

The myth of Malawi's ethno-regionalism: diverging appeals by political parties

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Abstract

Malawi's voting patterns remain a puzzle to the academic community. Although often described as ethno-regional, it has been explained by other factors such as governmental performance. This paper seeks to explore how group identity appeals differ between ruling and opposition parties in Malawi, by looking at the manifestos of the 2009 and 2014 elections from both the ruling party and the opposition party. By applying a critical discourse analysis to the manifestos and Afrobarometers, this study addresses the following expectation: While incumbent parties present higher levels of party nationalization and subsequently articulate national appeals, opposition parties lack party nationalization and formulate group identity – ethno-regional - appeals.

Contents

Introduction	4
Ethnicity and politics: what do we know?.....	6
Theoretical framework: distinguishing between opposition and ruling parties.....	10
Methodology	13
<i>Malawi: the road towards the 2009 and 2014 elections</i>	13
<i>Comparative case study</i>	14
<i>Data</i>	15
Empirics	17
<i>The social, economic and political context prior to the 2009 elections.</i>	18
<i>The MCP: appeals made in the manifesto for the 2009 elections.</i>	19
<i>The DPP: appeals made in the manifesto for the 2009 elections.</i>	22
<i>The social, economic and political context prior to the 2014 elections.</i>	24
<i>The MCP: appeals made in the manifesto for the 2014 elections.</i>	26
<i>The PP: appeals made in the manifesto for the 2014 elections.</i>	28
<i>The DPP: appeals made in the manifesto for the 2014 elections.</i>	30
<i>Diverging appeals by political parties: a comparison</i>	31
Conclusion.....	32
Bibliography	35

Introduction

In 1994, Malawi, a former British colony, held its first multi-party democratic elections. Due to colonialism and the corresponding politicization of ethnicity, three ethnic identities established high cultural visibility, which were reinforced by regional lines. Ethno-regional voting patterns became apparent in the elections of 1994, 1999 and 2004. However, in 2009, the elections presented a sudden collapse of ethno-regionalism, since President Mutharika and his Democratic Progressive Party obtained 66% of the total votes, based on support from all three regions (Ferree, 2010, p. 538; Smiddy, 2009, p. 663). The elections of 2014 indicate a relapse of Malawi to its traditional patterns of ethno-regional voting (Dionne, 2014).

Malawi's election results of 2009 and 2014 have presented the academic community with a puzzle, which has led to a variety of conclusions. In order to explain the election results, scholars have focused on the significance of economic and governmental performance (Ferree and Horowitz, 2010), the role of patronage (Posner, 2003) and the significance of ethno-regional identities (Horowitz, 1998; Kaspin, 1995; Ishiyama and Fox, 2006). In the African context, scholars explained voting based on economic performance (Key, 1964; Tufte, 1978; Lewis-Beck, 2000), ethnicity (Horowitz, 1998) and the interrelated determining factor of governmental performance and ethnicity (Carlson, 2015). However, while it has been concluded that ethnicity becomes more salient during electoral competition, the existing literature has failed to address the role of group identity – ethno-regional - appeals in the official statements of political parties (Eifert *et al.*, 2010). The focus of research has generally been on the characteristics of voters as opposed to the characteristics of political parties (Ishiyama, 2006, p. 754). More significantly, possible *intra*-system differences in political parties have remained largely unexplored. So far, it remains unclear whether Malawi's political parties indeed appeal

to voters based on a certain – ethno-regional - group identity and whether political parties diverge in their appeals¹.

According to the theoretical framework provided by Cheeseman & Ford (2007) and Wahman (2017), political parties may alter their appeals depending upon their position in government. Incumbent parties present high levels of party nationalization and have access to state resources, which should result in ruling parties formulating national appeals. Opposition parties lack party nationalization and are expected to formulate group identity – in this case ethno-regional - appeals. Gadjanova clarifies that ‘group identity appeals in political campaigns are politicians’ invitation (urge, appeal) to individuals to self-identify with a certain group narrative, which is meaningful contextually, by selectively combining elements from this narrative with articulations of the political means to actualize it’ (Gadjanova, 2013, p. 310). According to the theory, ruling parties should *not* make group identity appeals – which are appeals focused on one ethno-regional group -, rather, they should articulate national appeals. On the contrary, opposition parties will make group identity appeals.

In order to test this expectation, a critical discourse analysis will be conducted on the manifestos of the Malawian Congress Party (MCP, 2009 and 2014) and the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP, 2014) as the opposition party and the DPP and the People’s Party (PP) as the incumbent parties of 2009 and 2014 respectively. The critical discourse analysis aims to uncover appeals by political parties, which may be hidden in a social, political, economic or historical context. The 2009 elections are often described as presenting a sudden collapse of ethno-regionalism, while the 2014 elections are known for a fall back to ethno-regionalism. Due to the puzzling electoral results, the salience of ethnicity in the elections of 2009 and 2014 will be studied. Manifestos are the appropriate unit of analysis since they consist of political

¹ The research defines ‘appeals’ as a politicians’ urge to voters to self-identify with the party and its programme.

statements representing the party as a whole and it allows for a comparison between different elections. The results of the previous elections, economic conditions and the findings of multiple Afrobarometers will be used to sketch the social, political and economic context previous to the elections. Afrobarometers are used because they consist of a standard set of questions and have been regularly conducted in Malawi, which allows for a systematic comparison on public attitudes.

Political parties hold a key position in electoral politics. The development of political parties provides significant insights to the nature of democracy in Malawi and the changing relationship between citizens and the political class (van de Walle, 2003, p. 298). The theoretical framework has demonstrated that incumbent parties achieve higher levels of party nationalization, while the contrary is true for opposition parties. However, it is not yet clear whether countries like Malawi are also representing a net rise or decline of the salience of ethnicity in political mobilization (Cheeseman, 2007, p. 12). This study aims to contribute to the plugging of this research gap. Furthermore, in order to understand if, when and where ethno-regional voting will occur or collapse, it is crucial to comprehend what drives political parties to construct group identity appeals (Ferree, 2010, p. 555). The findings contribute to the debate on Malawi's ethno-regional voting patterns, since it explores the diverging salience of ethnicity in the appeals made by political parties.

Following the theoretical framework and bearing in mind the expected diverging appeals made by political parties, the following research question will be addressed in this study: How do ruling and opposition parties differ in their salience of ethnicity in the appeals made during the elections in Malawi?

Ethnicity and politics: what do we know?

When studying the salience of ethnicity in appeals made by political parties, it is crucial to understand the relationship between ethnicity and politics. Horowitz (1998) has provided a

prominent contribution to the literature on ethnic voting patterns, stating that voters use elections to manifest their membership to a certain group identity, which turns elections into an ethnic ‘head count’. Contradictory to the notion of an ethnic headcount, Ferree and Horowitz have studied the Malawian elections of 2009 and concluded that there is a lack of ‘‘overarching regional identities’’. They argue that ‘‘when people feel pleased with the president’s performance and feel cared for by the government, the correlation between identity and partisanship is likely to become weaker’’ (Ferree, 2010, p. 549). Hence, they highlight the significance of governmental performance and argue that the academic community should avoid viewing ethnic voting patterns across Africa as a fixed phenomenon (Ferree, 2010, p. 555).

Ishiyama and Fox studied the relationship between ethnic group identification and partisan attachment. In their research, Malawi was the only African country in which the strength of ethnic group identification was positively related to partisan attachment (Ishiyama, 2006). According to Kaspin, the role of ethnicity in Malawi’s elections is ‘‘negative, reactive rather than proactive, defined by a relationship of contrast to the hegemonic group as the significant, self-defining ‘other’.’’ (Kaspin, 1995, p. 614). Both Ishiyama & Fox and Kaspin highlight the importance of ethnicity to Malawian politics. Thus, on the one hand, scholars have stressed the importance of governmental performance. On the other hand, scholars have stressed ethnicity and its determining role in elections.

There is also significant work on the role of ethnicity in politics beyond Malawi. Several scholars, such as Olorunsola (1972), Horowitz (1991) and Bernan *et al.*, (2004), view ethnic identity – which is defined as the tendency of people to identify themselves according to cultural background and descent-based characteristics – as the prevailing organizing principle of society and politics (Bratton *et al.*, 2012, p. 28). This argument is rather similar to those of Horowitz (1998) and Ishiyama & Fox (2006), in which ethnic identification plays a crucial role in

Malawian politics. Following this line of thought, voting patterns in Malawi should indeed be explained by ethno-regional identities. Other scholars have argued that voters may presume that leaders who share their ethnic or regional identity are expected to distribute patronage to them, while leaders from other ethnic groups are not expected to do this (Posner, 2003; Chandra, 2004).

However, the views of Horowitz (1985), Posner (2003) and Chandra (2003) fail to acknowledge that voters may change their vote depending upon governmental performance. According to Horowitz (1985), voters have an unconditional preference towards their co-ethnic party or president. In the case of Malawi, Ferree and Horowitz (2010) have shown that we should not read great permanency into ethno-regionalism. Posner (2003) and Chandra (2004) do not specify when the belief in patronage and its corresponding expectation of better public goods in the future increases.

Several scholars have provided support to the argument presented by Ferree and Horowitz (2010). If a ruling party has presented good economic performance, citizens will vote for it; if not, they vote against it (Key, 1964; Tufte, 1978; Lewis-Beck, 2000). However, as rightfully indicated by Bratton *et al.* (2012), partisan identification always needs to be incorporated in voting behavior: supporters of the ruling party are likely to judge the economic performance less severe than opponents (Bratton *et al.*, 2012, p. 30).

Bratton *et al.* (2012) performed a cross-national research on voting behavior in Africa and concluded that the division between economic and ethnic voting is overestimated. Although not denying the role of ethnicity, their study concludes that Africans are increasingly basing their voter choice on economic achievements (Bratton *et al.*, 2012, p. 46-48). While Bratton *et al.* (2012) do acknowledge the bias that voters may have towards a co-ethnic political party, they have not empirically studied this bias. If these theories of instrumentalism, suggesting that voters favor co-ethnic parties because they will be more likely to provide the voter in the future

with better economic and political goods, then ethnicity and performance cannot be seen as separate considerations in voting behavior (Carlson, 2015, p. 354).

Carlson (2015) finds that ethnicity and performance interrelate in the determination of voting preferences in Africa. She finds that, in Uganda, voting choices are based on both co-ethnicity and good performance, since this combination will most likely result in better public goods for the voter. This study represents a new view on ethnicity and politics, because its findings indicate that co-ethnicity only matters when it is linked to expected future benefits (Carlson, 2015, p. 378). One might expect that the salience of ethnicity and electoral competition are thus inherently connected. Elections provide the possibility for political parties to express their identity, to criticize each other's performance and to put their own party in good light. This thought is confirmed by Eifert *et al.* (2010), who find compelling evidence that ethnic identities in Africa are reinforced when exposed to political competition. They state that ethnic identities hold an instrumental value: they are very useful in the pursuit of political power. Thus, the study counters views presented by scholars such as Horowitz (1998) which argue that ethnic attachments are "in the blood". Eifert *et al.* (2010) claim that ethnic identities are reinforced by competitive electoral elections (Eifert *et al.*, 2010, p. 495).

Evidently, there remains a debate on the role of ethnicity in political elections. Thus far, research on intra-system differences in appeals and the corresponding salience of ethnicity has not been prominent in the debate. The literature presents evidence for rising ethnic identities during elections and it has shown the importance of ethnicity, good performance and patronage. Furthermore, it has shown that ruling parties are likely to be less severely judged by supporters than opponents. However, how do ruling and opposition parties differ in the salience of ethnicity in their appeals?

Theoretical framework: distinguishing between opposition and ruling parties

In order to assess the appeals made by different political parties, it is necessary to comprehend why different parties are expected to make different appeals. According to the theories discussed below, ruling parties are expected to make national appeals, while opposition parties are expected to formulate group identity – ethno-regional – appeals (Cheeseman, 2007; Wahman, 2017). This difference is explained by both varying levels of party nationalization and unequal access to state resources.

Caramani (2004) defines party nationalization as the level of homogeneity in the geographical spreading of a political party's votes. A political party is highly nationalized when its electoral support is equally distributed along all the geographical areas of the country. For Malawi, the DPP reflects high party nationalization in 2009, since it obtained support throughout the country. The 2014 elections present significantly lower levels of party nationalization, the DPP did receive support throughout the country, but the main support came from the southern region. Furthermore, the majority of the northern region was obtained by Banda and her PP and almost 60% of the central region supported Chakwera of the MCP (Malawi SDNP, 2014).

While Cheeseman & Ford (2007) do not explicitly mention ‘party nationalization’, they have compared ‘ethnic polarization’ and ‘ethnic diversity’² across types of party, different countries and between 2001 and 2006. The study, which includes Malawi, has aimed to uncover the relationship between free multi-party electoral competition and the salience of ethno-linguistic identities (Cheeseman, 2007, p. 3). The study demonstrates that Malawi experiences a general decline in ethnic polarization, which suggests that the development of democracy has

² Ethnic polarization is ‘the extent to which support for a given party varies between a country's ethnic groups’, while ethnic diversity means ‘the range of ethnic groups represented within any ones party/party system’ (Cheeseman, 2007, p. 7)

decreased the significance of ethnicity as a determinant for party attachment across the party system (Cheeseman, 2007, p. 9). Significantly to the case of Malawi, when focusing on the difference between the ruling and opposition party, Malawi's ethnic-based support is becoming less substantial for the ruling party, while the contrary is true for opposition parties. While ruling parties are increasingly building a national support base, opposition parties tend to mobilize voters based on ethnicity. Therefore, the research suggests that the principal strategy of opposition parties for voter mobilization will be group identity – ethno-regional - appeals, while ruling parties are expected to appeal to a national support base (Cheeseman, 2007, p. 19).

Wahman (2017) builds on the work of Cheeseman & Ford (2007), but incorporates the impact of national ethnic heterogeneity on diverging levels of party nationalization. Applicable to the case of Malawi, national ethnic diversity and unfavorable geographical conditions hinder party nationalization of opposition parties, which encourages them to make group identity - ethno-regional - appeals. Incumbent parties are less affected by the ethnic diversity and unfavorable geographic conditions. Opposition parties suffer from scarce resources, while incumbent parties have the access to state resources to campaign in various regions (Wahman, 2017, p. 309-311). Hence, incumbency fundamentally improves the prospects of party nationalization and the accompanying construction of national appeals (Wahman, 2017, p. 309). The divergence in the level of party nationalization between opposition and incumbent parties is significantly larger in highly ethnically fractionalized countries, such as Malawi (Wahman, 2017, p. 317).

However, it is not yet clear whether countries like Malawi are also representing a net rise or decline of the salience of ethnicity in political mobilization. The theoretical framework fits within the emerging recognition that African political parties diverge in their appeal, structure and organization, not only between different countries but also within a party system (Basedau et al., 2011; Elischer, 2013; Wahman, 2017, p. 318). Based on the theories discussed

above, the following theoretical expectation is adopted: while ruling parties articulate national appeals, opposition parties formulate group identity – ethno-regional - appeals.

Finally, it is important to define group identity appeals within the framework of this research. When referring to group identity appeals in Malawi, this paper refers to ethno-regionalism, which became evident during all multi-party elections of Malawi, with the exception of 2009. Figure 1 shows the ethno-regional voting pattern of the first multi-party election of 1994 (Posner, 1995, p. 131). This ethno-regional voting pattern remained vivid, despite the fact that parties changed during the following elections (Ferree, 2010, p. 537). Kalipeni stated that “regionalism appears

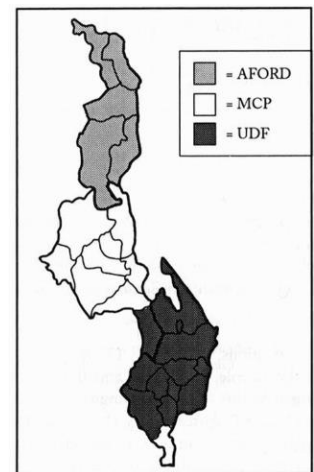


Figure 1: Malawi: voting patterns, 1994 (Posner, 1995, p. 131).

to have resulted in the formation of three super-ethnic groups each with its own regional base” (Kalipeni, 1997, p. 152). The Tumbuka identity became salient in the north, the Chewa identity in the central region and the Yao identity in the southern part of Malawi. (Kaspin, 1995, p. 601; Osei-Hwedie, 1998, pp. 227-227). However, it has been shown that governmental performance may alter voting behavior. Furthermore, politicians *construct* group identity appeals, which indicates that they may change. According to the theory, this may be encouraged depending upon the position of the political party in the government. Acknowledging the possibilities of developments within (ethnic) identity, the paper takes a constructivist stance towards the concept of ethno-regionalism, viewing it as fluid and endogenous to various social, political and economic processes (Chandra, 2001, p. 7).

As stated in the introduction, group identity appeals are made during political campaigns, in which politicians’ urge individuals to identify with a certain story. This story becomes meaningful due to the combination of elements of the narrative with expressions of political means to realize it (Gadjanova, 2013, p. 310). For instance, a party may emphasize certain historical achievements and combine this with language rights in order to appeal to one ethno-

regional group. Group identity appeals are defined as constructed group narratives, in which political parties selectively choose the elements of the story, which implies that they are open for change (Gadjanova, 2013). Hence, a political party may alter its narrative between different elections in order to appeal to a different electoral group.

Methodology

Malawi presents a puzzling case: ruling parties are becoming more nationalized, while opposition parties remain mono-ethnic (Cheeseman, 2007, p. 25). In-depth research is needed to reveal the development of these ‘divergent’ party systems and its impact on the political salience of ethnicity (Cheeseman, 2007, p. 25). Scholars have not yet managed to clearly explain the 2009 and 2014 election results. Hence, a case study on Malawi is necessary to uncover the developments of ethnicity in appeals in 2009 and 2014. As previously stated, in-depth case studies are required in order to assess whether Malawi is in fact presenting a net rise or decline of the salience of ethnicity in political mobilization (Cheeseman, 2007, p. 12). The findings of Malawi are relevant to other cases, such as Botswana, Nigeria and Zambia, which present the same decrease of ethnic support for ruling parties, while opposition parties become more focussed on one group identity. Furthermore, the findings may contribute to the ongoing debate on the definition of ethnicity: a diverging salience of ethnicity in appeals may counter the idea of ethnicity being a fixed phenomenon. This research aims to clarify the picture of Malawi’s elections and to contribute to the broader debate on the salience of ethnicity in African politics.

Malawi: the road towards the 2009 and 2014 elections

During colonialism, three ethnic identities became salient. These identities were reinforced by regional borders. The Tumbuka identity became salient in the north, the Chewa identity in the central region and the Yao identity in the south. (Kaspin, 1995, p. 601; Osei-

Hwedie, 1998, pp. 227-227). In 1966, president Banda and its MCP ruled Malawi as a one-party state for the following three decades. During this period, the central Chewa identity became equivalent to the Malawian identity. The north of Malawi experienced severe economic and cultural marginalization, while the south suffered from mainly cultural marginalization. (Kaspin, 1995, p. 610). Banda's ruling has been criticized for intensifying the ethno-regional divisions, which became visible during the subsequent multi-party elections. The 2009 elections are thus far the only election that did not represent the ethno-regional divisions (Ferree, 2010).

Thus, the 2009 elections present a sudden collapse of ethno-regionalism. President Mutharika was able to obtain a majority of votes in each region. It is not yet clear why the elections presented a shift away from ethno-regionalism, especially since the results of the 2014 elections present a fall back to this pattern. However, the 2014 election results do present another achievement, namely the second time in Malawi's history that an incumbent president is voted out of office, this presidential turnover is remarkable since Malawian presidents hold a high level of incumbent advantage (Patel, 2015, p. 80). Malawi has experienced a general decline in ethnic polarization, which may suggest the maturing of democracy has lowered the importance of ethnicity as a determinant for voting behavior (Cheeseman, 2007, p. 9). Furthermore, Malawi's recent electoral results have puzzled the academic community. Hence, the time frame for this study is the presidential elections of 2009 and 2014.

Comparative case study

The study's unit of analysis will be political parties participating in general elections. When referring to the ruling or incumbent party, the paper refers to the party of the president. This is not in line with the theoretical framework, which focusses on both the parliamentary and presidential winners. However, in the case of Malawi, the parliamentary powers are arguably subordinate to the powers of the president. The parliament does not have control over its own agenda nor budget (Svasand, 2012, p. 4). Following Wahman's (2017) argument that

access to state resources fosters party nationalization of the incumbent party, it is most appropriate to consider the president's party as the incumbent party.

The study will be a comparative case study on Malawi's elections, focussing on the MCP (2009 and 2014) and DPP (2014) as opposition parties and the DPP (2009) and PP (2014) as ruling parties. The MCP is chosen as the opposition party since it experienced considerable electoral defeat in the 2004 and 2009 election results. In 2014, it managed to gain more votes, but it remained an opposition party. Furthermore, the MCP has ruled Malawi from 1966 to 1994 and it has been criticized for creating "super-ethnic groups" (Chirwa, 1998, p. 58). The DPP is chosen since it governed the country from 2005 until 2009 and won the 2009 elections but, due to the sudden death of President Mutharika in 2012 and the subsequent shift in president and corresponding political party, did enter the 2014 elections as an opposition party. Insights in the party's appeals while being both a ruling and an opposition party may contribute to comprehending the effects of incumbency on the appeals. The comparison between the appeals of the MCP, DPP and the incumbent parties may shed light on possible *intra*-system differences in appeals. Consequently, these insights may contribute to explaining the results of the 2009 and 2014 elections.

Data

According to Svasand and Mpesi, "electoral manifestos are a concrete expression of the interest aggregation function performed by political parties". (Svasand, 2012, p. 8). Manifestos are a channel for appeals by political parties (Eder et al., 2016, p. 76). As argued by Cole (2005), it is advantageous to study manifestos when the units of analysis are political parties, since election manifestos represent the political party as a whole. The data for this research consists of the 2009 and 2014 manifestos of the MCP and the DPP, and the 2014 manifesto of the PP.

The manifestos will be analysed by means of critical discourse analysis (CDA). Previous scholars have shown that governmental and economic performance may influence voting

behaviour. CDA ensures that the research will take this into account through incorporating the social, economic and political contexts prior to the elections. CDA focusses on political discourse and how it constitutes inequality. It assumes that politicians use language, among others, to appeal to voters and seeks to expose the purpose behind political statements (Nadeem, 2014, p. 1). Therefore, CDA constitutes the appropriate manner of analysis for this research, since this study seeks to critically examine the appeals made in political statements. CDA helps to expose appeals which are hidden in a certain historical, social, economic or political context. In this research, the object of analysis will thus be the electoral manifestos, it is produced and received through writing and reading and it needs to be examined in context of the social, economic and political environment prior to the elections.

In order to measure the extent to which a party formulates group identity, in this case ethno-regional, appeals, it is necessary to know which concepts are linked to group identity in political discourse. Gadjanova has done a comparative analysis focused on coding the speeches and manifestos provided during electoral campaigns in twenty democratic states across the world. Gadjanova distinguishes herself within the research on identity appeals due to her constructivist stance, unlike most of the current research, her categorization allows for the acknowledgement of historical and contextual social meaning of certain political statements and policies. Since this paper takes a constructivist stance towards the concept of ethnicity and ethno-regionalism, Gadjanova's six categories and related concepts illustrated in Table 1 will be applied to the manifestos in order to assess the presence of group identity appeals (Gadjanova, 2013, p. 311–312). The manifestos of opposition parties are expected to reflect these categories in higher degrees than the ruling party, since opposition parties are presumed to formulate group identity – ethno-regional - appeals.

Category	Related concepts
The community (own group)	Ancestry, values, traditions, language, land
The community's past	Historical figures, significant battles, past violence, past discrimination, significant historical events
Group rights	To self-government, safeguard own traditions, non-intervention in communal affairs, speak own language, inhabit a territory, develop economic potential, prosperity, existence or survival
Means to safeguard group rights	Language rights, strong minority rights, multiculturalism, political autonomy, territorial rights, quotas for representation, affirmative action, decentralization, autonomy, secession, protest/boycott, violent opposition, centralization/strong central government, industry protection, reconciliation with other groups
Discrimination/unfair treatment	By a government, by other groups, in political representation, in employment, in education, regarding language
Other groups	Competitors, oppressors, impostors, inferior, equal, complementary, not a threat

Table 1: List of categories and concepts linked to group identity in political rhetoric (Gadjanova, 2013, p. 312)

The social, economic and political context will be uncovered through the gross domestic product (GDP), previous elections results and the results of the Afrobarometer³, which are public attitude surveys. The Afrobarometer consists of a standard set of questions which allow for systematic comparison and provides an accurate representation of Malawi. By looking at the answers on questions regarding economic conditions, trust in president and government, status of democracy, perceived equality and identity, the Afrobarometers' changing public attitudes will be incorporated into the findings in the manifestos.

Empirics

The theoretical framework has demonstrated that ruling parties are expected to present less salience of ethnicity than opposition parties in their appeals during the elections. By carrying out a CDA on the 2009 and 2014 manifestos of the DPP and PP as the ruling party respectively and of the MCP and DPP as the opposition parties, this paper examines whether ruling and opposition parties indeed diverge in the salience of ethnicity in their appeals.

³ The research will take into account round 3 (2005), round 4 (2008), round 5 (2012) and round 6 (2014).

The social, economic and political context prior to the 2009 elections.

In 1999, Muluzi of the United Democratic Front (UDF) won the presidential elections with approximately 52% of the total national votes. The MCP became second, with 45% of the votes. In 2004, the UDF won the elections with almost 36% of the votes. President Mutharika of the UDF received approximately 55% of his votes from the southern region, which fits the party's 'southern' profile (Ferree, 2010, p. 534). The MCP lost the elections with approximately 28% of the votes. Tembo, the MCP's running candidate for presidency, gained almost 65% of his votes from the central region, which constitutes the regional constituency of the MCP (African Elections Database). The MCP has experienced increasing electoral defeat in the 1999 and 2004 elections.

When Mutharika took office as president, he entered into a conflict with his party's chairman, Muluzi, over the anti-corruption policy. The dispute remained unresolved and was argued to become a national issue. Consequently, in February 2005, President Mutharika announced his resignation from the UDF. He established a new party, the DPP, and more than 70 Members of Parliament followed his lead (Dundos, 2011, p. 327). This research focusses on the President's party as the incumbent party, hence, the DPP will be examined as entering the 2009 elections as the ruling party.

Malawi's political landscape changed drastically in 2005, Mutharika presented himself as the fighter against famine and food insecurity. His Agricultural Input Subsidy Programme (AISP)⁴ added both material and symbolical value, he got the chance to respond to nationalist feelings in both a positive and populist manner (Hamer, 2017, p. 4). The Afrobarometers reflect a change in identity, whereas in 2005 merely 23% of the respondents felt *only* Malawian, this number increased to 47% in 2008. The share of people that identified *only* according to ethnicity decreased from 18% in 2005 to 6% in 2008. The trust in President Mutharika and the ruling

⁴ Later renamed to Farm Input Subsidy Programme (FISP)

party increased significantly between 2005 and 2008. Furthermore, while in 2005 61% of the respondents claimed that Malawi was a democracy with major problems, this number decreased to 32% in 2008. Although Malawians are increasingly positive towards governance and economic management, the Afrobarometers reflect an increasing number of people that believe they should be careful of what they say about politics (Afrobarometer 2005; Afrobarometer 2008).

Economically, although Malawi remains one of the poorest countries in the world, it has presented promising achievements between 2006 and 2010 (UN Malawi, 2014). The real GDP of Malawi grew significantly, reaching its peak of 9.7% growth in 2007. Table 2 presents the public attitudes towards the economy between 2005 and 2014, which reflects increasing positive attitudes in 2008.

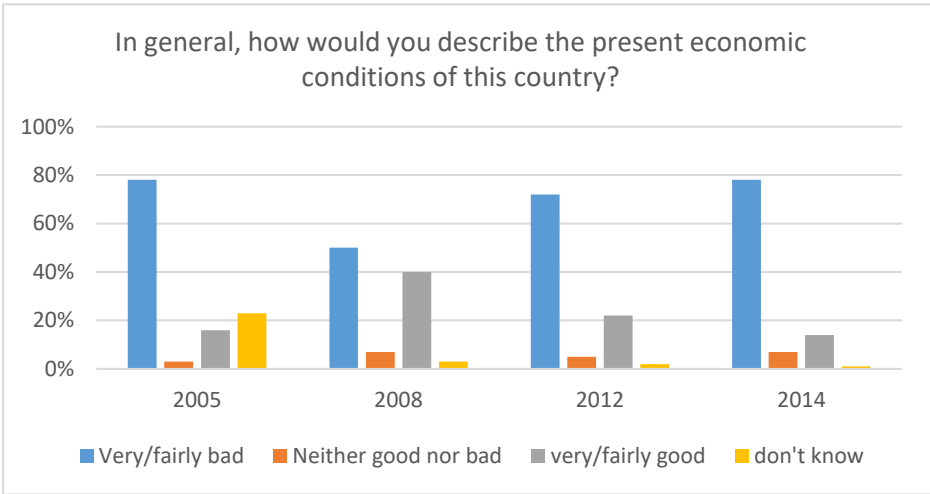


Table 2: economic conditions according to the Afrobarometers of 2005, 2008, 2012 and 2014

The MCP: appeals made in the manifesto for the 2009 elections.

The manifesto was written in a time of economic progress, an increasingly positive attitude towards governmental performance and a rising Malawian identity. It is crucial to bear in mind that the MCP and its former Banda regime have been criticized for intensifying Malawi’s ethno-regional divisions (Chirwa, 1998, p. 58). President Banda equated the central region’s Chewa identity to the Malawian identity (Kaspin, 1995, p. 610). When perceiving the central region as

the MCP's group identity, three of Gadjanova's categories linked to group identity in political rhetoric become apparent, namely: the community's past, claims of unfair treatment and means to safeguard group rights.

The manifesto contains numerous references to the successes of the Banda regime, for instance:

'... it is the MCP that fought both colonialism and imperialism, defeated the federation of Rhodesia and Nyasaland and brought independence, economic progress and human dignity to the people of Malawi'' (MCP, 2009, p. 3-4).

Tembo and his MCP emphasize their contribution in achieving independence and the following economic progress. During the Banda regime, the central region benefitted from economic progress while the north suffered from economic stagnation and both the northern and southern region experienced cultural marginalization (Kaspin, 1995, p. 609). The references to the successes of the past are substantiated by various criticisms to the governments since 1994. For instance, the MCP argues that *'Malawi is worse of in governance and corruption that it was fifteen years ago''* (MCP, 2009, p. 4). Moreover, the MCP claims that *'problems of tribalism and regionalism have generated to crisis proportions since 1994''* (MCP, 2009, p. 9). However, as noted before, regionalism had already gained its political relevance during the Banda regime. Bearing in mind the country's recent economic achievements, the rising Malawian identity and increasing positive attitude towards governmental performance, the MCP's statements seem to be misplaced. However, when taking into consideration the historical context, the MCP appeals to the central region, which has lost its privileged position since the introduction of multi-party elections and the subsequent southern profiled governments.

The claims of unfair treatment are, among others, related to access to public media: *'... the incumbent DPP Government has denied the expression of different views from the opposition and other stakeholders by restricting access to public media''* (MCP, 2009, p. 40).

According to the Afrobarometers, people feel increasingly careful of what they can say about politics, which fits a claim of a constrained expression of different views⁵. The European Union Elections Observation Mission (2009) found that state owned television highly privileged the DPP during the campaign period, the DPP received 81% of the share of coverage of political actors, while the MCP got 7% and the UDF received 6% of the share. This should be perceived as unfair treatment by the government in political representation. Campaigns are a crucial moment for communication between representatives and citizens (Coleman, 2005, p. 181). In this case the government has disproportionately favored the ruling party, which constitutes unfair treatment towards the opposition parties. Since the governments thus far have been known for their “southern profile”, it may be argued that the central and northern views are less represented in the media due to restricted access for opposition parties representing them.

Finally, the MCP refers multiple times to decentralization and reconciliation, which belong to Gadjanova’s “means to safeguard group rights”. Decentralization and regional empowerment become evident in the education policy, in which the MCP seeks to “*devolve more powers and responsibilities to education divisions, district educational authorities, school head-teachers, teachers in planning and management*” (MCP, 2009, p. 43-44). Furthermore, the MCP aims to safeguard cultural rights, claiming that it will “*preserve our diverse cultural heritage to anchor national development efforts*”, the reference to “diverse cultural heritage” is particularly relevant (MCP, 2009, p. 49). The MCP seems to counter the DPP government’s responses to nationalist tendencies and a Malawian identity, which became evident in the Afrobarometers. A significant part of the cultural heritage of Malawi inherits a time in which the central Chewa identity was equivalent to the Malawian identity, by safeguarding the diverse

⁵ In 2005, 20% of the respondents felt that they have to be careful of what they say about politics. In 2008, this number increased to 35% of the respondents.

cultural heritage, we expect that the MCP seeks to safeguard the central identity built by the Banda regime.

Thus, it has become evident that the MCP formulates ethno-regional – group identity - appeals. The regional appeals become particularly clear from the numerous references to the successes of the former Banda regime, in which the central region was privileged. Furthermore, the MCP expresses claims of unfair treatment and means to safeguard group rights, which both belong to the political rhetoric of group identity.

The DPP: appeals made in the manifesto for the 2009 elections.

President Mutharika was born and raised in the southern region of Malawi and was initially member of the southern profiled UDF. In the case of regional appeals, the political rhetoric on group identity by the DPP is expected to aim towards the southern region. However, President Mutharika argues that he seeks to reverse Malawi's tradition of ethno-regionalism and to build a political party with a nationalist base (Ntata, 2012, p. 3). As a ruling party, especially with the objective to establish a national support base, the DPP is expected to formulate national appeals.

The manifesto of the DPP does not present references to the political rhetoric of a southern group identity. The DPP makes merely one reference to reconciliation. However, the concept of reconciliation is embedded in the broader claim of equality. The claim of equality is consistent and strong throughout the manifesto and substantiated by a rejection of regionalism. The DPP states that *“There shall be political tolerance and understanding and democracy will not imply tribalism, ethnic superiority and regional hegemony”* and *“It [the Constitution] shall not be manipulated to suit one political party, one tribal group or one geographical area”* (DPP, 2009, p. 9-10). Taking into consideration the historical context of the one-party rule by the MCP and the accompanying favoring of the central region, the DPP takes a clear stance against this type of government. Furthermore, President Mutharika knows that, in order for the

DPP to succeed long-term, they need to counter regionalism and transcend regional boundaries (Ntata, 2012, p. 3). This is also reflected in the emphasis on equality beyond regional background, by, for instance, stating that: *“The right to economic pursuit or engage business without distinction of any kind such as race, tribe, colour, religion, political views, social origin, social status, birth, gender or other consideration”* (DPP, 2009, p. 13).

Besides the multiple claims towards equality, the DPP makes various referrals to the establishment of a *“... new culture that promotes the broadest representation and people emancipation”* (DPP, 2009, p. 9). This new culture reflects the aim to go beyond regionalism. The notion of *“the broadest representation”* may be a response to the governments since 1994, which were all ruled by *“southern”* parties. While the DPP was in office, it sought to respond to nationalist feelings in a positive and populist manner and to build a national support base (Hamer, 2017, p. 4). The new culture would thus constitute a nation-wide representation. Nationalist feelings are reflected in the Afrobarometers, which present a rising Malawian identity in 2008.

The nationalist tendencies and rising Malawian identity are also reflected in the manifesto, which seeks to stimulate the Malawian identity. For instance, when discussing tourism, the DPP manifesto calls for *“developing unique artifacts and hand-craft specifically “Malawian” in character that can be identified as such anywhere in the world”* (DPP, 2009, p. 34). When discussing education, the DPP seeks to significantly improve *“the quality, orientation and coverage of primary education with a view to making the children know more about their country, environment, culture and historical background that that of other countries”* (DPP, 2009, p. 35). The statements indicate the construction or advancement of a national identity. The claims all fit within the broader goal of transcending regional boundaries, the manifesto seeks to move beyond regionalism.

Contrary to the MCP, the DPP presents no statements that fit Gadjanova's categories on group identity. The DPP makes strong claims for equality and a national identity, which constitute a national appeal. Thus far, the findings fit the theoretical expectations. The next section will conduct a CDA on the manifestos of the MCP, the PP and the DPP for the 2014 elections.

The social, economic and political context prior to the 2014 elections.

The DPP won the elections of 2009, resulting in a second term for President Mutharika. The DPP received approximately 66% of the total national votes (African Elections Database). The 2009 elections are often referred to as a sudden collapse of ethno-regionalism, since President Mutharika obtained support throughout the northern, central and southern region (Ferree, 2010, p. 538; Smiddy, 2009, p. 663). Tembo and his MCP became second with 30% of the national votes.

During the 2009 elections, Joyce Banda was the running mate of Mutharika. Once he was elected as president, she became his vice-president. In 2011, Mutharika chose his brother, Peter Mutharika, as the new president of the party, which side-lined Banda and made her decide to form her own party, the People's Party (PP). As it was her constitutional right, Banda stayed in office as vice-president. In 2012, incumbent President Mutharika passed away, which led to Banda taking over the presidential seat (Patel, 2015, p. 81-82).

The presidency of Banda was not a path strewn with roses. In September 2013, the Cashgate scandal, the biggest financial scandal in the history of Malawi, was exposed. Several government officials have allegedly been taking advantage of a loophole in the system to divert millions of dollars of the government. The allegations led to outrage among Malawians and a crisis of confidence among Malawi's key donors, which resulted in the withholding of money. The scandal took a prominent position in the campaigns of the 2014 general elections, with opposition parties describing the current government as corrupt and emphasizing anti-

corruption policies. President Banda argues that she took the appropriate measures and that the former DPP government is to blame for the scandal. (BBC, 2014). The tables below present the increasingly negative attitudes towards President Banda and the government’s fight against corruption, this attitude particularly rose in 2014, which is the first Afrobarometer taken after the Cashgate scandal.

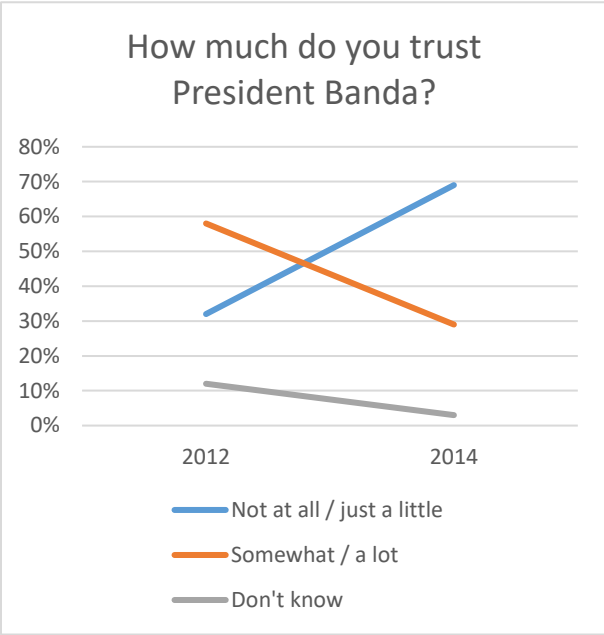


Table 3: trust in the President according to the Afrobarometers of 2012 and 2014

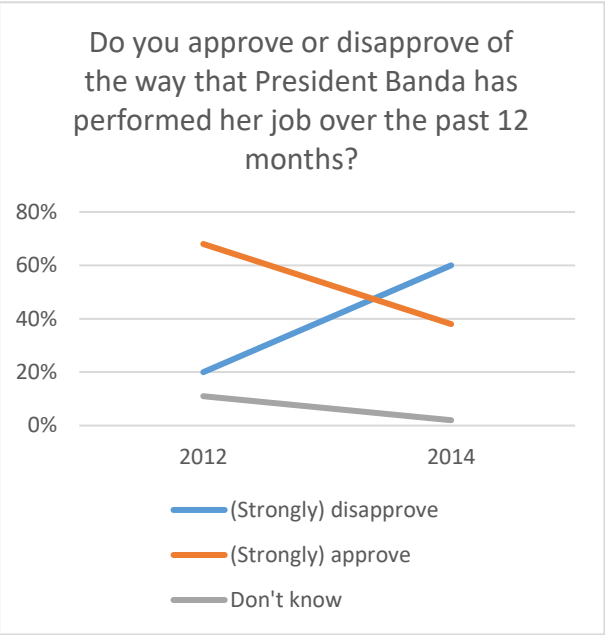


Table 4: approval of the President according to the Afrobarometers of 2012 and 2014

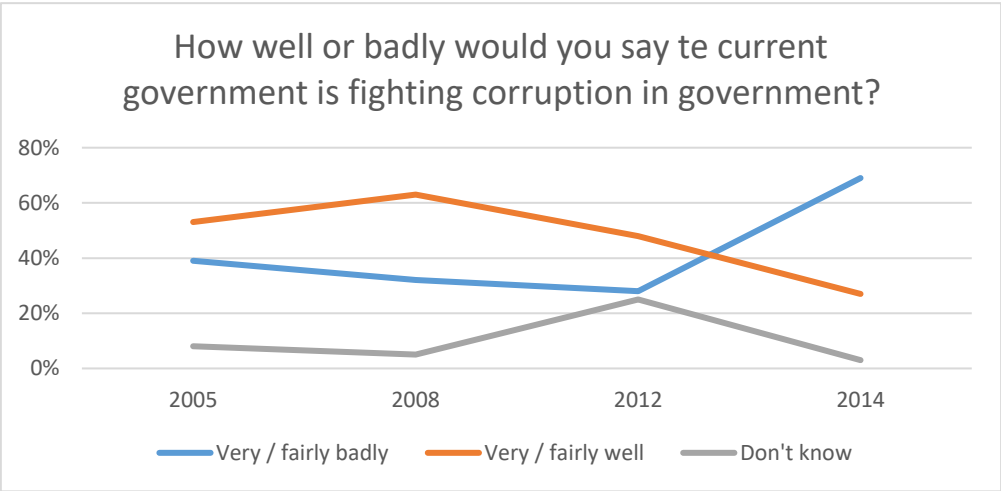


Table 5: fight against corruption according to the Afrobarometers of 2005, 2008, 2012 and 2014

Economically, the country underwent serious setbacks in 2011 and 2012. The real GDP growth decreased to 3.8% in 2011, mainly due to diminished donor inflows, shortages of foreign exchange, fuel and raw materials. While the growth of the real GDP slowed down, inflation was rising and the Kwacha suffered from serious devaluation⁶. The economic stagnation is also reflected in the public opinion, as becomes evident from Table 2⁷. Furthermore, the Afrobarometer presents a shift in identity. Whereas 47% of the respondents felt *only* Malawian in 2008, this number decreased to 36% in 2014. The number of people that identified as both Malawian and member of an ethnic group increased from 28% in 2008 to 48% in 2014.

The MCP: appeals made in the manifesto for the 2014 elections.

The elections of 2014 took place in a time of economic stagnation, a growing negative attitude towards governmental and economic performance and a decreasing national identity. The manifesto of Chakwera, the running candidate for presidency, and his MCP present several claims belonging to the political rhetoric of group identity, which is expected since it is an opposition party. Bearing in mind that the MCP is expected to appeal to the central region, the party formulates claims linked to the community's past, group rights, means to safeguard group rights and unfair treatment by the government.

Although less frequent than in the 2009 manifesto, the community's past and the past achievements of the MCP are also emphasized in the 2014 manifesto. For instance, '*Needless to say, it is the party which liberated every Malawian from the colonial bondage and brought independence and human dignity to Malawi*' (MCP, 2014, p. 1). Furthermore, the party argues that it '*... will take on the challenge of restoring the Civil Service to its former enviable glory*'

⁶ The kwacha is the currency of Malawi.

⁷ Page 19.

(MCP, 2014, p. 47). As previously stated, these claims form a group identity appeal towards the central region, which was privileged during the MCP's Banda regime.

Malawi is divided into three administrative regions: the northern, central and southern region, which overlap with Malawi's ethno-regional lines (UN Malawi). All three regions have their own capital: Mzuzu is the capital of the northern region, Lilongwe of the central and Blantyre of the southern region. Since 1994, all ruling parties, excluding the DPP government which was elected in 2009, have been "southern parties", meaning that they are known for drawing their major support base from the southern region. The MCP aims to "*construct trade fair grounds for Lilongwe and Mzuzu*", thus for the northern and central capitals (MCP, 2014, p. 30). Currently, Blantyre already has the trade fair ground. In 1975, President Banda changed the capital from the southern city Zomba to Lilongwe. He sought to transform Lilongwe into the Malawi's locus of economic opportunity (Kaspin, 1995, p. 605). Nowadays, Blantyre is Malawi's center of finance and commerce. The construction of trade fair grounds relates to the group right of developing the economic potential of the central and northern cities. As previously done by the Banda regime, the MCP seeks to ameliorate the economic opportunities of Lilongwe. Statements of economic improvement fit within the context of economic stagnation.

"*The MCP attaches great importance to the decentralization*" (MCP, 2014, p. 17). In its 2014 manifesto, the MCP dedicates a chapter to the policy of decentralization, which is linked to Gadjanova's political rhetoric of group identity. The MCP will "*ensure greater involvement of the local people in the process of governance and development*", this devolution of powers to the local level will bring more power to the different regional groups (MCP, 2014, p. 17). The current shift in identity would likely stimulate the notion of decentralization, since Malawians are increasingly feeling both Malawian and part of an ethnic group. The rise of diverse, local, identities are likely to result in an aim towards greater involvement of local

people in the government. Therefore, decentralization is a means to safeguard group rights, even though, it cannot be directly linked to the central region in specific.

Several statements of the MCP are indirectly referring to unfair treatment by the government, for instance: *‘‘The MCP will rationalize government ministries and form a government on expertise and competence – not party or family interests’’* and *‘‘Promote professionalism in road maintenance programmes and eliminate corruption through transparent and non-political awards of contracts’’* (MCP, 2014, p. 8; MCP, 2014, p. 25). The manifesto was written after the Cashgate scandal, hence, statements on corruption seem to refer to the failures of the PP government. The Afrobarometers of 2008 and 2012 show that citizens increasingly find that leaders should not favor their own family or group⁸, while Malawi continues to suffer from various types of corruption, including patronage and nepotism (Transparency International, 2013). Bearing in mind that the governments since 1994, excluding the DPP government, have all had a major southern support base, the patronage networks are likely to have benefitted mainly the southern region. Thus, the MCP formulates a claim of unfair treatment by the government, which has likely benefitted the southern region.

To conclude, the MCP’s manifesto of 2014 reflects multiple categories that can be linked to Gajanova’s political rhetoric of group identity. The MCP is an advocate for decentralization, seeks to develop the economic potential of the central region, stresses its past achievements and discredits the previous governments based on unfair treatment.

The PP: appeals made in the manifesto for the 2014 elections.

In 1999, Joyce Banda entered politics for the UDF, a southern based political party⁹. She represented the southern Zomba Malosa constituency. Banda got appointed as Minister for Gender and Community Services. Internationally, Banda is known as an advocate for women’s

⁸ In 2008, 52% of the citizens strongly agreed with the following statement: *‘‘Since leaders represent everyone, they should not favour their own family or group’’*. In 2014, 71% of the respondents strongly agreed.

⁹ President Joyce Banda is not related to the former President Hastings Banda of the MCP.

rights and as the first female president of Malawi (Mponda, 2012). In 2012, incumbent president Mutharika passed away, which led to Banda becoming the president with the PP as the ruling party. Although she has only ruled for two years, it has been concluded that Banda has routinely used state resources for campaigning (Patel, 2005, p. 83). State resources should fundamentally improve a party's prospects of formulating national appeals.

The manifesto lacks any references to categories linked to the group identity – the southern identity - in political rhetoric. Throughout the manifesto, claims for equality “beyond ethnicity” become evident. For instance, she seeks to “*create a Malawi that works for all regardless of their political affiliation, ethnicity, religion, region of origin and social status*” (PP, 2014, preamble VI). In the 2014 elections, Banda profiled herself as the champion of social protection for women, children and the poor, she is referred to as the “*champion of the poor*” and aims to “*reduce inequality – spatial and gender*” (PP, 2014, p. 2-3; Hamer, 2017). When she pleads for equal distribution of and access to health services, she emphasizes “*vulnerable groups such as poor people, women, children, orphans, people with disabilities and the elderly*” (PP, 2014, p. 25). The Afrobarometer of 2014 indicates that women have more trust in Banda, whereas 26% of the male respondents have somewhat or a lot of trust in Banda, 32% of the women gave this answer. Thus, beneficiary to the current public attitudes and appropriate with her past in women activism, Banda formulates a “social” appeal aimed at women, children and the poor.

Fitting in the context of a decreasing national identity, the PP puts little focus on national identity. However, Banda does argue that “*... arts, culture and sports provide a national identity to both the nation and the outside world*” (PP, 2014, p. 42). Furthermore, it seeks to “*uphold and promote a national heritage to promote a distinct national identity on the international stage*” (PP, 2014, p. 42). The PP emphasizes the significance of a national identity on the international stage. Banda's ruling years were characterized by a crisis of confidence

among Malawi's key donors after the Cashgate scandal, it seems that Banda seeks improve the image of Malawi. However, there are no explicit indications for this.

It is noticeable that the manifesto pays barely any attention to the fight against corruption. During the presidency of Banda, the biggest financial corruption scandal of Malawi came to light. The President and her party seem to avoid the topic in the manifesto, mentioning only briefly the aim to increase funding for anti-corruption institutions.

To conclude, the PP has not presented any of the categories linked to political rhetoric on group identity of the southern region. The findings indicate a nationwide "social" appeal towards women, children and the poor.

The DPP: appeals made in the manifesto for the 2014 elections.

The DPP won the elections in 2009. However, due to the sudden death of President Mutharika, Banda and the PP became the president and the subsequent ruling party. Consequently, the DPP entered the elections as both the winning party and an opposition party. Since the DPP has no longer access to state resources, the theory would expect the DPP to fall back to regional appeals.

Although the DPP enters the elections as an opposition party, Mutharika manages to formulate national appeals. The party does not articulate any claims that can be linked to the political rhetoric of group identity of the southern region. The DPP still makes strong arguments for equality "beyond region", emphasizing the equality for women, the youth, the elderly and disabled people. Furthermore, the statements for a national identity that were found in the 2009 manifesto are also presented in the current manifesto of 2014. For instance, the party still argues that "*There shall be political tolerance and understanding and democracy will not imply tribalism, ethnic superiority and regional hegemony*" (DPP, 2014, p. 15). Throughout the manifesto, claims that were made in 2009 are frequently repeated.

Thus, on the topics of equality and national identity, the manifesto of 2014 overlaps with the previous manifesto of 2009. However, there are new developments in the manifesto. The DPP proposes the creation of a National Security Council with statutory powers which should *“guide long-term decision-making and determination of government actions for national interests, the well-being of our people and institutions, and our sovereignty and territorial integrity”* (DPP, 2014, p. 19). Bearing in mind the unexpected termination of the incumbency of the DPP, this claim seems to be directed towards preventing situations like this in the future. Taking into consideration the political and historical context, this measure does not merely safeguard national - as opposed to regional - interests, it also presents a manner in which the ruling party can lock its policies.

The content of the manifesto greatly overlaps with the manifesto of 2009. The manifesto does not present an ethno-regional appeal, rather, through a focus on national identity and equality, a national appeal is constructed, even though the party is no longer a ruling party and lacks the access to state resources.

Diverging appeals by political parties: a comparison

The section above has explored the different appeals made by opposition and ruling parties for the 2009 and 2014 elections of Malawi. Following the theoretical framework, ruling parties were expected to formulate national appeals, while opposition parties articulate group identity – in this case ethno-regional – appeals.

The study has found that the MCP, as an opposition party, has formulated regional appeals in the 2009 and 2014 manifesto. The 2014 manifesto presents a stronger ethno-regional appeal: the manifesto reflects more of Gajanova’s concepts linked to the political rhetorical of the group identity of the central region. This may be due to the severe electoral defeat experienced by the MCP in the 2009 elections. Furthermore, the ethno-regional appeal of 2014 is likely to be stimulated by the decreasing national identity within Malawi.

The ruling parties, the DPP in 2009 and the PP in 2014, both managed to articulate national appeals, in the sense that the appeals moved beyond ethno-regionalism. The DPP, by focusing on national identity and equality, formulated a clear national appeal in 2009. The PP, which focused less on national identity and more on social protection, articulated a nationwide ‘‘social’’ appeal towards women, children and the poor. The study has shown that social, economic and political circumstances have a considerable influence on the appeals articulated by political parties. While the DPP formulated its appeals in a time of a rising Malawian identity, the PP articulated an appeal influenced by Banda’s background in women’s activism and a decreasing national identity.

According to the theoretical framework, Malawi’s opposition parties are less nationalized and are not likely to formulate national appeals, among others due to a lack of access to state resources. In 2009, the DPP, as a ruling party, was able to formulate a clear national appeal. In 2014, the DPP entered the elections as an opposition party. Although lacking state resources, the DPP managed to construct a national appeal, which, despite the decreasing national identity shown in the Afrobarometers, again focused on equality and national identity. The manifesto of 2009 presents the notion of the creation of a National Security Council, which indicates that the DPP is searching for a manner to safeguard national interests and to lock government policies in the case of a sudden shift of government.

Conclusion

Thus, how do ruling and opposition parties differ in their salience of ethnicity in the appeals made during the elections in Malawi? This study has sought to answer this question by means of a critical discourse analysis on the manifestos of opposition and ruling parties during the 2009 and 2014 elections in Malawi. The findings have been discussed in the previous section, which conclusions can be drawn from this?

The following theoretical expectation has been tested in the study: ruling parties (the DPP and PP) make national appeals, while opposition parties (MCP and DPP) appeal to a specific ethno-regional group. Incumbent parties reflect higher levels of party nationalization and have access to state resources, which both foster the articulation of national appeals. The critical discourse analysis focused on the presence of concepts related to the political rhetoric of group identities as identified by Gadjanova (2013).

To a certain extent, the cases meet the expectation. The MCP, as an opposition party since 1994, has presented multiple references that can be linked to the political rhetoric of group identity in both 2009 and 2014. On the other hand, the DPP and the PP have not presented any of the categories linked to ethnic appeals during the 2009 and 2014 elections respectively, rather, the ruling parties managed to formulate national appeals. In 2014, the DPP entered the elections as both the winning party and an opposition party, due to the sudden death of president Mutharika in 2012. Although holding the position of an opposition party, the DPP did not fall back to ethno-regional appeals: it managed to articulate national appeals. Thus, the DPP went against the theoretical expectation.

The findings have, to a certain extent, been in line with the theoretical expectations. The results of the 2009 and 2014 elections have been perceived as a puzzle by the academic community and the role of ethnicity has remained unclear. This research has found that the MCP, as an opposition party experiencing strong electoral defeat, has had a high salience of ethnicity: it has constructed ethno-regional appeals. On the other hand, ruling parties show no salience of ethnicity and construct national appeals.

The DPP has managed to formulate national appeals, even as an opposition party. This may indicate that the maturing of democracy in Malawi has reduced the significance of ethnicity in electoral competition. However, thus far, this finding can merely be linked to the DPP. The research is limited in its scope and has not yet uncovered the impact of new party development

on the salience of ethnicity. The DPP and PP both entered as new and ruling parties to the 2009 and 2014 elections respectively, this may have effected their appeals, since they had to build a new support base. The 2014 elections were the first tri-partite elections, in which local, parliamentary and presidential elections were held simultaneously. Furthermore, this year presented the first televised presidential debate. The fact that local elections were held at the same time may have strengthened ethno-regional appeals, in order to address both national and local issues simultaneously.

In order to further explore diverging party systems, future research should seek to uncover the differences between old and newly established political parties. The new political parties need to find a support base, which may alter their salience of ethnicity. The findings of Malawi may be relevant to other cases, such as Botswana, Nigeria and Zambia, which present the same decrease of ethnic support for ruling parties, while opposition parties become more focussed on one group identity. The theoretical expectations should also be tested in these cases, in order to find a general answer to whether these theoretical cases present a net rise or decline in the salience of ethnicity in appeals.

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