these are not included is that short nature of the dataset, presented some convergence problems in probability models.

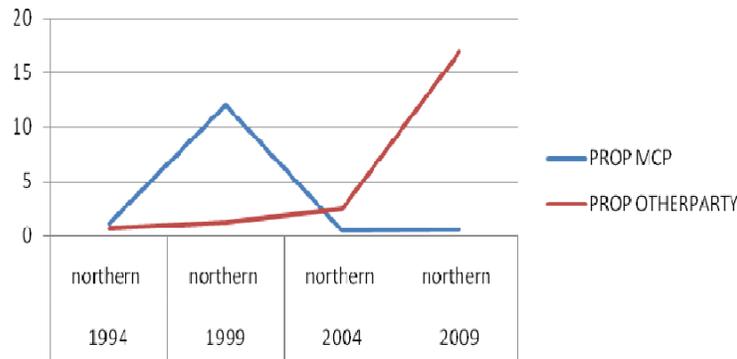


Figure 1. MCP vote proportions across time in the northern region.

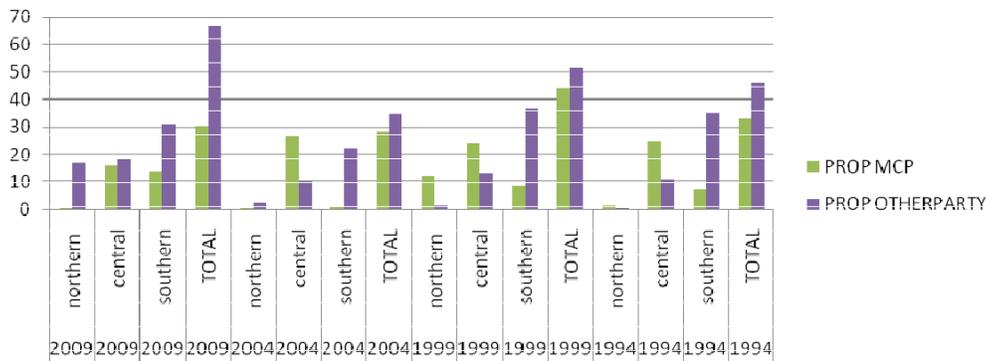


Figure 2. Proportion of votes given to the MCP in the presidential elections since 1994 by region.

only obtained a very small proportion of votes from the northern region and in 2009 in particular, such votes almost vanished, with some northern districts giving the MCP only 1% of the vote giving the rest to Bingu wa Muntharika of DPP. The time that the MCP obtained some larger amount of votes than another party in the northern region was in 1999 when the MCP went into an alliance with the northern party, AFORD against Bakili Muluzi's UDF. The MCP had also generally failed miserably in the southern region since 1994, with the exception of 2009 when the Yao dominated UDF went into an alliance with MCP and in 1999, when the MCP under a southerner Gwanda Chakuwamba competed against the UDF. On the contrary, although the central region had tended to favour the MCP, it had generally been more open to other regional parties than the two other regions.

In sum, one would argue that the North just like the South had consistently voted against the MCP when it stood alone (for instance in 1994, 2004) under H.K. Banda and J.Z.U. Tembo as leaders of MCP (Donge, 1995, for a similar observation), but there are prospects that the two regions could vote MCP provided a good coalition is built e.g. 1999 and 2009 under Gwanda

Chakuwamba and J.Z.U. Tembo respectively. These regional patterns are further demonstrated through the figures below. Figure 2 shows vote proportions accruing to MCP in the northern region over time in order to clearly show the regional voting patterns.

The general trend was that North was not likely to vote for MCP unless MCP partnered with northern parties hence the sudden change in the almost zero vote proportion trends in 1999 when MCP under Gwanda Chakuwamba took AFORD aboard, against UDF. This was also the case with the southern region.

Figure 3 shows that the South was not likely to vote for MCP unless MCP partnered with Southern parties hence the sudden change in the trend in 2009 when MCP went into an implicit alliance with UDF against DPP. Comparatively, the Southern region was more likely to vote for MCP even in the absence of a coalition than the Northern region. It cannot be said whether this is simply because the southern region has very strong historical links with the central region.

From Figure 4, it appears that MCP generally amassed good proportions of votes from the centre with yearly variations being a function of other year specific factors including whether there were alliances or not. In years

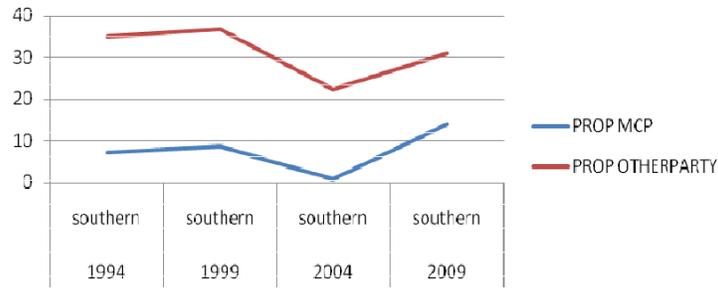


Figure 3. MCP vote proportions across time in the southern region.

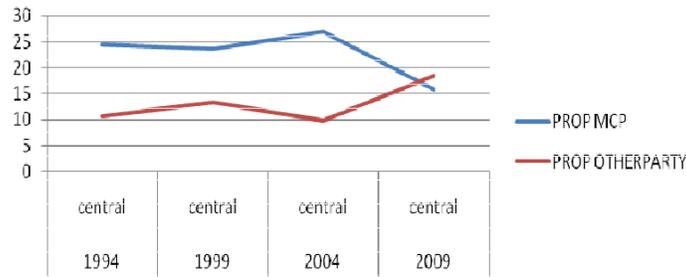


Figure 4. MCP vote proportions across time in the central region.

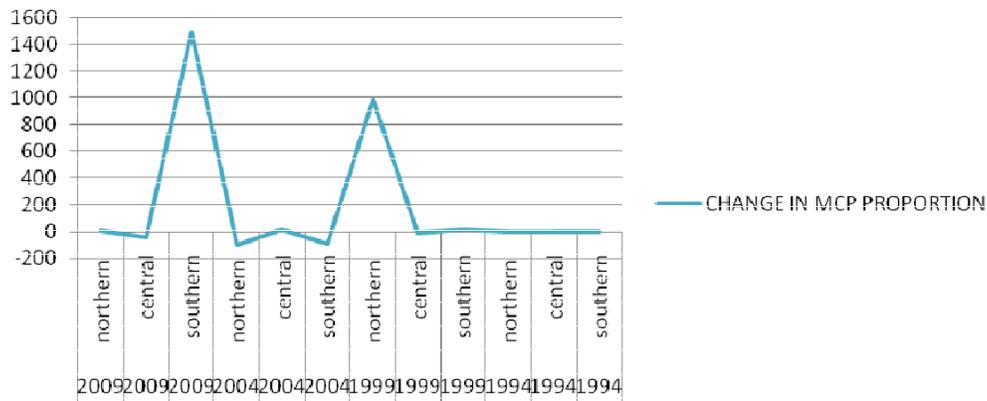


Figure 5. Vote proportion for MCP by region over time.

where regional party alliances were absent such as 2004 and 1994, the MCP performed strongly at the centre. By comparison with the rest of the regions, even in the absence of an alliance, the central region voter was more likely to give a chance to an outside party than the other two regions.

Figure 5 shows changes in proportion of votes accruing to the MCP over time. Again, the North and South only voted MCP markedly more favourably when MCP allied with them (e.g. the change in the Southern vote was high in 2009 while the northern vote was high in 1999) while the tendency for the Central region to vote for the MCP

generally remained stable. The preponderance of evidence about regional voting, spanning all the elections suggests that sectionalism of a regional and ethnically defined nature was still one of the most potent fault lines along which political cleavages galvanized in Malawi.

### Leadership

Drawing from newspaper reports, phone in programs on radio MBC and general commentary from different sources, it appeared that the MCP's leadership in the

run-up to the 2009 elections was problematic in the sense that it did not respond to the need for change of strategy and leadership. Perhaps this is why Hon Binton Kumtsaira, Hon Kate Kainja, Hon Ted Kalebe, Hon Louis Chimango and many others either had to resign or were fired from the party.

## **The leadership style**

### ***Inclusivity***

Drawing from the division of roles in the party, it appeared that the MCP's leadership style had not been inclusive. The MCP's inner circle's composition did not reflect diversity even if this is critiqued with the central region in mind. It appeared that the party did not truly embrace important leaders from districts such as Ntcheu and did not pay attention to the tribal pluralism that existed at the central region. The region had non-ignorable proportions of Tongas, Yaos and Ngonis yet leaders from these tribes were conspicuously missing in top and influential leadership positions of the party.

## **Parliamentary conduct and the Muluzi factor**

It is often argued that the conduct of the MCP at the time that Muluzi tried to advance the infamous third term bill (which was presented by AFORD's Kwauli Msiska) did not do much to bind its loyalists (Ross, 2004). The MCP MPs showed some support for the bill, a move which was interpreted as a show of naivety and self-centeredness on the part of the MCP leaders. This may have repelled borderline MCP supporters. It is possible that some people looked at the party as a lost ship being sailed by a sick crew and hence doomed to political destruction. Again, soon after Bingu had ditched Muluzi, at that time when the MCP had the lion's share of political muscle as measured by MPs, the MCP's members of parliament decided to support the UDF in their bid to try and oust the newborn DPP. In the mind of the voter, this association might have been equalled to exonerating Muluzi from the many office abuses he had allegedly committed throughout his tenure as president. It is not surprising that these issues re-surfaced as lines of a smear campaign against MCP leaders' character in 2009.

The MCP MPs conspicuously refused to pass the 2008 budget when the nation needed it most, they undermined the DPP's bid to launch the Shire-Zambezi waterway and they were also cast as the lawmakers who never approved any appointments by the president. These made MCP unpopular and the ruling party capitalised on these events to tell the electorate how anti-developmental the MCP and the UDF were.

## **Campaign strategy, the opposition side factor and funding**

From the newspaper messages, campaign articles and radio messages, it appeared that the campaign strategy was not as robust as it should have been. The MCP seemed to lack finance and was conspicuously absent on the media channels while their rivals were always on the private radio Zodiak broadcasting corporation and at the same time monopolising the state media. The MCP were conspicuously absent from any airwaves and their messages constituted less than 10% of all messages. This might suggest that research on party funding, intra-national and international funding opportunities were not well exploited, or if the funds were there, they were not well disbursed.

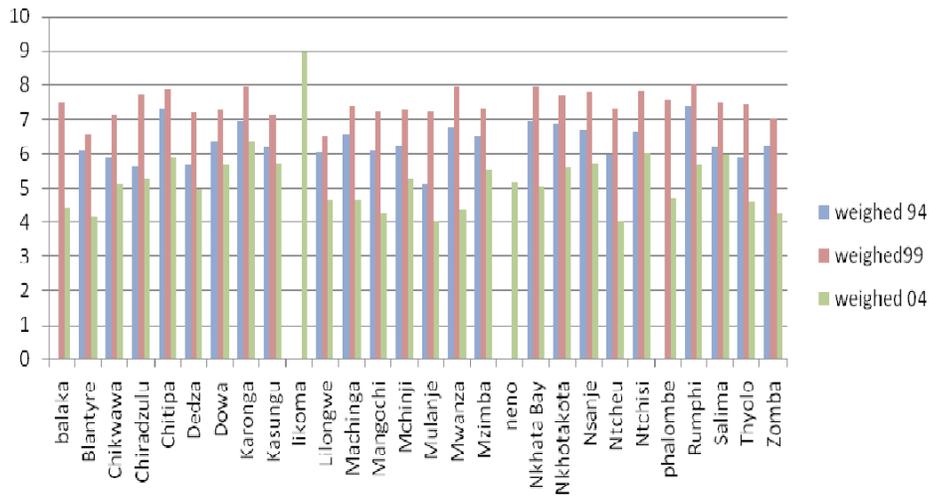
## **Incumbency factor**

Incumbency advantage refers to the electoral margin a candidate may enjoy due to his status as an incumbent running for re-election (Gordon and Landa, 2009). An extensive literature in American politics beginning in the 1960s and 1970s has documented the existence of such a margin, first in congressional elections (e.g. Erikson, 1971; Mayhew, 1974), and later elsewhere (e.g. Ansolabehere and Snyder, 2002). Scholars have further endeavoured to disaggregate the impact on the incumbency advantage of what might be called the advantages of incumbency—that is, analytically distinct features of electoral politics perceived to contribute to that margin. A default presumption of this work (and often a logical implication of the underlying research designs) is that while these advantages may differ in the magnitude of their effects, they all point in the same direction. All are understood to work to the benefit of incumbents as such, rather than, for example, to the benefit of some types of incumbents and to the detriment of others. Further, none are thought to operate in opposition to one another (Gordon and Landa, 2009).

Since the DPP was in power, it meant that as a party, they could easily be financed, legitimately or not, through many sources. Interest groups see the government of the day as a reasonable party to fund as any money lent to a ruling party faces higher risk-adjusted rates of return compared to gambling on the opposition side. This is not unique to Malawi and is certainly the case in North America where for example large direct officeholder benefits in the form of discount incumbents receive on campaigning relative to challengers and the existence of pro-incumbent endorser bias could sometimes benefit incumbents (Gordon and Landa, 2009; Kushner et al., 1997). There are other mechanisms through which the incumbency may generate a win and some of these may go through the less independent and arguably corrupt judiciary and electoral commission leaders. In some cases, a ruling president has more chances of influencing

**Table 2.** Malawi's presidential elections outcomes since 1994.

year	Presidential elections winner	
	Incumbent	Opposition
1994	0	1
1999	1	0
2004	1	0
2009	1	0
All years	3	1



**Figure 6.** Turn out per population over time.

the two bodies to act in his/her favour. Below are the results of elections for incumbents versus the opposition. Table 2 shows that out of the 4 elections that have been held in Malawi since 1994, 3 (75%) were won by the incumbent party. The only one that was lost by an incumbent party took place in 1994 and saw late life president Dr Banda relinquish power to the UDF.

### District size/region

The base for MCP has districts that are large and small, literate and less literate, all of which could have an effect on the diffusion and effect of campaign messages. If these factors are important, a campaign strategy that ignores these factors might be limiting its party's chances of winning more votes. Depending on what campaign strategists may do the district size issue and existence of the populous Lilongwe district presents both an opportunity and a downside. Lilongwe's population is bigger than the Northern region in total and yet this has its down sides (the NSO, 2009 projects Lilongwe's total (rural and urban) population at circa 2, 200,000 while that of the Northern region stands at 1,600,000). This might

imply that mobilization may be tricky for larger administrative areas and campaigns need to focus more resources in such areas. Figure 6 is a graph of voter turnout per population of a district in the elections so far.

Figure 6 shows the turn out per population for each participating district in the three elections for which complete data were available. It seems that generally the turn out was larger everywhere in the 1999 parliamentary and presidential elections, followed by the 1994 and the turn out was least in the 2004 elections. Whether this may be because the 1994 elections were the first and some people were afraid to vote compared to the 1999 ones when it was generally believed that people had the right to vote, or whether the 2004 low turn out was a function of disappointed voters being uninterested in the political process, is a question for research. What seems clear, however, is that in general, larger districts such as Lilongwe and Blantyre seem to be characterized by lower voter turn outs than the others. This begs the question whether district/administrative size may have a role to play in determining voter turnout. Figure 7 shows an average voter per population over the three elections for which turn out data was available and helps clearly show the pattern suggested in the previous Figure 6.

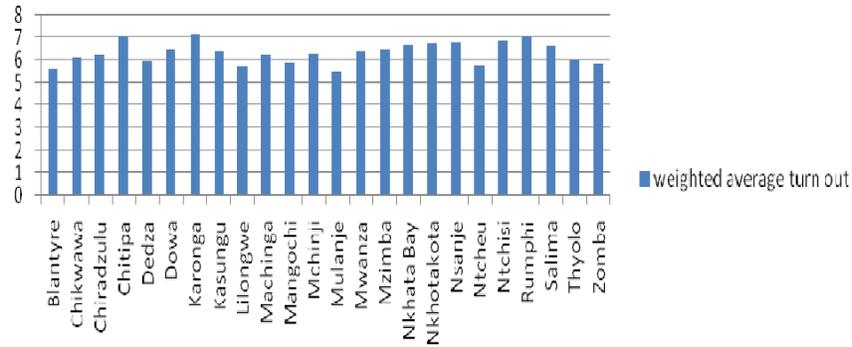


Figure 7. The average weighted turn out across districts.

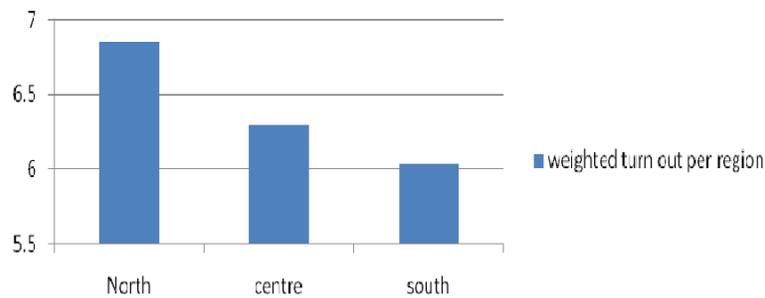


Figure 8. Weighted turn out per region.

Figure 7 shows that the Lilongwe, Blantyre Mulanje, Mangochi and Zomba districts which are larger districts have generally experienced a lower turn out on average which again brings into the debate, issues of difficulties with mobilization of voters in larger administrative areas. This finding is also supported by literature (Kushner, 1997). The fewer exceptions to this general rule (e.g. Mzimba district) may be explained by other factors that are district specific but are crucial for voter turn out and one such factor is education. It is widely known that there are wide disparities in terms of education between the northern, central and southern districts, with the North being more educated followed by the centre and then the South. Looking at the aggregate level (the regional level), the weighted turn out per region shows that turnout was generally higher for the northern region followed by the central region while the south has faced the lowest turnout rates.

The pattern shown in Figure 8 suggests that there is an opportunity at the central region as well as in the southern region for parties to increase their votes, not only by encouraging switching from other parties to theirs but by generally mounting campaigns that could boost turn outs. Had the MCP engaged in research, they would have boosted their numbers by tapping into the unexploited potential in the Lilongwe district's rural areas

either by ensuring that campaign materials are widely available in remote areas of the region and/or increasing campaign expenditure in the district and perhaps this would have the potential of reversing the inverse district size-voter turn out relationship thereby advantaging the MCP.

### District level illiteracy

There too seems to be an inverse relationship such that the higher the illiteracy, the lower the turn out. This implies that northern districts may turn out more than elsewhere and the order would be preserved too within districts and regions. Figure 9 motivates this subject by presenting school attendance rates for 2007 in some districts across Malawi. It is clear that illiteracy is more in districts outside the northern region and that the central region is relatively better educated than the southern region. Mangochi Machinga and Salima seemed to have the highest illiteracy rates, while Mzimba is conspicuously one of the districts with fewer illiterate people.

Figure 10 that follows takes into account the illiteracy information in determining the turn outs. It confirms the postulate about the inverse-illiteracy-turnout relationship. Mzimba which is well educated has weighted turn out that

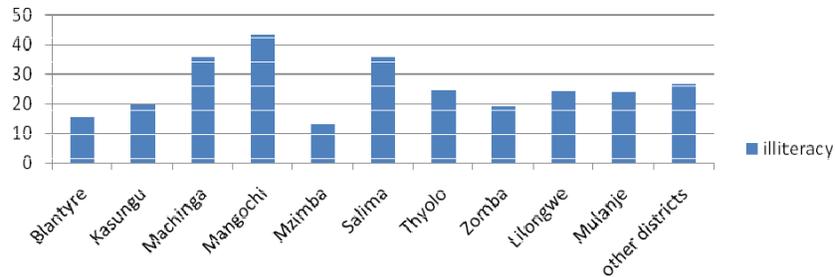


Figure 9. Illiteracy per districts (measured by no education percent).

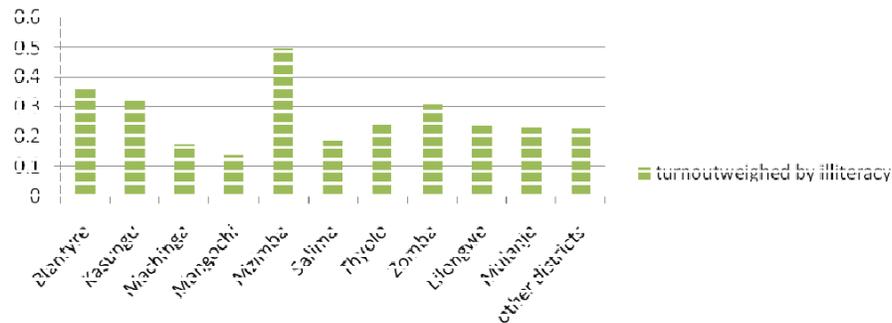


Figure 10. Turn out weighted by illiteracy.

is higher and turnout is very low in Mangochi, Machinga and Salima. It could be argued that these low turnout areas do present opportunities for increasing voter turnout in future provided party strategists could invest enough resources at the campaign stage. Furthermore, any government policy that seeks to increase education attainment across the board in the nation has the positive externalities of helping to boost future election voter turnout, which could as well advantage parties regardless of whether or not they are in power.

### Coalition factors

In the run-up to the 2009 elections the MCP went into an alliance with the UDF. This was in some form, contradictory because the UDF waged a negative campaign against the MCP and its leader John Tembo in the 2004 general elections. The DPP campaign machinations simply fetched the recorded tapes and videos that portrayed the MCP too negatively and used such tapes to tell voters that the 2009 MCP-UDF quasi-alliance was unreal and a sign of MCP and UDF's political desperation.

### A model of propensity to vote

To summarise issues up, political party affiliation in Malawi seems to be a dynamic function of many factors

in which some weigh more than others at different times dependent on what happens to the economy and political parties in play. A simple function for voting behaviour in Malawi could be represented as shown in Table 3. For the MCP, it appears that all these factors worked together to deliver a below average performance especially in the 2009 elections. Given the preponderance of evidence on the factors behind the loss, it appears that the party machinery as whole share the blame so that the notion that MCP's failure may be attributable only to the top leaders of the party or John Tembo alone seems unfounded, ill-conceived and indeed misleading. It appears that the 2009 loss was a collective decision on the part of the losers, implying that any bid for revival would need to be collective too if it were to hold any water.

### Conclusion

The challenges facing the MCP at the turn of 2009 were real and the loss in the 2009 elections was so large and so serious that it generated fears of MCP demise among its supporters. This paper finds that the smear campaigns directed towards MCP's leadership, the absence of a major competing party in the northern region, the incumbency factor which gave the DPP superior financing and airwaves advantage, district sizes, regional and tribal affiliations coupled with the negative legacy and

**Table 3.** Determinants of MCPs performance in elections.

<b>Variable and description</b>	<b>Importance in Malawi</b>
Political party affiliation	Dependent variable
Social fabric	Crucial
Religion	Important
Economic progress	Important
Party policies and organisation	Important
Regional and tribal dummies	Very crucial
Incumbency factor	Very crucial
Gender of the contestant	Very crucial
Campaign expenditure	Crucial
District size	Important
Education level of the district	Important
Personal character	Very crucial
Past legacy of the leaders	Very crucial
Development projects supported	Crucial

conduct of the MCP leadership in parliament among others, helped the DPP to win with an overwhelming majority.

It seems that while one way for the MCP to recover may be to develop better campaign strategies and financing, to the extent that regionalism is important in election cycles in Malawi, the future of MCP's politics further depends on how the MCP interacts with the newly born and today's youth. The MCP could take advantage of the current circumstances (where old leaders are leaving the stage) to project a good image to the youth who are tomorrow's voters. Regardless of how some of today's divisive leaders and parents may portray the MCP to their children, any careful restructuring would win a good chunk of the youth as they grow and live to appreciate the merits of a reformed MCP.

It appears that there is need to diversify party finance and to increase expenditure per person during campaign in larger areas to reverse the inverse size-turn-out relationship in elections. In all areas, long term solutions to low voter turnout are in massive education for all. One political solution that could arise from the inverse relationship that exist between district size and voter turnout is to divide larger districts into manageable bits. Drawing on the findings herein, the notion that MCP's failure may be attributable only to the top leaders of the party or its leader John Tembo alone is unfounded, ill-conceived and indeed misleading. The defeat was a result of the collective failure of the party entities to address the issues covered herein at the minimum.

Whatever one may conclude from this account of the MCP debacle, it seems that one message that comes out clearly is that life after the 2009 defeat is not essentially impossible for the MCP, all they need is good organisational judgement and a redress of the issues that this paper tackles.

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