MALAWI'S NEW DAWN

Daniel N. Posner

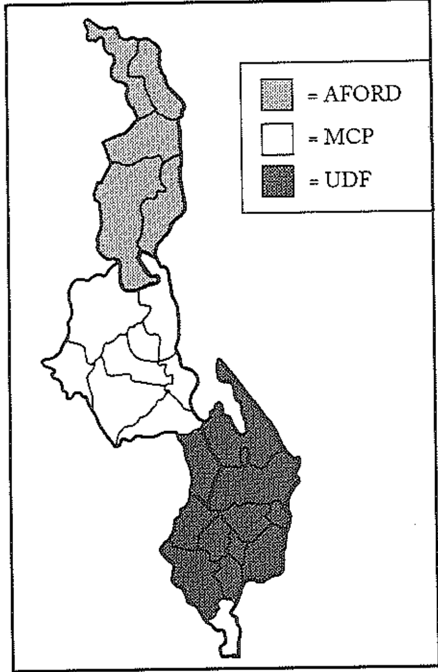
***Daniel N. Posner** is a Ph.D. candidate in the department of government and an associate at the Center for International Affairs at Harvard University. He served as an election monitor in Malawi for the National Democratic Institute. His doctoral dissertation explores the impact of political change on national and ethnic identities in Zambia and Malawi.*

Malawi's first-ever multiparty elections, held on 17 May 1994, represented a new beginning for the people of Malawi and the closing of a long chapter in Africa's political history. The unseating of President Hastings Kamuzu Banda and his Malawi Congress Party (MCP) brought the departure from politics of Africa's last prominent independence-era dictator and the demise of one of the last remaining one-party regimes in the region. It also marked the culmination of two years of remarkable political changes that transformed Malawi from one of the most closed and repressive countries in Africa to one that holds promise of becoming among the continent's most open and liberal.

Having paved the way for the elections by voting in a June 1993 referendum to scrap the 27-year-old ban on multiparty political competition, Malawians elected Bakili Muluzi, a Muslim businessman from the southern region, as their country's new president. Muluzi won 47.2 percent of the vote in a three-way race contested by President Banda and trade unionist Chakufwa Chihana, who obtained 33.5 percent and 18.9 percent of the vote, respectively. In the simultaneously held parliamentary elections, run on a plurality basis in single-member constituencies, the three major parties won seats in roughly the same ratio as their presidential standard-bearers. Muluzi's United Democratic Front (UDF) secured 85 of the 177 seats, Banda's MCP won 56, and Chihana's Alliance for Democracy (AFORD) captured 36.[1]

The most outstanding feature of the election, apart from its orderliness, was the clear regional basis of the voting patterns (see map). AFORD, which captured every parliamentary seat in the northern region,

was able to win only three seats outside of it—all in constituencies adjacent to the border between the northern and central regions. The UDF completely dominated the south, winning 71 of the 74 constituencies in that region. The UDF also managed to win 14 seats in the central region, all clustered along the central-southern border, along the shore of Lake Malawi (where the country's Muslim population is concentrated), and in the urban areas of the capital, Lilongwe (where the party's business ties were attractive). The locus of MCP support was in the central region (Banda's home region), where the party won 51 of the 68 available seats. The only constituencies the MCP was able to capture outside of the central region were in the far southern tip of the country, the home area of its popular secretary general, Gwanda Chakuamba. An identical pattern of regional polarization obtained in the presidential election.[2] While Muluzi's relative success in courting voters outside of the south played some role in accounting for his victory, the outcome of the presidential poll was, more than anything else, a function of demographics. Fifty percent of Malawi's nine million people live in the south. Muluzi won the election because he was the candidate from the region with the highest percentage of eligible voters in a contest where people voted overwhelmingly for their own coregionalists.



Malawi: Voting Patterns

What explains this pattern of regional voting? Malawi is a country of great ethnic heterogeneity.[3] Yet it is also a country in which very different historical patterns of missionary activity, educational development, migration, and agricultural policy in the three regions have led to a privileging of regional identities over more localized ethnic ties. In the north, a combination of widespread missionary education in the Tumbuka language and a shared dependence on labor migrancy for cash income during the colonial era shaped a set of common interests revolving around promoting opportunities for educated Africans and reinforcing social institutions capable of maintaining migrant workers'

ties to land and family. Out of these common interests a single regional identity was forged among the disparate groups occupying the area. The people of central Malawi, who were relatively homogeneous culturally and linguistically to begin with, were unified during the colonial period by a shared interest in agricultural policies supportive of small-holder tobacco production, the principal means of subsistence in the region. In the densely populated and ethnically heterogeneous south, a somewhat weaker identity grew out of a common resentment of the government-supported, estate-owning white settlers who controlled access to the region's scarce land.[4]

While the emergence of regional identities may be traced to the pre-independence period, the primacy of regionalism in political life today is as much an outcome of the character of postindependence rule and the nature of the campaign leading up to the May 1994 elections—which at once reflected and deepened the country's tripartite division—as it is a legacy of colonialism. Whatever its origins, Malawi's regional polarization poses a serious obstacle to the consolidation of democracy. For democracy to work, a government must be perceived as legitimate and at least somewhat representative of the people of the nation. The fact that almost no one from the north and only a minority of those from the central region supported the country's new president suggests that the legitimacy of the infant regime may be weak. On the other hand, the balance of forces in the new parliament is likely to help democracy. No party has a simple majority in the National Assembly, creating strong incentives for compromise and alliance-building. So far, interparty bargaining has won out over obstructionism. Whether this trend continues will depend on the quality of leadership displayed by the new government as it tackles the many pressing economic and social problems facing the country.

Thirty Years of MCP Rule

One of the ironies of Malawi's political history is that Banda was invited to take power by the very leaders that he ultimately imprisoned, chased into exile, or killed. In the late 1950s, when political organization against the incorporation of Malawi—then Nyasaland—into a political union with the settler-dominated Rhodesias was reaching its peak, Banda was practicing medicine in Ghana. The young intellectuals of Malawi's independence movement felt that they needed a leader with more stature and experience if they were to negotiate effectively with the British and command the respect of Malawi's largely rural and conservative population. They asked Banda, then in his sixties, to return to Malawi to spearhead their effort. In preparation for his arrival, they traveled around the country promoting him as the "ngwazi" (savior) who would lead the nation to independence. Banda proved a master not only at

political organization and oratory, but also at exploiting the adulation that greeted him on his return. By the time independence was won in 1964, he had reshaped the Congress Party, the key vehicle of the independence movement, into his personal instrument.

The deepening divisions that had emerged in the party between Banda and his "boys," as he derisively called the younger Congress leaders, came to a head when a majority of the cabinet broke with him several weeks after independence. Superficially a dispute over civil-service reform and foreign relations, the cabinet crisis was really about power and who would wield it in the postcolonial state. Following the sacking of four "rebel" ministers and the resignation of three others, Banda took advantage of the weakness of his opponents by purging the party—and thus the political arena itself—of all those opposed to his absolute rule. Thousands of Malawians were detained, killed, or forced into exile. The ruthlessness with which he dealt with his opponents at this early stage sent a strong message to anyone inclined to question his authority. It also set the tone for the 30 years of repressive personalistic rule that would follow.

After the cabinet crisis, three broad trends came to characterize Malawian politics. The first was the centralization of political and economic power in the hands of the country's ruler. Within two years of independence, Banda had secured for himself not only the presidency of the country and of its only legal political party, but also the ministries of Agriculture, Foreign Affairs, Justice, and Public Works. In 1971, he was designated president-for-life. Parliament became a rubber-stamp institution filled with Banda's sycophants. The British-model judiciary was emasculated by the creation of a parallel system of "traditional courts," controlled by the MCP, to which all political and serious criminal cases were referred. Banda also maintained a monopoly on economic power. By virtue of his ownership—ostensibly "in trust on behalf of the people of Malawi"—of Press Trust, a massive conglomerate of companies responsible for tobacco production, petroleum marketing, banking, insurance, and most of the country's manufacturing, Banda exerted a strong measure of personal control over more than 50 percent of the entire national economy. He used this economic power for patronage, and also built himself a series of grandiose private palaces around the country.

By the early 1980s, power had begun to shift to Banda's longtime companion Cecilia Kadzamira and her uncle John Tembo. As governor of the Reserve Bank, chairman of numerous state companies, and minister of state in the Office of the President, Tembo controlled an enormous patronage network and repressive apparatus. As Banda's closest advisor and heir-apparent, he, along with his niece, also came to control access to the president. Tembo used these levers, with Banda's blessing, to amass power and wealth for himself and his extended

family. By the time the movement for political change began to crystallize in the early 1990s, Tembo and Kadzamira had become the most powerful—and the most loathed and feared—figures in Malawi.

A third tendency of the postindependence era was the crystallizing of regional identities.

A second major feature of the Banda era was the ruthless treatment of political opponents and the total control of public life by the MCP and its appendages. Political dissenters were routinely detained and tortured in Banda's notoriously horrific prisons. Those less fortunate (usually because they were perceived as more threatening to the regime) were simply made to disappear, often in murders set up to look like road accidents. The most shocking example was the case of Ministers Dick Matenje, Aaron Gadama, and Twaibu Sangala and MP David Chiwanga, whose bullet-riddled bodies were found in an overturned car in Mwanza near the Mozambique border in May 1983. The day before, Matenje, then the secretary general of the party, had introduced a motion in parliament that would have resulted in a modest liberalization of the regime. Even those dissidents operating outside Malawi were not out of Banda's reach. The deaths of exiled Malawian organizer Attati Mpakati in Harare, Zimbabwe, in 1983 and journalist Mkwapatira Mhango in Lusaka, Zambia, in 1989 were both almost certainly the work of Banda's agents.

Throughout the Banda period, the government-owned press and radio were heavily censored and used as propaganda vehicles. Unions, churches, and other civil society groups were coopted by the party and, until 1992, played no role as sources of dissent or political opposition. Loyalty to the "ngwazi"—measured by one's willingness to purchase party cards, contribute money to the MCP, or, in the case of women, travel across the country to dance for the president at official functions—was enforced by the Malawi Young Pioneers (MYP), a red-shirted paramilitary group originally set up to perform agricultural-extension work but quickly transformed into an instrument of intimidation and domestic spying. So pervasive was the system of informers in Malawi, so loose was the definition of disloyalty, and so draconian were the penalties for appearing to be at odds with the president that fear and suspicion came to permeate society.

A third tendency of the postindependence era was the crystallizing of regional identities. Although Malawi has experienced none of the communal strife that has afflicted so many other African nations, the way in which Banda ruled the country nonetheless seriously exacerbated regional divisions. The regional boundaries created by the British in 1921 were not only preserved after independence but made the basis of party organization and government administration. Official forms, required for everything from school enrollment to police reports, asked

for information on one's ethnic group and region, thus reminding citizens that such affiliations were intrinsic components of their identity. Banda's speeches, which frequently began with the insistence that "among us there must be no Chewa, no Ngoni, no Tumbuka, no Yao, no Lomwe, no Tonga, no Nyakyusa; we must be Malawians," often went on to remind the audience that Banda himself was a Chewa from Kasungu.[5] From the beginning of Banda's rule, Malawian culture was made synonymous with Chewa culture. In 1968, the Chewa language was adopted as the sole national language; the use of other African languages in the press or on the radio was declared illegal. The relocation of the capital from Zomba in the south to Lilongwe in the central region was only the most notable instance of a broader pattern of shifting development expenditure and investment from the south and north to the Chewa heartland.

Northerners were the special victims of the Banda regime's abuses. Advantaged by a legacy of Protestant missionary activity that put great stress on education, northerners were, at independence, represented in the civil service and the university in numbers far beyond their proportion of the population. Throughout the 1970s, deliberate steps were taken to purge these institutions of non-Chewas generally and northerners in particular. In 1987, with northerners still constituting nearly 50 percent of university entrants, a formal quota system was adopted for university admissions. Two years later, Banda publicly denounced the country's top civil servants for regionalism and charged teachers from the north with sabotaging the education of pupils from the central and southern regions "with the intention of hampering [these] children from further education so that all top jobs are eventually held by those from the north."[6] He then announced that all teachers of northern origin were required to return to their home region. This shocking declaration, coupled with the string of arrests that followed the expulsion of northern civil servants and teachers, had an enormous impact, reinforcing the sense of siege among northerners and impressing upon others the arbitrariness, paranoia, and ruthlessness of Banda's rule. "For 25 years Banda talked about unity, unity, unity," remarked one church leader, "but in half an hour in February 1989 [when he announced the repatriation of northern teachers] he destroyed it all."[7]

Pressure for Change

On 8 March 1992, Malawi's eight Catholic bishops issued a pastoral letter that contained severe criticism of the government. This revolutionary statement, the first open act of opposition to the Banda regime in 28 years, triggered a ground swell of increasingly bold and public agitation for political reform. The pastoral (which must be seen not only as an act of leadership but also as a defensive, face-saving

move by a church that had come to be seen by many as compromised, corrupt, and irrelevant) was not the sole impetus for change. As the bishops themselves acknowledged, the desire, if not yet the demand, for change was already strong in Malawi by the time they issued their Lenten appeal. "People will not be scandalized to hear these things," they wrote. "They know them. They will only be grateful that their true needs are recognized and that efforts are made to answer them."[8]

A principal cause of the growing disaffection with the regime was economic. Banda's estate-focused and patronage-based development strategy had led, since independence, to an increasing disparity between the middle classes and the poor. Malawi's predominantly rural population had long been among the worst-off in Africa. By the early 1980s, however, the absence of development in the rural areas had begun to emerge as a central grievance against the government. Meanwhile, as the poor became poorer, a small group of businessmen, many with ties to the MCP, grew rich enough to enjoy a degree of autonomy from the state. As in many of the countries that have undertaken democratic reforms in the last several decades, the emergence of a class of independent businessmen with ties to international commercial circles (where they were often embarrassed by their country's reputation as a backward dictatorship) played a key role in creating an impetus for change. The UDF, one of the country's two indigenously organized opposition groups (and now the country's dominant political party), was literally born in the Chamber of Commerce. Had Banda's ownership of most of the country's commercial enterprises and agricultural estates been less well known, the class resentments of poor Malawians might have been aimed at the business community as such rather than at Banda personally. That they were not aimed at business made possible the alliance between rural farmers and urban commercial interests that was crucial to the ultimate unseating of the MCP regime.

A second key development was the rise of the Tembo-Kadzamira clique. For all his brutality and eccentricities, Banda was still the "ngwazi," the savior who had led Malawi to independence. This gave his one-party regime a legitimacy it otherwise would have lacked. With the emergence of Tembo and Kadzamira as the key players on the political scene in the mid-1980s, however, this legitimacy suffered severe erosion. Tembo's appointment as minister of state in January 1992 alienated the civil servants for whom he became responsible and inspired great fear that his formal takeover of power was imminent. Malawians' deep hostility to this prospect convinced many of them of the need for immediate action to change the nature of the political system.

Changes on the international scene constituted a third factor contributing to the impetus for reform in Malawi. The examples of political change in Zambia and South Africa had the important effect of

convincing Malawians that change was possible. In the case of Zambia, whose close demographic and historical ties with Malawi would have magnified its influence in any case, the impact of democratization extended beyond the mere demonstration of successful political change to include active support for the Lusaka-based Malawian opposition by the Chiluba government. A second aspect of this international dimension, felt more by the government than by the population at large, was the growing pressure from the international community for political liberalization. The thawing of the superpower rivalry in Africa during the late 1980s brought a relaxation in the Western obsession with stability and anticommunism—issues on which Banda had positioned himself masterfully over the years—and a new stress by the donor community on democracy and human rights. Western governments, embarrassed by the spotlight put on human rights abuses in Malawi by groups such as Amnesty International, and freed from the strategic imperative of maintaining unconditional support for Banda, began applying pressure for reform. In 1990, a resolution submitted to the U.S. Congress tied the continuation of aid to Malawi to improvement in its human rights record.[9] American and European pressure on the Banda regime continued over the next several years, culminating in the suspension of more than $70 million in nonhumanitarian aid at the Paris Club donors' meeting of May 1992.

The Growth of the Opposition

These factors help explain the context of frustration and expectation in which the bishops' letter was composed and released. It was the reading and circulation of the letter itself, however, which sparked the outpouring of open protest that ultimately forced the government's hand and thus marked the true beginning of the democratization process in Malawi. Evidence that the pastoral letter had struck a responsive chord came a week after its release, when university students in Zomba and Blantyre demonstrated in support of the bishops. These protests marked the first open antigovernment demonstrations in three decades and resulted in the closing of the University of Malawi for the first time in its history. In May, workers at Malawi's largest textile manufacturer went on an unprecedented strike for better working conditions and wages. After police fired on the marching strikers, killing 40, two days of riots ensued.

Meanwhile, active organization against Banda's rule proceeded underground on parallel fronts. In addition to the increasingly energetic activities of the Lusaka-based exile community (which played a critical international public-relations role for the prodemocracy movement), two separate groups began meeting clandestinely within Malawi in early 1992. One group, which was later to develop into AFORD, was based in the northern town of Rumphi and comprised mainly northern intellectuals. The other group, which formed the core of what was to become the UDF, was organized in the commercial city of Blantyre in the south. In contrast to the Rumphi committee, many of whose members had served lengthy prison terms for dissident political activities, the Blantyre group was made up mainly of successful businessmen and former MCP leaders who had fallen out with Banda. This difference proved to be a source of profound distrust between the two groups. In conjunction with regional prejudices and the natural rivalry over who would lead the process of political change, it effectively prevented any close cooperation within the underground opposition.

Second only to the bishops' letter in galvanizing popular opposition to the Banda regime was the arrest of Chakufwa Chihana on April 6. Returning via South Africa from a conference held in Lusaka on the prospects for democracy in Malawi, Chihana was arrested at Lilongwe airport as he began reading a speech announcing the formation, on Malawian soil, of an interim committee to campaign for the reintroduction of multiparty democracy. This brave, if calculated, act immediately cast Chihana as the leader of the prodemocracy movement in Malawi. The in-depth coverage by the BBC and other news organizations of Chihana's return, arrest, and subsequent trial focused international attention on Malawi and made Chihana a hero in the eyes of his countrymen. It also made AFORD, at least temporarily, the vanguard party of change. Chihana's frequent court appearances over the next 14 months became occasions for mass rallies and antigovernment demonstrations.

At least as important as the BBC's radio coverage in furthering the cause of the opposition movement in Malawi were the fax, the photocopier, and the personal computer. One of the most remarkable aspects of the Malawian transition to democracy was the use of the fax machine to breach the wall that Banda had built around his country by means of censorship. Independent civil society groups, businesses, and large government offices—especially those thought to have photocopiers—were targeted by the Lusaka-based opposition for the receipt of anonymous samizdat faxes. Truckers, traders, clergymen, and other mobile groups were enlisted as distributors. By the middle of 1992, Malawi was awash in a sea of anonymous faxes and photocopied leaflets containing leaked government documents supplied by disgruntled civil servants and parastatal employees, reports from foreign newspapers describing the country's economic and political difficulties, and other sorts of officially seditious material. Circulated in offices, passed among friends, or left in the night under stones in markets and at bus stops, these fragments of uncensored communication played a critical role in demonstrating, both by their content and by their very existence, that the

emperor had no clothes. A series of mass arrests in May and June 1992 showed just how seriously the government took the destabilizing impact of the fax-photocopy network.

By the beginning of 1993, samizdat faxes had been largely supplanted by independent newspapers. What made this transition possible was the availability of personal computers outfitted with desktop publishing software. For an initial outlay of less than $2,000 (a sum that was often provided by a sympathetic international donor), an ambitious journalist could set up a professional-looking newspaper virtually overnight. More than 30 such papers had appeared by mid-June 1993. Some of the early stories carried in this new independent press, such as the *Financial Post* report on the demonstrations that followed the pastoral letter or the investigation by *The Nation* into the 1983 Mwanza killings, were pathbreaking. Still, as with the samizdat faxes and leaflets, the truly revolutionary impact of the independent press derived more from the implicit demonstration that people could now express their opinions than from the particular opinions that the newspapers happened to express.

On 18 October 1992, Banda unexpectedly announced that a referendum would be held on the question of the continuation of one-party rule. Following a campaign characterized by modest cooperation between AFORD and UDF but marred by MCP intimidation, violence, and the widespread arrest of opposition activists, voters went to the polls on 14 June 1993 and expressed by a two-to-one margin their preference for multiparty government.[10] Bowing to the people's wishes, Banda called on parliament to repeal the ban on parties and annul the government's power to detain political opponents without trial and confiscate their property. He also declared an amnesty for exiles, relaxed rules against free expression, and announced that elections would be held within the year. Although Banda stopped short of acceding to opposition demands that he resign, he did agree to the creation of two councils paralleling the cabinet and parliament, composed of equal numbers of representatives from the MCP and each of the opposition parties, to oversee the governance of the nation during the interim period.

The Primacy of Regionalism

The unifying effect of the referendum campaign on the two principal opposition parties, AFORD and UDF, was short-lived. As soon as the referendum results were announced and the fate of the one-party system was set, the stakes of the game changed and the political arena became, once again, a three-party show.

AFORD began the campaign with two advantages. First, it had as its leader Chakufwa Chihana, the man who had "stood up to Banda." Second, none of its organizers had served at any time in the MCP government. This gave the party impeccable dissident credentials and allowed it to tar the MCP and UDF (many of whose leaders had previously held senior posts in the MCP) with the same brush. Unfortunately for AFORD, however, the referendum had already given Malawians the opportunity to vote against the old system. By the time the election campaign began, most voters were less interested in holding grudges than in deciding which party would best promote local development. This emphasis on development not only blunted much of AFORD's "clean hands" appeal, but also raised patronage considerations to central importance. In a country where, thanks to the example set by Banda, patronage ties follow regional lines, AFORD's regional base in an area with only 11 percent of Malawi's total population was just not enough.

The southern-based UDF, on the other hand, profited greatly from the deeply ingrained expectation that a leader, once elected, would provide for his own. With half of all Malawians living in the south, the task facing UDF strategists became simply the consolidation of their base. In campaign speeches, while considerable emphasis was placed on criticizing Banda, Tembo, and the evils of the MCP, at least as much energy was devoted to responding to accusations about party members' former ties to the MCP and defusing rumors—promoted by AFORD and MCP in an effort to split the south along religious lines—that Muluzi, a Muslim, was being bankrolled by Arab governments who wanted to turn Malawi into an Islamic state. The UDF's roots in the business community were also critical in shaping the party's platform and the profile of its supporters. Its emphasis on promoting private enterprise and removing governmental interference in commerce attracted many Asian businessmen to the party and helps explain the UDF's strong showing in urban centers outside the south. The party's business backers also gave it the funds to compete formidably with the incumbent MCP and cash-starved AFORD.

The MCP's strategy was threefold: solidify the party's hold on the central region, divide the opposition (as Daniel arap Moi had in Kenya), and convince voters that the party had changed. Although simple, the strategy was also implicitly contradictory. Many of the tactics used in pursuit of the first imperative (bribery, intimidation by the MYP, the instigation of violence to sow fear of change) belied the MCP's claims that it had changed its ways. Great efforts were nonetheless made to present the party in a new light. John Tembo, whose close association with the MCP was a severe liability in most parts of the country, remained largely in the background during the campaign. Banda's stature as the father of the nation was still an asset, especially in the central region, but his frail health made vigorous campaigning impossible. The reigns of the party were increasingly taken up by new-face politicians like Dr. Hetherwick Ntaba, a silver-tongued orator with an excellent

sense for public relations, and the immensely capable and energetic Gwanda Chakuamba, a onetime political detainee who, when released from prison in July 1993, was wooed to the MCP camp.

Chakuamba's joining of the party was a significant coup and temporarily shifted momentum from the opposition to the ruling party. This shift was reversed, however, when long-simmering tensions between the MYP and the army erupted into open conflict on 3 December 1993. In the course of the fighting, the army uncovered immense MYP arms caches and forced the government to order—after the event—the formal disarming of the MYP. Though the army ultimately returned to its barracks, it made it clear that it did so out of respect for the opposition-dominated council that was supervising the transition rather than because it continued to recognize the authority of the MCP government. By stripping the MCP of its most formidable instrument of repression and making clear both the army's preference for democratic change and the ease with which it could block attempts to derail it, the military's action against the MYP played a critical role in ensuring the ultimate success of the political transition.

As the campaign progressed and the dominance of regionalism became more and more apparent, all three parties reshuffled their key officeholders and executive-committee members so that senior political leaders from other regions were included. Yet all these efforts to establish beachheads in other parts of the country failed. With the single exception of Chakuamba (whose constituency's balloting was marked by significant irregularities), none of the first vice-presidents, second vice-presidents, or secretary generals who had been so carefully chosen to balance party tickets was able to carry his home constituency. Following a long-standing pattern in African politics, Malawians voted for parties rather than candidates and based their party choices on the congruence between the party president's regional affiliation and their own. The presence of a local notable on a party's executive committee mattered little if that party's president came from another region.

Given the starkly regional pattern of the voting, it is worth considering whether the nature of Malawi's electoral system contributed to the polarized electoral outcome. The first-past-the-post system that was employed in the May parliamentary elections yielded a National Assembly in which AFORD, MCP, and UDF occupied 36, 56, and 85 seats, respectively. Had the same voting patterns obtained in the context of a system of proportional representation (PR)—admittedly a somewhat dubious assumption given that electoral systems also affect the campaign strategies adopted by parties and candidates, and thus the voting patterns that are realized—the outcome would have been remarkably similar. Had electoral districts been drawn at the regional level, the breakdown would have been 38 seats for AFORD, 60 for MCP, and 79 for UDF; had they been drawn at the level of Malawi's 24 administrative districts, the breakdown would have been approximately 40, 59, 78. Thus the adoption of PR would have slightly advantaged AFORD and MCP and disadvantaged UDF in terms of the strength of their respective parliamentary representation. It also would have helped to break down the close correlation between regional and party delegations by giving all three parties more seats outside their home regions. Still, the fundamental dynamic of a three-party parliament requiring an alliance between two of the three parties would have been generated by either system. The weight of demographics, regional orientation, and party-president identification in Malawi was such that electoral engineering could not have significantly altered the results.

Prospects for Democracy

Despite the clear polarization of voter preferences, the elections of 17 May 1994 were calm and civil, a good sign for democracy's long-term prospects in Malawi. Another encouraging sign is the manner in which President Muluzi has conducted himself since taking office. Resisting pressures from some quarters for a witch hunt against former MCP leaders, he has urged the people of the country to channel their energies into building Malawi's future rather than dwelling on the past.[11] While this position has undoubtedly been determined to some degree by Muluzi's desire to avoid revelations about the past actions of himself or his ministers, it is also an indication of a genuine spirit of reconciliation and tolerance that has come to pervade both the government and the country as a whole.

One of Muluzi's first acts as president was to order the release of all political prisoners and the immediate closure of the country's three most notorious prisons. In a token effort to win back a disaffected north, Tumbuka broadcasts were reintroduced on the nationally run radio news. Muluzi has also distinguished himself from his predecessor by personally defending the freedom of the press and speaking openly about the country's AIDS epidemic. In August 1994, he unveiled an ambitious Poverty Alleviation Program aimed at improving the social and economic conditions of rural Malawians. In another positive development, the new UDF government has made efforts to reach across regional lines in its appointments to statutory bodies. In early October 1994, an agreement was reached between UDF and AFORD whereby Chihana would become the country's second vice-president and his party would be given five ministerial positions in exchange for its support for government programs in parliament.

Good intentions and interregional bridge-building alone, however, will not be enough to overcome the significant difficulties facing the new government. The democratic era in Malawi begins against a backdrop of serious environmental and social problems, including rapid population

growth, acute land scarcity, deforestation, widespread food insecurity, and an illiteracy rate of more than 60 percent. The picture is also bleak on the economic front. Lake Malawi has largely been fished out, the country has virtually no significant economically exploitable mineral deposits, and tobacco, Malawi's principal source of foreign-exchange earnings, has already reached its growth potential. Thus there is very little to drive an economic expansion. On top of all this, Banda's continued control of Press Trust gives him immense leverage—which some evidence suggests he and his cronies have begun to employ—to manipulate the economy for political purposes.

If the record of governance elsewhere in Africa is any guide, the road that Malawi faces promises to be rocky, though not necessarily impassable.

In the face of impossibly high expectations about the benefits that the political transition will bring, these severe economic and social problems cloud the prospects for successful democratic consolidation in Malawi. Other factors give further cause for pessimism. The institutions of Malawi's infant civil society are weak. Its press, though lively and critical, is immature and still at the mercy of the owners of the country's only major printing presses, a UDF minister and Banda himself. Malawi's new constitution, while on paper one of the most democratic in Africa, remains vulnerable to charges of illegitimacy because it was written without significant public consultation. Moreover, Malawi's history leaves the people and the bureaucracy that is supposed to serve them without experience in democratic governance. The country's primarily rural population is profoundly conservative and, as the voting pattern in the election so starkly revealed, preoccupied with presidential authority. Given these factors, a return to authoritarianism cannot be ruled out if a widening gap between expectations and performance begins to undermine significantly the legitimacy of the government. The fact that disillusionment with the regime would almost certainly take on regional overtones—the inclusion of token AFORD politicians in the cabinet will probably do little to erase the equation in northern minds of the UDF-dominated government with the south—makes this prospect even more threatening.

Still, the new government's performance over its first several months gives grounds for hope. Whether regional divisions can be overcome, poverty alleviated, and democratic institutions strengthened over the longer term will be a function of the quality of leadership exercised by the heads of all three parties. If the record of governance elsewhere in Africa is any guide, the road that Malawi faces promises to be rocky, though not necessarily impassable.

NOTES

The author gratefully acknowledges the support of the Center for International Affairs at Harvard University and the International Predissertation Fellowship Program of the Social Science Research Council.

1. Balloting in two constituencies originally won by the MCP (one of these by party secretary general Gwanda Chakuamba) was marked by significant irregularities, resulting in the Electoral Commission's calling for a re-vote. Chakuamba retained his seat in the by-election, but the other was lost to the UDF. The results provided here incorporate the outcome of the re-vote.

2. Chihana won 87.8 percent of the vote in the north but only 6.3 percent outside of his home region. Banda took 64.3 percent of the vote in the central region but only 13.9 percent in the rest of the country. Muluzi, who, of the three, had the strongest support outside of his home region, won 78 percent of the vote in the southern region and 21.2 percent in the northern and central regions combined. A fourth candidate, Kalempo Kalua of the Malawi Democratic Party, managed to win only 0.5 percent of the vote nationwide.

3. Figures from 1966, the most recent available, put the distribution of major ethnic groups as follows: Chewa, 28.3 percent; Nyanja, 15.3 percent; Lomwe, 11.8 percent; Yao, 11.2 percent; Ngoni, 9 percent; Tumbuka, 7.4 percent; Sena, 2.8 percent; Tonga, 2 percent; other, 12.2 percent. In addition, Malawi is home to a significant Asian population, located principally in the urban areas. Figures cited in Frederic Pryor, *Malawi and Madagascar: The Political Economy of Poverty, Equity and Growth* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990).

4. Leroy Vail and Landeg White, "Tribalism in the Political History of Malawi," in Leroy Vail, *The Creation of Tribalism in Southern Africa* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1991), 151-92.

5. The quotation is from Banda's address to the MCP Party Conference held in September 1991. The contrast with Zambian president Kenneth Kaunda's practice of beginning his speeches with the simple refrain "One Zambia, One Nation" is instructive. Unlike Kaunda, Banda mentions each of his country's major ethnic groups by name, drawing attention to the very divisions he is claiming to eschew.

6. *Daily Times*, cited in *Malawi: EIU Country Report No. 2* (London: Economist Intelligence Unit, 1989), 29.

7. Rev. Dr. Overton Muzunda, interview by the author, Mzuzu, 27 December 1993.

8. The bishops' letter is excerpted in "Documents on Democracy," *Journal of Democracy* 3 (October 1992): 138-39.

9. The release of 87 political prisoners between January and March of 1991, the largest number freed in a single wave since 1977, was a clear sign that pressure by international donors was beginning to be felt.

10. In a significant foreshadowing of the May 1994 election results (and a vivid indication both of who had benefited during the previous 29 years of MCP rule and of where the government's powers of intimidation remained strongest), central-region residents were nearly five times as likely to vote for the continuation of the one-party system as were northerners and southerners.

11. In fulfillment of a widely publicized (and popular) campaign promise, Muluzi has, however, ordered an inquiry into the 1983 deaths of Matenje, Gadama, Sangala, and Chiwanga.