

ABSTRACT

CHANGING ELECTION TRENDS IN MALAWI: HOPE FOR DEMOCRACY CONSOLIDATION?

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The paper explores the voting trends in Malawi since the onset of multiparty democracy and how they relate to democracy consolidation. Multiparty democracy was introduced in Malawi in the early 1990s when people opposed the 30 year authoritarian rule of Hastings Kamuzu Banda through elections. The coming in of a democratic government under new leadership of Dr. Bakili Muluzi and his United Democratic Front Party (UDF) in 1994 gave the people of Malawi hope for a democratic change. However despite having established basic freedoms for the people and adopting a new constitution enshrining multiparty democracy in his first of the two five year terms, in general the first ten years of democracy in Malawi did not register much success. Democracy came along with rising perceived corruption, increased food insecurity, increased regional and ethnic differences- resulting in people voting for presidential candidates based on the regional and tribal basis. When efforts to change the constitution to allow for third and/or open presidential term of office failed, Muluzi handpicked Bingu wa Mutharika to represent his party in the presidential elections of 2004. Immediately after becoming the second president under a democratic government in Malawi, Bingu defected from UDF and formed his own party- Democratic Progressive Party (DPP). Mutharika's government registered improved economic management and improved food security situation among other things in his first term. Malawians voted again in May 2009. Mutharika won with a landslide victory acquiring 65 percent of the votes. For the first time in the history of Malawi he amassed majority of the votes from all the regions of the country. DPP has won 119 of the 193 parliamentary seats. Do these election trends signify democracy consolidation? What will be the advantages and disadvantages of having a strong ruling party in parliament and a weak opposition?