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# Regional Polarisation in Voting Pattern: Malawi's 1994 Elections

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## Abstract

*This paper briefly examines the unprecedented political events in Malawi that began in March 1992 and culminated in multi-party elections in which Dr. Banda's regime yielded the reigns of power to a democratically elected government. Using detailed results of the 1994 presidential and parliamentary elections, the paper argues that regionalism rather than ethnicity appears to be the dominant factor influencing voting patterns at the national level. Regionalism appears to have resulted in the formation of three super ethnic groups each with its own regional base. Elites are securing political power by redefining the ethnic equation; and their competition for scarce resources and political power continues to occur in the guise of spatial units, among which the super ethnic region is the more salient, and has consequently become the most influential factor in elections.*

## Introduction

The second wave of democratic change that has been sweeping Africa since the late 1980s (Nzongola-Ntalaja 1995) finally reached Malawi in 1992, and culminated in the rise to power of a new and democratically elected government of President E. Muluzi in 1994. Hastings Kamuzu Banda, who had ruled Malawi since its independence in 1964 and called himself "Life President," grudgingly yielded the reigns of power to the forces of reform. After decades during which all dissent was suppressed and government opponents were either imprisoned or forced into exile (Africa Watch 1990; Lwanda 1993), the country experienced a smooth transition to multi-party politics. The outcome of the June 14, 1993 referendum, in which 63 percent of Malawians favoured multi-party government versus Dr. Banda's single party rule (Somerville 1993; Chirwa 1994) was the watershed of the changes that

culminated in the parliamentary and presidential elections held in May 1994. Dr. Banda and his MCP political party were soundly defeated by the United Democratic Front (UDF) in those elections.

The central objective of this essay is to examine the voting patterns in the presidential and parliamentary elections that took place in 1994 from a purely geographic perspective in order to shed some light on the structure of Malawi's emerging democratic political system. While the making of Dr. Banda as an autocrat has been amply discussed elsewhere (Short 1974; Williams 1978; Kalipeni 1992; Lwanda 1993) and the origins of the events that climaxed in the election of a new government in 1994 have also been examined in great depth (Ham and Hall 1994; Kalipeni 1995a; Rasmusen 1995; Ross 1995 & 1996; Nzunda and Ross 1995; Mchombo 1995), a detailed examination of the voting patterns and their implications for attempts to build a democratic society in Malawi is yet to be written. The existing literature has been characterised by generalisations about the North-South-Central political polarization along ethnic and regional lines. (Chirwa 1994; Cullen 1994; Cullen *et al.* 1995). This paper analyzes the nature and dynamics of voting at the national level through the use of descriptive statistics. The first part of the essay reviews briefly the evolution of the democracy movement. This is followed by a partial analysis of the policies that fashioned super ethnic identities out of the variety of tribes that existed before, and then by an examination of the voting pattern in the presidential and parliamentary elections. It is argued that the voting pattern reveals the development of super-ethnic identities that are coterminous with specific regional identities; and that it is these ethno-regional identities which influenced voting during the 1994 elections.

### **The Democracy Movement**

The movement against Dr. Banda's government can be traced back to the early days of independence in the mid-1960s. The opposition to his government was systematically persecuted and its remnants forced into exile in neighbouring countries, particularly Zambia and Tanzania. The exiled opposition was weak and divided, and was rendered ineffective through constant harassment by Banda's agents (Sommerville and Mhango 1983). The current phase of the democratic movement that led to the removal of the Banda government was born in March of 1992 when the seven Catholic Bishops in Malawi distributed a Lenten Letter attacking the government and calling on Malawians to work for change (La Marche 1992). This letter sparked off the first ever anti-Banda demonstrations. Labour leader, Chakufwa Chihana, then came to prominence when he seized the opportunity of open dissent precipitated by the Bishop's letter. Subsequently, he received a mandate from a meeting of Malawian dissidents which he attended in Zambia to return home and organize a national conference on democracy. His immediate arrest on returning to Malawi gave considerable impetus to the democracy

movement, resulted in the birth of the Alliance for Democracy (AFORD) which had the Northern Region as its power base (on account of the fact that Chakufa Chihana was from the North), and eventually brought down the Banda regime.

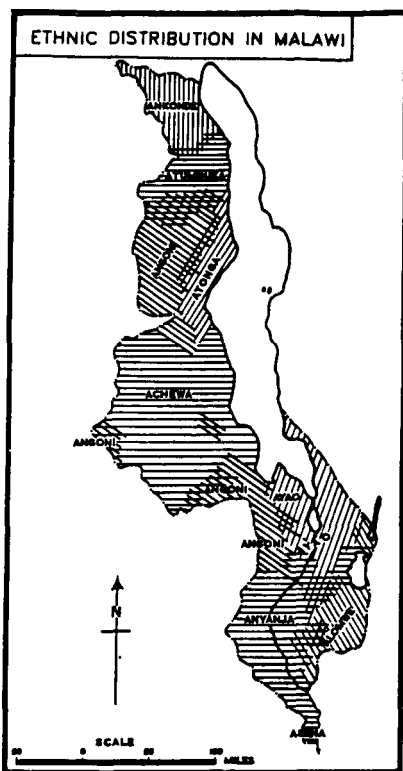
Shortly after the formation of Chihana's AFORD, other political organisations began to form along regional lines. Of significance among the lot was the United Democratic Front (UDF) founded by a group of renowned ex-government ministers and MCP leaders all of whom had fallen out with Dr. Banda at one time or another and had been sacked or jailed (Sommerville 1993). Among the prominent figures in the UDF was Aleke Banda (no relation to Dr. Banda) who had been a youthful MCP political prodigy in the 1960s and 1970s only to fall from grace when he was tipped as a possible successor to Banda; Edward Bwanali, who was regional minister for the Southern Region but fell out of favour in the late 1980s after suspicion that he had advocated political reforms; and Bakili Muluzi who was one of the prominent ministers removed from the Banda government as MCP Administrative Secretary after Zambian newspapers speculated that he could succeed President Banda (Sommerville 1993). Muluzi later emerged as the leader of UDF. Due to the past connection of the UDF leaders with the Banda Government, the party became known as MCP2. It enjoyed strong following from the Southern Region. Because the Southern Region accounts for almost 50 percent of Malawi's population, the UDF soon emerged as the strongest opposition group in the country. A number of smaller pressure groups also mushroomed throughout the country. (Zelesa 1996).

### **The Making of "Super Ethnic" Regions?**

In the multiparty elections held in May 1994, Dr. Banda, the last prominent ruler in the generation of African leaders who replaced the colonialists, graciously conceded defeat and handed power over to the then president elect Bakili Muluzi of UDF (Keller 1994; Ransdell 1994). A spatial analysis of the presidential and parliamentary votes shows a similar geographic pattern as that of the referendum vote held in June 1993. It is clear from the data presented in this paper that *region* rather than *ethnicity per se*, was a critical factor that influenced the way people voted. The task of this paper is to show why regional identities influenced how the people voted.

I use the term *super-ethnic region* as an explanatory variable. Malawi is a conglomeration of 15 different ethnic groups, none of which can claim to be in the majority. Some of the ethnic groups are found in all three regions as enclaves. For example, the Ngoni groups are found in parts of the Central and Northern Regions (see Figure 1). When the Chewa of the Central Region and related ethnic groups in the Southern Region (the Mang'anja) are lumped together they form a majority, known as the Maravi complex. Although small in number, the Tumbuka ethnic group dominates the Northern Region, where their language has become the *lingua*

*franca*. It is nonetheless wrong to regard every person from this region as a Tumbuka because there are other equally significant ethnic groups. The Tonga, the Nyakusya, the Ngonde, etc. are not Tumbuka yet they are generally considered to be part of the Tumbuka complex. (Figure 1) The Banda regime was largely responsible for encouraging the formation of this super-ethnic identity called the Tumbuka.



**Figure 1:** Malawi: Ethnic Distribution

**Source:** Pike, J. G. and Rimmington, G. T. 1965. *Malawi: A Geographical Study*. London: Oxford University Press.

Surely colonial policies played a part in this by providing justification for the policies of the Banda government. The Northern Region, for example, enjoyed much greater access to education than the rest of the country; and to date it enjoys the highest literacy rate. It was partly due to this that the Banda government felt

threatened by northerners whom he branded as the cause of Malawi's political and economic problems. As Chirwa (1994) notes people from the north were politically ostracised and persecuted as a consequence. This forced them to stick together for a common cause. The image that the regime painted of them as scape-goats for the problems of Malawian society, and as people who were always pursuing the development of their region at the expense of others exposed them increasingly to resentment by people from other regions, which further strengthened the determination of such diverse groups in the north as "the Ngonde, Tonga, Tumuka and (the) northern Ngoni to feel a common tie to their area ..." (USAID 1977). The peoples of the Southern Region were also obliged by similar policies and circumstances to develop a sense of common identity despite their ethnic heterogeneity.

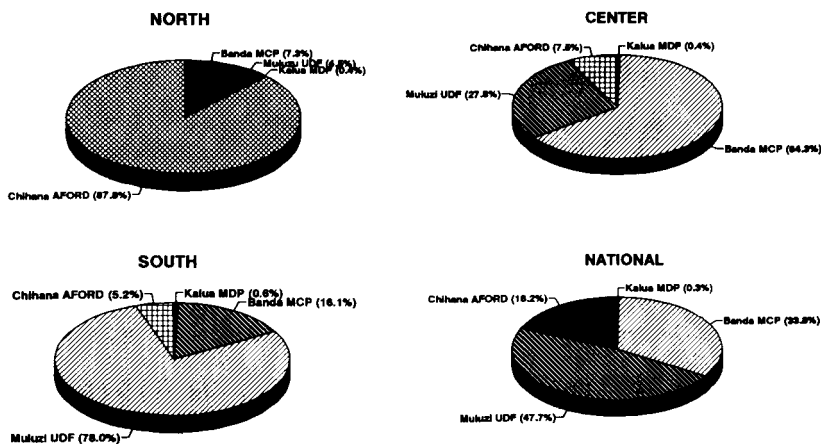
By the time the Banda government was superseded, three super-ethnic groups had crystallised; each of these occupied almost a distinct region from the other. These are the Tumbuka of the Northern Region; the Chewa of the Central Region; and the Yao, Lomwe, Mang'nja and Sena of the Southern Region. The politics of the referendum and the multi-party elections brought to the fore such deep seated regional consciousness.

### **The Regional Factor in the Election**

Perhaps the most tangible impact of the resolve of the people of Malawi and the international community was felt in the results of the June 14, 1993 referendum. Some 63% of the voters voted for the creation of a multi-party system (Dzimhiri 1994). Turnout was very high particularly in urban areas where people had no qualms about defying the government. Even where the control of the MCP and its para-military Young Pioneers was still relatively tight, people were less prepared than in the past to obey the chiefs and elders, who tried to influence how the people should vote. The results of the referendum, showed some disturbing signs. Surely the results were a clear victory for multi-party system of government, with 63 percent of the voters preferring a change of the system, and 37 percent voting for a single party state. But more especially the referendum vote also went along regional lines. The North and the South voted overwhelmingly for a change in the political system. Of the 444,196 who voted in the Northern Region, 392,569 or 84.4 percent voted for a multi-party system; in the most populous Southern Region, the figure was 1,201,195 out of 1,438,371, or about 83.5 percent in favor of a multi-party system (Chirwa 1994). The Central Region voted overwhelmingly for the continuation of the status quo with 832,413 out of 1,270,881, or 65.5 percent in favor of a single-party state. Some districts in the Northern and Southern Regions produced majorities of more than ninety-five percent for multi-party democracy. Blantyre the most populous city in the country voted ninety percent in favour of change. It was only in the Central Region, home of Dr. Banda and some of his more powerful ministers such as Mr. John Tembo, that the majority voted for the single

party system of government. One area, Dowa in the Central Region, voted ninety-five percent in favor of one-party rule.

The presidential and parliamentary elections which were held in 1994 replicated the results of the referendum. The results of the presidential elections are summarized in Table 1 and Figure 2 and those of the parliamentary elections are in Table 2 and Figure 3. Four candidates from four parties contested the presidential elections, namely, the incumbent President Banda of the Malawi Congress Party (MCP), Muluzi of the United Democratic Front (UDF); Chakufa Chihana of the Alliance for Democracy and Kamlepo Kalua of the Malawi Democratic Party (MDP). A total of eight parties (including the four listed above) contested the parliamentary elections.

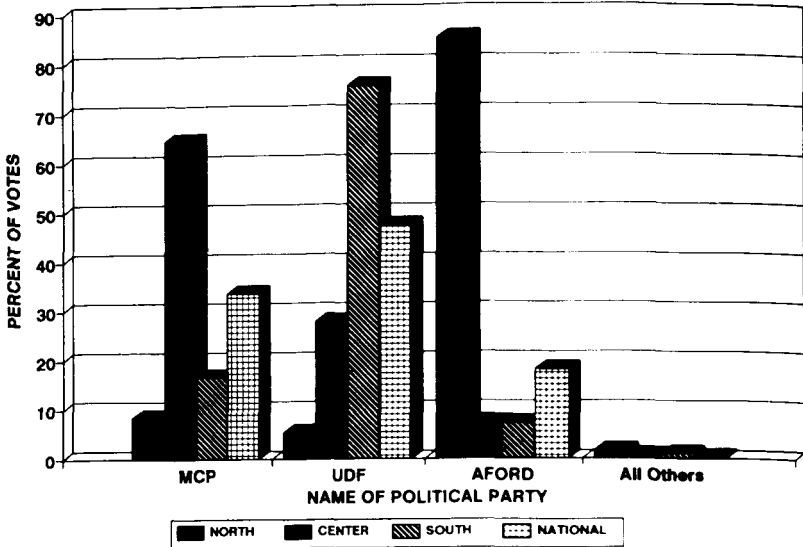


**Figure 2:** Malawi: 1994 Presidential Election Results by Region.

**Source:** Author, data from Malawi Government, 1994. *The Malawi Government Gazette* Volume XXXI No. 40, 24 June 1994, pp. 267-282.

In the Northern Region, Chihana of AFORD emerged as the winner taking 88 percent of the votes cast, followed by Dr. Banda with 7.3 percent of the votes, and Muluzi who secured only 4.5 percent of the votes. In the Central Region, Banda surprisingly received only 64.3 percent of the votes. He had expected to do much better than this; but the assassination of Ministers Dick Matenje, Aaron Gadama, Twaibu Sangala and member of parliament, David Chiwanga in 1983 were still very fresh in the minds of the voters, particularly in the home districts of the assassinated ministers, namely, Ntcheu, Kasungu and Dedza districts (Malawi 1994). Muluzi of the UDF garnered a respectable 27.8 percent of the votes in the Central Region and Chihana matched Banda's 7.3 percent of the Northern votes by

### 1994 PARLIAMENTARY ELECTION RESULTS BY REGION IN MALAWI



**Figure 3:** Malawi: 1994 Parliamentary Election Results by Region

**Source:** Source: Author, data from Malawi Government, 1994. *The Malawi Government Gazette* Volume XXXI No. 40. 24 June 1994, pp. 267-282.

grabbing 7.5 percent of the votes cast in the Central Region. In the Southern Region Muluzi emerged as the winner with 78 percent of the votes compared to Dr. Banda's 16 percent of the votes and Chihana's 5 percent of the votes. Kamlepo Kalua of the MDP did poorly in all three regions with 0.4 percent in the North, 0.5 percent in the Central and 0.6 percent in the South.

Although Muluzi took the prize from Dr. Banda, given the intensity of resentment against Dr. Banda and the Malawi Congress Party throughout the country, the votes at the national level were not humiliating for Dr. Banda. While Muluzi obtained 47.2 percent of the total vote, Dr. Banda received 33.5 percent with Chakufa Chihana coming a distant third with 18 percent of the vote, and Kamlepo Kalua polling an insignificant 0.3 percent (Figure 2). The parliamentary elections as shown in Table 2 and Figure 3 followed more or less the same regional pattern as the presidential elections. As Chirwa (1994) notes, out of the 177 seats in parliament, AFORD won 36 seats, almost all of them from the North and only three from border constituencies in the Central Region; the MCP won 56 seats, 51 of them from the Central Region and 5 from the Southern Region; UDF won a total of 85 seats — 12 seats in the Central Region and 73 in the Southern Region.

**Table 1. Malawi: 1994 Presidential General Elections Results by Region**

Name of Candidate & Political Party	North Votes	Center Votes	South Votes	National Votes	North % of Votes	Center % of Votes	South % of Votes	National % of Votes
Banda MCP	33,650	743,739	218,964	966,353	7.30	64.31	16.09	33.45
Muluzi UDF	20,837	321,581	1,062,336	1,404,754	4.52	27.81	78.04	47.16
Chihana AFORD	404,837	86,766	71,259	562,862	87.80	7.50	5.23	18.00
Kalua MDP	1,754	5,161	8,709	15,624	0.38	0.45	0.64	0.32
Valid Votes	461,078	1,156,539	1,361,268	2,978,885	98.64	97.56	98.09	97.97
Null and Void	6,341	28,977	26,462	61,780	1.36	2.44	1.91	2.03
Total Votes Cast	467,419	1,185,516	1,387,730	3,040,665	85.73	81.12	78.46	80.54
Total Registered	545,195	1,461,367	1,768,694	3,775,256	14.44	38.71	46.85	100.00

Source: Malawi Government, 1994. *The Malawi Government Gazette* Volume XXXI No. 40, 24th June 1994, pp. 267-282.

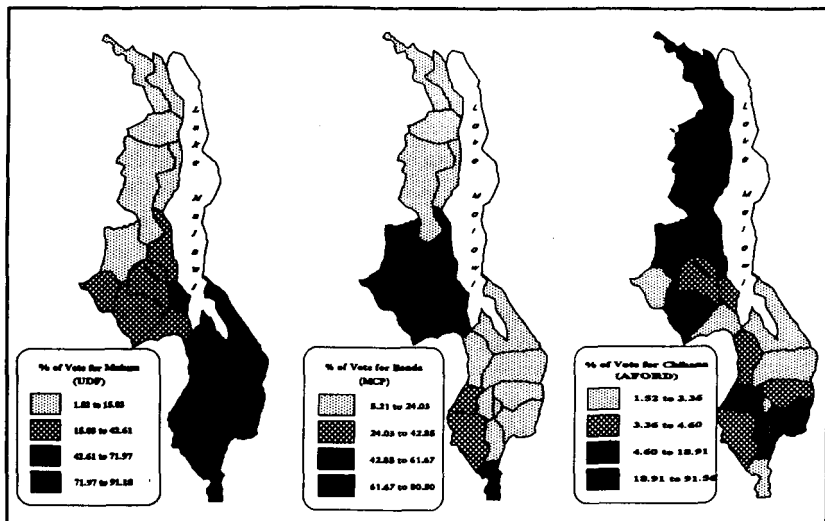
**Table 2. Malawi: 1994 Parliamentary General Elections Results by Region**

Name of Political Party	North Votes	Center Votes	South Votes	National Votes	North % of Votes	Center % of Votes	South % of Votes	National % of Votes
MCP	37,291	732,824	225,932	996,047	8.24	64.4	16.46	33.61
UDF	24,039	315,143	1,036,696	1,375,878	5.31	27.69	75.51	46.43
AFORD	384,618	82,132	96,667	563,417	84.94	7.22	7.04	19.01
All Others	6,850	7,868	13,552	28,270	1.51	0.69	0.99	0.95
Valid Votes	452,798	1,137,967	1,372,847	2,963,612	98.53	97.39	97.59	97.65
Null and Void	6,758	30,506	33,942	71,188	1.47	2.61	2.41	2.35
Total Votes Cast	459,556	1,168,473	1,406,771	3,034,800	84.29	79.96	79.54	80.39
Total Registered	545,195	1,461,367	1,768,694	3,775,256	14.44	38.71	46.85	100.00

**Source:** Malawi Government, 1994. *The Malawi Government Gazette* Volume XXXI No. 40, 24th June 1994, pp. 267-282.

## Ethnicity or Regionalism

When the district level votes shown in Table 3 is mapped and a one-way analysis of variance conducted, the results yield some interesting patterns in as far as regional polarization is concerned. Figure 4 shows a choropleth map of each candidate's votes by district grouped into 4 categories as shown in the legend. Note



**Figure 4:** Malawi: 1994 Presidential General Elections Results by District and Region

**Source:** Author, data from Malawi Government, 1994. *The Malawi Government Gazette* Volume XXXI No. 40, 24th June 1994, pp. 267-282.

that due to the insignificant nature of the votes garnered by Kamlempo Kalua a map for him is not included. Essentially the votes for each candidate were ranked in ascending order and divided into four groups with the first group containing the 6 districts in which the candidate did extremely poorly; the second category contains the next 6 districts in which the candidate did moderately well; and so on. For each candidate there is a clustering of districts in which each one of them excelled. For example, Muluzi did extremely well in Mangochi, Ntcheu, Machinga, Chiradzulu, Zomba and Blantyre. One characteristic of these districts is the large proportion of the Yao people, Muluzi's ethnic group. He also had a reasonably good showing in other districts of the Southern and Central Region but did poorly in the Northern Districts.

The second map shows the spatial patterning of the votes gained by Dr. Banda and his Malawi Congress Party. He did extremely well in the Chewa stronghold

cluster in the Districts of Mchinji, Kasungu, Lilongwe, Dowa, Dedza and Ntchisi. He also did reasonably well in Nsanje, Chikwawa and Mwanza districts in the Southern Region. These districts contain large numbers of the Mang'anja group that speak a similar language to Chichewa called Nyanja and can easily associate with Dr. Banda's origin in terms of culture. Dr. Banda's good showing in Nsanje can be explained by the fact that this is the home district of the MCP vice president, Mr. Gwanda Chakuamba. In contrast, Chihana took all of the Northern districts with a reasonably good showing in Lilongwe, Blantyre and other parts of the Southern Region.

When a one-way analysis of variance is conducted for each candidate with *Region* as the *class variable* and the data in Table 3 is examined in greater detail, it becomes very clear that AFORD's popular base is the narrowest in terms of the regional distribution of its electoral support while the MCP and UDF can lay claim to a semblance of being national political parties. In the one-way analysis of variance (Table 4), the mean of the votes garnered by each candidate in each region by district is computed. For example, Dr. Banda got, on a district average, 5.9 percent in the North, 47.12 percent in the Central and 15.57 in the South. The question is whether the differences between the mean for each of the 3 presidential candidates are statistically significant. The F ratios and the associated probability values in Table 4 indicate that all the three major parties are regionally polarized but that the levels of polarization are significantly different from each other. For example, the F ratio for Chihana's vote is a massive 720.58 while Banda's is only 26.24, and Muluzi 32.84. Although all three are statistically significant at the 5 percent level of significance, the F ratios imply that UDF and MCP (particularly MCP) are well represented throughout the other regions, which is not the case with AFORD. We also computed the F statistic for Kamlepo Kalua and found that, although he gained insignificant results, these are nationally representative. The F ratio was 2.72 and the associated probability value was 0.0892 indicating that on average he scored the same percentage of the votes cast in the Northern, the Central and Southern Regions. In other words, the MDP showed no strong regional identification, and can be considered a broad-based national political party; but it is now too weak to make any significant political impact, especially in elections.

### **Prospects for 'Nationalisation'**

In spite of these historically determined political formations and voting patterns recent developments suggest the possibility of changes towards the emergence of political parties with a more national support base and appeal, and consequently less regionally determined voting behaviour. Already the MCP appears to be penetrating the North. In a recent parliamentary by-election in a Mzimba district constituency, Banda's MCP won the contested seat. Indeed when one examines the presidential votes at the constituency level, Chihana performed best in areas where

**Table 3: Malawi: 1994 Presidential General Elections Results by District and Region**

District	Registered Voters	Number Voting	Null and void votes	Total valid Votes	Votes for Muluzi	Votes for Chihana	Votes for Banda	Votes for Kalua	Voter Turnout %	Votes for Muluzi %	Votes for Chihana %	Votes for Banda %	Votes for Kalua %
<b>NORTH</b>	545,195	467,419	6,341	461,078	20,837	404,837	33,650	1,754	85.73	4.52	87.80	7.30	0.38
Chitupa	53,462	45,961	528	45,433	828	40,098	4,351	156	85.97	1.82	88.26	9.58	0.34
Karonga	81,501	71,510	1,470	70,040	2,023	64,121	3,647	249	87.74	2.89	91.55	5.21	0.35
Mzimba	272,908	236,948	2,833	233,115	10,487	202,865	18,999	764	86.82	4.50	87.02	8.15	0.33
Nkhata Bay	72,051	60,042	932	59,110	4,993	50,053	3,672	392	83.33	8.45	84.68	6.21	0.66
Rumphi	62,273	53,958	578	53,380	2,506	47,700	2,981	193	86.65	4.69	89.36	5.58	0.36
<b>CENTRAL</b>	1,461,367	1,185,516	28,977	1,156,539	321,581	86,766	743,739	5,161	81.12	27.81	7.50	64.31	0.45
Dedza	182,812	135,302	4,732	130,570	34,307	2,980	93,488	503	74.01	26.27	2.28	71.60	0.39
Dowa	148,090	121,262	3,037	118,252	17,779	4,344	95,178	834	81.88	15.03	3.67	80.49	0.71
Kasungu	180,462	146,732	2,947	143,785	15,126	27,186	94,249	601	81.31	10.52	18.91	65.55	0.42
Lilongwe	457,595	391,566	8,159	383,407	77,509	29,856	274,739	1,303	85.57	20.22	7.79	71.66	0.34
Mchinji	124,806	99,245	2,242	97,003	25,983	3,156	67,452	412	79.52	26.79	3.25	69.54	0.42
Nkhotakota	87,841	74,455	1,737	72,718	27,526	11,056	33,867	269	84.76	37.85	15.20	46.57	0.37
Ntcheu	129,918	99,474	2,485	96,989	69,801	3,543	23,057	588	76.57	71.97	3.65	23.77	0.61
Ntchisi	56,693	45,502	1,566	43,936	13,561	1,516	28,637	222	80.26	30.87	3.45	65.18	0.51
Salima	92,950	71,978	2,072	69,906	33,366	3,039	33,072	429	77.44	47.73	4.35	47.31	0.61
<b>SOUTH</b>	1,768,694	1,387,730	26,462	1,361,268	1,062,336	71,259	218,964	8,709	78.46	78.04	5.23	16.09	0.64
Blantyre	267,599	221,367	3,212	218,155	171,088	17,144	28,682	1,241	82.72	78.42	7.86	13.15	0.57
Chikwawa	121,315	92,019	2,197	89,822	50,981	3,019	34,615	1,207	75.85	56.76	3.36	38.54	1.34
Chiradzulu	98,812	69,129	1,337	67,792	60,372	1,045	6,097	278	69.96	89.05	1.54	8.99	0.41
Machinga	258,699	218,160	4,184	213,980	195,082	3,244	14,835	819	84.33	91.17	1.52	6.93	0.38
Mangochi	256,162	207,710	0	207,710	184,230	6,871	15,571	1,038	81.09	88.70	3.31	7.50	0.50
Mulanje	257,006	170,594	5,733	164,861	109,975	19,495	34,347	1,044	66.38	66.71	11.83	20.83	0.63
Mwanza	49,192	39,245	1,255	37,990	26,232	1,747	9,550	461	79.78	69.05	4.60	25.14	1.21
Nsanje	71,305	58,043	1,968	56,075	23,891	1,607	29,658	919	81.40	42.61	2.87	52.89	1.64
Thyolo	174,357	134,748	3,441	131,307	94,459	10,060	26,095	693	77.28	71.94	7.66	19.87	0.53
Zomba	214,253	176,711	3,135	173,576	152,649	7,117	19,514	1,009	82.48	87.94	4.10	11.24	0.58
<b>NATIONAL</b>	3,772,062	3,041,661	61,780	2,978,912	1,404,754	562,862	996,353	15,624	80.54	47.16	18.89	33.45	0.52

Source: Malawi Government, 1994. *The Malawi Government Gazette* Volume XXXI No. 40, 24th June 1994, pp. 267-282.

**Table 4: One-Way Analysis of Variance for the Presidential Vote**

Candidate	Region	No. of Districts	Mean % of votes by	Standard Deviation	Min. % vote	Max. % vote	F Statistic	Prob. value
Muluzi (UDF)	North	5	3.77	2.04	1.55	6.93	32.84	0.0001
	Central	9	24.64	13.92	8.38	53.73		
	South	10	56.94	14.25	33.51	75.41		
Banda (MCP)	North	5	5.89	1.56	4.47	8.13	26.24	0.0001
	Central	9	47.12	14.28	17.75	64.27		
	South	10	15.57	11.57	5.73	41.59		
Chihana (AFord)	North	5	74.82	3.42	69.46	78.68	720.58	0.0001
	Central	9	5.55	4.92	1.63	15.06		
	South	10	3.64	2.22	1.06	7.58		
Kalua (MNDP)	North	5	0.34	0.11	0.28	0.54	2.72	0.0892
	Central	9	0.38	0.10	0.28	0.56		
	South	10	0.60	0.35	0.28	1.29		

**Source:** Author, data from Malawi Government, 1994. *The Malawi Government Gazette* Volume XXXI No. 40, 24th June 1994, pp. 267-282.

the Presbyterian Church was very strong and did poorly in Ngoni strongholds, for one reason or another. The two districts in the Northern Region that Banda got the most votes from are mainly Mzimba and Karonga areas. This shows that even in the Northern Region there are internal cleavages which could be easily exploited by the two major political parties, MCP and UDF, to advantage.

Other developments since the 1996 elections also confirm the possibility that the major political parties could capture the Northern Regions to make them more national organisations. The imperative to penetrate the Northern Region has come from the weakness of Chihana's AFORD which has exposed the Northern Region, his principal political base, as a juicy political prize to be won by the major political parties. Indeed the AFORD has moved from one alliance to another, unable to bargain for a secure political position. It first went into uneasy alliance with MCP and then the UDF, what observers have called political trolloping. When President Bakili Muluzi initially refused to form a government of national unity and, with the exception of the vice presidency, offered most important cabinet positions in his government to southerners, AFORD declined the three junior ministries which were offered. Rather than accepting a junior position in a partnership with the UDF, the AFORD went into the most improbable alliance with MCP, a political party that the AFORD leadership had previously nicknamed the "party of death". For a while the opposition boasted a total of 91 seats in parliament versus the ruling UDF's 86 seats. When the public response from his northern base was hostile, and fearing a massive desertion by AFORD supporters, the AFORD leadership switched part-

ners and now wanted to join the UDF government under the same terms they had previously rejected. Significantly, the collapse of the UDF/AFORD alliance ushered in a veritable process of disintegration of the AFORD leadership.<sup>1</sup> At least, the successful revolt of a section of the AFORD leadership is indicative of the ease with which the UDF, for example, could penetrate the Northern Region and break the AFORD's current electoral monopoly by exploiting the loyalty of the AFORD defectors.

## **Conclusion**

The 1994 referendum vote and the presidential and parliamentary multi-party election results reveal the regional polarization of electoral support in Malawi. Regionally based super-ethnic identities rather than ethnic identities *per se* appear to be the principal factor shaping voting patterns in the context of multi-party politics. As Werbner (1993) notes regarding the Botswana democratic experience, elites have historically secured wealth through their access to political power, which allows them to retribalize and neopatrimonize the political landscape within self-serving political frameworks. This appears to be happening in Malawi [Chirwa 1994] where elite competition for political power is aimed at securing access to state controlled scarce resources which would enable them to consolidate their political power base through political patronage. In the process new identities are being constructed: the old traditional structure of *tribe* has been transformed into a spatial unit among which regional identities are the most salient (Grundy 1985; Werbner 1993; Bratton and van de Walle 1994). The prospect for political stability in Malawi will depend decisively on how claims arising from such regional identities are, on one hand carefully balanced against one another; and on the other hand knitted into a functional harmony in order to deepen the growth of a stable Malawian national identity.

## **Notes**

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- 1. A number of AFORD ministers refused to resign from the Muluzi government following the collapse of the UDF/AFORD alliance.

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