

**DETERMINANTS OF ELECTORAL SHIFTS IN MALAWI: A STUDY OF
NKHATABAY SOUTH EAST CONSTITUENCY (1994-2014)**

MASTER OF ARTS (POLITICAL SCIENCE) THESIS

BENSON BVUTO MAKHUYULA

UNIVERSITY OF MALAWI

DECEMBER 2021



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(1994-2014)

MASTER OF ARTS (POLITICAL SCIENCE) THESIS

By

BENSON BVUTO MAKHUYULA

BA (Journalism) – University of Malawi

Submitted to the Department of Political and Administrative Studies, Faculty of
Social Sciences in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts (Political Science)

UNIVERSITY OF MALAWI

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DECLARATION

I, the undersigned, hereby declare that this dissertation is my own original work which has not been submitted to any other institution for similar purposes. Where other peoples' work has been used acknowledgement has been made.

BENSON BVUTO MAKHUYULA

Full Legal Name

Signature

Date

CERTIFICATE OF APPROVAL

The undersigned certify that this thesis represents the student's own work and effort and has been submitted with our approval.

Signature: _____ Date: _____

BONIFACE DULANI, PhD (Associate Professor)

Supervisor

Signature: _____ Date: _____

HAPPY MICKSON KAYUNI, PhD (Professor)

Co-supervisor

DEDICATION

This thesis is a dedication to my uncle, the late Welton Bota. Uncle Welton was a very strict disciplinarian. His strict moral code forced on us during our childhood days was the root of my present successes, especially in the area of education.

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ABSTRACT

This study sought to investigate factors behind persistent cases of electoral shifts in certain constituencies in Malawi. Specifically, the study examined the role of political sophistication and political disaffection. Studies in Europe and North America have shown that electoral shifts tend to occur among voters who are politically sophisticated and politically dissatisfied. Using qualitative methods of inquiry, the study sought to investigate the extent to which these observations could hold true for Malawi. The study was conducted in Nkhatabay South East constituency in the northern part of Malawi and it involved thirty purposively selected individuals. The generation of data was done through focus group interviews, key informant interviews, and documentary reviews. Data analysis was done manually and involved the use of both deductive and inductive approaches. The study findings showed that the majority of the respondents were politically sophisticated and politically dissatisfied. The results demonstrate the efficacy of political sophistication and political disaffection in explaining changes in electoral preferences among the investigated group. However, the study findings fall short of being generalisable because the study was basically an exploratory one and that it was confined to only one constituency. In addition, only few purposively selected respondents were involved in the study. A comprehensive study is, therefore, needed in order to have a broader understanding of vote switching in Malawi.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT.....	vi
TABLE OF CONTENTS.....	vii
LIST OF FIGURES	xi
LIST OF TABLES.....	xii
LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS.....	xiv
CHAPTER ONE	1
INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND TO THE PROBLEM.....	1
1.1 Introduction	1
1.2 Background to the Problem.....	2
1.3 Problem Statement	3
1.4 Study Objectives	5
1.4.1 Main Objective.....	5
1.4.2 Specific Objectives	5
1.5 Research Questions	6
1.6 Justification for the Study	6
1.7 Research Design and Methodology.....	7
1.8 Organisation of the Thesis.....	7
1.9 Summary of Chapter One.....	8
CHAPTER TWO	9
LITERATURE REVIEW	9
2.1 Introduction	9
2.2 Voting Behaviour: What It Is	9
2.2.1 Determinants of Voting Behaviour	9
2.2.2 Models of Voting Behaviour	10
2.3 Electoral Shifts: Conceptualisation and Measurement.....	12
2.4. Electoral Shifts From A Global Perspective	12

2.5 Electoral Shifts From A Malawi	14
2.6. Founding Democratic Elections in Malawi.....	14
2.7 From Stability to Instability	17
2.8 Variations in the Level of Electoral Shifts in Malawi.....	18
2.9 Explaining Variations in the level of Electoral Shifts in Malawi	18
2.10 History and Attributes of Political Parties at the Centre of Electoral Shifts	20
2.10.1 Malawi Congress Party (MCP)	20
2.10.2 Alliance for Democracy (AFORD) and the United Democratic Front (UDF).....	21
2.10.3 Republican Party (RP), Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) and Peoples Party (PP).....	21
2.11 Causes of Electoral Shifts in Malawi	23
2.11.1 Political Sophistication.....	24
2.11.2 Political Disaffection	26
2.12 Theoretical Framework	27
2.12.1 Cognitive Mobilisation Theory	28
2.12.2 Frustrated Floating Voter Theory	29
2.13 Summary of Chapter Two	30
CHAPTER THREE	32
RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY	32
3.1 Introduction	32
3.2 Philosophical Underpinnings of the Study.....	32
3.3 Research Design.....	33
3.4 Research Methodology.....	34
3.5 Site of the Study	34
3.6 Population Sampling	35

3.7 Data Collection Methods/Instruments.....	37
3.7.1 Focus Group Interviews.....	37
3.7.2 Key Informant Interviews.....	40
3.7.3 Document Reviews.....	41
3.8 Data Validation and Reliability.....	42
3.9 Data Analysis	42
3.10 Ethical Issues.....	43
3.11 Limitations of the Study.....	43
3.12 Summary of Chapter Three	44
CHAPTER FOUR.....	45
EMPIRICAL RESEARCH FINDINGS	45
4.1 Introduction	45
4.2 Why the Respondents Switch Parties on the Election Day.....	46
4.3 Political Information and Shifts in Party Preferences	49
4.4 Political Sophistication and Party Identification.....	51
4.5 How Vote Switchers Form Party Preferences.....	52
4.8 External Political Efficacy and Shifts in Party Preferences	58
4.9 Summary of Chapter Four.....	60
CHAPTER FIVE	61
ASSESSMENT OF RESULTS.....	61
5.1 Introduction	61
5.2 Empirical Findings and Their Link to Theory	61
5.3 Conclusion.....	66
CHAPTER SIX.....	67
CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS	67
6.1 Introduction	67
6.2 Research Objectives, Findings and Conclusions.....	67

6.3 Recommendations for Future Research	71
REFERENCES	72
APPENDICES	82

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1: Legislative Seat Share among Major Parties in % (1994 and 1999 Elections).....	17
Figure 2: Legislative Seat Share among Parties in Malawi in % (2004, 2009, and 2014 Elections)	17

LIST OF TABLES

Table 1: <i>Electoral Shifts in Malawi as Observed from Three Constituencies</i>	1
Table 2: Regional Share of Legislative Seats Among Parties in Malawi (1994 and 1999 Elections)	16
Table 3: Segmentation of Focus Group Members Based on Their Level of Education	40
Table 4: Why the Investigated Group Switch Parties on the Election Day	49
Table 5: Number of Politically Informed and Uninformed Respondents in %.....	50
Table 6: Number of Party Identifiers among Respondents in %.....	51
Table 7: Things Respondents Look at When Deciding Which Party to Vote For	53
Table 8: Level of Political Trust among the Respondents Expressed in %	54
Table 9: Reasons for Lack of Political Trust among the Respondents	56
Table 10: Why Most Respondents Are Dissatisfied With How Democracy Works in Malawi	57

LIST OF APPENDICES

Appendix 1: Screening Items for the Respondents Based on Elections Results (1994 - 2014), Nkhatabay South East Constituency.....	82
Appendix 2: Focus Group Questionnaire.....	83
Appendix 3: Key Informants Questionnaire.....	84
Appendix 4: Map of Malawi Showing District with Exceptional Cases of Electoral Shifts.....	E
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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AFORD	Alliance for Democracy
DPP	Democratic Progressive Party
JCE	Junior Certificate of Education
MCP	Malawi Congress Party
MEC	Malawi Electoral Commission
MGODE	Movement for Genuine Democracy
MP	Member of Parliament
MSCE	Malawi School Certificate of Education
NDA	National Democratic Alliance
PP	Peoples Party
PPM	Peoples Progressive Movement
RP	Republican Party
SADC	Southern African Development Community
UDF	United Democratic Front

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND TO THE PROBLEM

1.1 Introduction

This study was investigating the factors that are perpetuating cases of electoral shifts in certain constituencies in Malawi. The condition of electoral shifts obtains when a significant portion of the electorate, at some level of aggregation, switches parties from one election to another (Dassonneville, 2015; Lachat, 2007). An analysis of parliamentary election results in Malawi in the years between 1994 and 2014 shows that certain constituencies have been switching parties from one election to another (Malawi Electoral Commission, 2014). While it is normal to switch parties during elections it becomes a puzzle when such shifts tend to occur more often in some constituencies than in others. **Table 1** on page 2 shows some of the constituencies in Malawi with a history of persistent cases of electoral shifts.

Table 1: *Electoral Shifts in Malawi as Observed from Three Constituencies*
(1994-2014)

District	Constituency	Year of Election + Winning Party				
		1994	1999	2004	2009	2014
Nkhatabay	Nkhatabay South East	AFORD	MCP	RP	DPP	PP
Chikwawa	Chikwawa South	UDF	MCP	RP	DPP	PP
Nsanje	Nsanje South West	UDF	MCP	RP	DPP	PP

Source: www.mec.org.mw; www.sdn.org.mw/election

1.2 Background to the Problem

Though electoral shifts have been a recurring phenomenon in certain constituencies in Malawi, relative little is known about the drivers of these shifts. To the best knowledge of this researcher, there has been no any country-specific scholarly inquiry on electoral shifts in Malawi. Instead, research studies that have so far touched on this subject in Malawi have done so just in passing. For example, in his study of electoral volatility which involved 30 Sub-Saharan African countries, Asingo (2009) makes a very brief reference to Malawi. Again, previous related studies in which Malawi was involved have never tackled voter-centred determinants of electoral shifts, the focus of this study. Instead, these studies have emphasized the role of economic and institutional factors. For example, Asingo (already cited above) was investigating the influence of economic conditions on voters' volatility. On the other hand, Ishiyama (2005) was assessing the influence of institutional factors on legislative volatility in a study that involved 31 Sub-Saharan African countries, Malawi inclusive. Ishiyama was particularly interested in the role of electoral systems, ethnic fragmentation and party systems.

Electoral shifts originate at the level of individual behaviour (Bartolin & Mair, 1990) or as Roberts and Wibbels (1999) put it, electoral volatility is a cumulative function of individual vote shifts. It follows therefore that in order to have a better understanding of electoral shifts, studies should also put the voter himself at the centre of analysis. As Asingo (2009) explains, any inquiry about voter volatility that does not incorporate elements of voter behaviour is at best incomplete and at worst inaccurate. In this study, an investigation was made on the link between voters' characteristics

and party switching. The study wanted to find out the extent to which changes in party preferences on the Election Day are influenced by the voters' own characteristics.

Electoral research in Western Europe and North America has shown that party switching tends to occur among voters who are politically sophisticated and politically dissatisfied (Dassonneville,2015; Willocq,2016; Zelle,1995; Dalton & Weldon,2005;Kuhn,2009;Soderlund,2008). This research study sought to examine the extent to which these observations could hold true for the Malawi scenario.

1.3 Problem Statement

Vote switching is quite essential for the well functioning of a representative democracy like Malawi. Apart from showing the competitiveness and adaptiveness of the political system, vote switching also ensures the responsiveness of the elected leadership (Dassonneville,2015). Politicians are always incentivised to implement policies that citizens want only when a potential threat of being voted out exists. In this way, vote switching can also be looked at as an effective accountability mechanism. Voters will switch parties if they believe that the incumbent has failed to deliver according to their expectations (Dassonneville,2015). Vote switching also helps in ensuring the alternation of government power which is yet another core element of a representative democracy (Dassonneville,2015;Huntington,1991; Cheeseman,2010).

Despite the important role that vote switching plays in a democracy, it is surprising to note that instances of party switching are not so common in Malawi. Based on the analysis of the electoral outcomes referred to earlier in this study, very few constituencies in Malawi switch parties during elections.

Most of the constituencies seem to have strong partisan attachment. Limited cases of party switching have made the alternation of government power quite problematic in Malawi. The country has so far witnessed only two instances of power alternation. The first happened in 1994 when the UDF took over the reigns of power from the MCP during the country's founding democratic elections (Patel,2005;Meinhardt& Patel,2003; Patel & Svasand,2007). The second one happened in 2020 during the fresh presidential elections in which the MCP-led alliance took over government power from the DPP (International Foundation for Electoral Systems [IFES],2020). Between 1994 and 2020, government power was actually in the hands of the same political grouping, first under the banner of UDF and later under DPP.

Another challenge which is associated with party switching in Malawi is the lack of knowledge about the characteristics of voters in the volatile constituencies. It is not known for certain whether voters in volatile constituencies have characteristics that are different from partisan voters as suggested by the electoral research literature (see Dassonneville,2015, 2012). Lack of knowledge about the individual characteristics of vote switchers has the potential of limiting the broader understanding and correct interpretation of the drivers of party switching in Malawi. It has already been demonstrated earlier in this study that economic and institutional factors fail to adequately explain party switching, especially national variations that are experienced in the level of occurrence.

Electoral research in Europe and North America has revealed certain characteristics of voters that are associated with party switching. For example, the research has shown that party switching tends to occur among voters with a high level of political

sophistication and a high senses of political disaffection (Dassonniville,2012, 2014, 2015; Willocq,2016; Kuhn,2009; Dalton,2007;Soderlund,2008; Dalton &Weldon,2005, Zelle,1995).Political sophistication is a condition which is determined by a number of factors which include voters' level of education, exposure to political information, and interest in politics (Lachat,2007; Dalton, 2007). On the other hand, indicators of political disaffection include voters' level of political trust, external political efficacy, and the level of satisfaction with how democracy works in a country (Dalton & Weldon,2005;Zelle,1998). This study wanted to examine the extent to which these observations could hold true for Malawi, Nkhatabay South East constituency.

1.4 Study Objectives

1.4.1 Main Objective

To investigate factors behind persistent cases of electoral shifts in certain constituencies in Malawi, Nkhatabay South East in particular.

1.4.2 Specific Objectives

1. To investigate motivations behind vote switching in Nkhatabay South East constituency
2. To investigate the influence of political information on electoral shifts in Nkhatabay South East constituency.
3. To inquire into how voters in Nkhatabay South East constituency form their party preferences
4. To investigate the influence of political trust on electoral shifts in Nkhatabay South East constituency
5. To inquire into the level of satisfaction with how democracy works in Malawi in Nkhatabay South East constituency

6. To inquire into the influence of external political efficacy on electoral shifts in Nkhatabay South East constituency

1.5 Research Questions

1. What could be the personal motives behind vote switching in Nkhatabay South East constituency?
2. To what extent does exposure to political information influence electoral shifts in Nkhatabay South East constituency
3. How do voters in Nkhatabay South East form their party preferences?
4. To what extent does the level of political trust influence electoral shifts in Nkhatabay South East constituency?
5. To what extent does one's level of satisfaction with how democracy works influence electoral shifts in Nkhatabay South East constituency?
6. To what extent does external political efficacy influence electoral Shifts in Nkhatabay South East constituency?

1.6 Justification for the Study

Voter-centred approaches have not been so popular with studies on electoral shifts in Africa, Malawi in particular. Where they have been used the emphasis has not been on the individual characteristics of voters but instead on the peoples living conditions (Asingo,2009). Thus, generally there exists a knowledge gap in the literature on the efficacy of voter-centred explanatory variables. Notwithstanding its exploratory nature as well its limited scope, this study was relevant as its findings will help to illuminate reasons that might often lead to variations in the level of electoral shifts in the study will help complement the existing electoral research literature on the subject of electoral volatility in Malawi and elsewhere.

1.7 Research Design and Methodology

This was a qualitative case study. The researcher opted for this design in order to have an in-depth understanding of the issue under investigation (electoral shifts). An in-depth understanding of an issue is always possible with a case study approach due to a number of reasons. Firstly, as Zainal (2007) explains, a case study usually involves a small geographical area and a limited number of participants. In this study, the researcher covered only one constituency (Nkhatabay South East) and engaged only 30 purposively selected participants. Secondly, according to Yin (2003), a case study takes place in the natural setting of a phenomenon and it uses multiple sources of evidence. This study took place in Nkhatabay South East constituency, one of the constituencies in Malawi with a history of persistent cases of electoral shifts. The study also used a triangulation of methods to generate the data.

1.8 Organisation of the Thesis

This dissertation is made up of six chapters. The first chapter contains an introduction to the study. The chapter introduces the issue under investigation providing reasons as to why the inquiry was necessary. It also outlines objectives of the study. The second chapter contains literature review, empirical as well as theoretical. The third chapter is a discussion of the research methods that were used to generate and analyse data. Chapter four presents empirical findings of the study while chapter five makes an assessment of these findings with regard to how they relate to the theory. Finally, chapter six presents the main conclusions of the study as well as recommendations for further studies.

1.9 Summary of Chapter One

This chapter was mainly an introduction to the research problem (determinants of electoral shifts in Malawi). The chapter exposed deficiencies in the previous related studies with regard to the role of voters' characteristics in electoral shifts in Malawi. In addition, chapter one offered a description of the research problem, outlined the objectives of the study, and explained the structure of the dissertation. Finally, the chapter provided a brief description of the research design and methodology.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

This chapter offers an appraisal of previous related studies which were done in Europe and North America. The chapter touches on a number of issues as follows: definitions of voting behaviour, determinants of voting behaviour in democratic systems, mainstream models of voting behaviour, definitions and measurement of electoral shifts, electoral shifts from a global and Malawian perspective, and history and attributes of political parties which were involved in electoral shifts in certain constituencies in Malawi. The chapter also examines main debates in the electoral research literature on the determinants of electoral shifts. Finally, the chapter discusses two theories in which the study was anchored.

2.2 Voting Behaviour: What It Is

Akhter and Sheik (2014) have defined voting behavior as a field of study which is concerned with the ways in which people tend to vote in public elections and reasons why they vote as they do. On the other hand, Rosema (2004) understands voting behaviour as “a vote cast by a certain individual in a specific election for (a candidate of) a particular party.” This study understands voting behaviour from the viewpoints of both schools of thought because they complement each other.

2.2.1 Determinants of Voting Behaviour

Voters are influenced by a number of contextual factors in their electoral decisions. One of these factors revolves around economic conditions. As Duch (2001) explains, voters often decide which party or candidate to vote for based on their perceptions of economic performance. “They tend to punish incumbents who fail to deliver

acceptable economic outcomes and reward governments which meet their expectations,” Duch observes. Apart from economic conditions, voters may also be influenced by a set of other contextual factors which include ethnicity, religion, region of residence (geography), family ties, and political party affiliation (Agomor& Adams,2014; Heywood,2002). In addition, as Rosema (2004) and Garzia (2011) explain, voters’ electoral preferences may also be influenced by their own perceptions about the personality or character of the candidate, the performance of the incumbent, and their orientation on issues.

2.2.2 Models of Voting Behaviour

Factors that influence voters electoral preferences can generally be explained from two main perspectives: sociological and psychological (Rosema, 2004). The sociological perspective (model) of voting behaviour is associated with the Columbian university researchers prominent among them being Lazarsfeld, Berelson, and McPhee (1954).The sociological model ties voting behaviour to social characteristics or group membership suggesting that voters tend to adopt a voting pattern that reflects the economic and social position of the group to which they belong (Heywood, 2002). The model, therefore, highlights the importance of a social alignment to such things as class, gender, ethnicity, religion, and region of residence (Heywood, 2002). In this way, the sociological model is associated with a stable voting behaviour (partisan voting), that is voting for the same party election after election. As Agomor and Adams (2014) explain, partisan voting suggests that election results will remain unchanged for a very long time.

On the other hand, the psychological model of voting behavior is associated with the Michigan University researchers as represented by Campbell, Converse, Miller and

Stokes (1960). At the heart of the Michigan voting model is the claim that voters have ‘pictures in their heads’ and that these pictures determine whom to vote for (Rosema, 2004). The “pictures” referred to here are voters’ orientation on issues, candidates, and parties, Rosema, explains. There are two sides to the Michigan voting model. On one hand, voters’ choices are determined by their perception about the candidate image and performance evaluation. Voters vote for the party with the most positive evaluation in terms of candidate personality, performance, and party’s positions on issues. On the other hand, the psychological model emphasizes the role of voters’ psychological attachment to parties or party identification when deciding which party to vote for. Party attachment serves as lenses through which politics is perceived [and through which voting decisions are made] (Kuhn, 2009). In electoral politics, party identification is usually associated with a stable voting pattern (Willocq, 2016; Dassonneville, 2015; Lachat, 2007; Dalton, 2007).

As Heywood (2002) explains, party identifiers are long-term supporters who regard the party as their own and who are not easily persuaded to withdraw their support from their preferred party or candidate and to transfer their vote to another party. The psychological model, therefore, offers two categories of voters; on one hand there is a rational voter whose voting decisions are influenced by issues, leader image, and past performance. As will be seen later in this chapter, rational voters are associated with vote switching (electoral volatility). On the other side of the psychological model there is a sincere voter whose voting decisions are influenced by partisan cues such as party affiliation, social class, and family lineages. As mentioned before, partisan voting is associated with a stable voting behaviour (Dassonneville, 2015).

2.3 Electoral Shifts: Conceptualisation and Measurement

This study was intended to investigate the determinants of electoral shifts in certain constituencies in Malawi. The condition of electoral shifts, as earlier observed, obtains when a significant portion of the electorate, at a certain level of aggregation, switches parties between two consecutive elections (Dassonneville, 2012). Electoral shifts denote attitude change towards one's preferred party (Lachat, 2004). A voter opts for a different party instead of his preferred party. However, as Zelle (1995) explains, this switch of parties on the Election Day does not necessarily suggest a switch of allegiance to the new party voted for, instead it is simply a mood of protest towards one's favoured party.

The electoral research literature offers a set of terms all of which signifies a voter's change of party preferences during elections. In this study, these terms are used interchangeably. The terms are as follows; electoral shifts, electoral volatility, vote switching, party switching, shifts in party preferences, electoral fluctuations, electoral support volatility, party support volatility, and voters' volatility. Electoral shifts are measured by changes in the distribution of legislative seats among parties between two consecutive elections (Shair-Rosenfield, 2008). Small changes in the distribution of legislative seats between parties signify low levels of electoral shifts while larger changes are an indication of high levels of electoral volatility (Shair-Rosenfield, 2008).

2.4. Electoral Shifts From A Global Perspective

Shifts in party preferences are experienced in both old and emerging democracies across the globe. Rowe-Jones (2012) has described old democracies as those countries which democratised during Huntington's "First Wave" (1828-1942) and which have

consistently maintained democratic governance up until now. There are 10 countries in this category and these are: Great Britain, Iceland, Australia, Canada, Finland, Ireland, New Zealand, Sweden, Switzerland, and the USA (ibid). Among the First Wave democracies, Britain and the US appear to experience more instances of electoral shifts than others. In Britain, for example, the 2019 British Election Study (BES) reports of the largest switch of voters from Labour to Conservative and Conservative to Labour in the 2010, 2015 and 2017 elections. The US is also known for electoral swing or battleground states which tend to switch parties from one election to another (Landman, 2020). Usually, swing states decide the winner in the US presidential polls.

Though First Wave democracies also experience electoral shifts, electoral shifts tend to be common in Second and Third Wave democracies (Bertoa & Schneider, 2012; Rowe-Jones, 2012; Tavits, 2005; Madrid, 2005). According to Rowe-Jones, Second Wave democracies refer to those countries which democratised in the years between 1943 and 1973 while Third Wave democracies are those democracies which were inaugurated after 1974. There are 18 countries in the Second Wave category, according to Rowe-Jones. These countries include: France, Germany, Italy, Netherlands, Belgium, Denmark, Israel, and Norway. On the other hand, Third Wave democracies include Portugal, Spain, Greece, countries in Latin America, former communist states in Eastern Europe, and African countries (Nur, 2016; Mozaffar, 1997). The literature on electoral research offers a number of explanations on why electoral volatility tends to be high in some democracies and low in others. These explanations are examined later in this chapter.

2.5 Electoral Shifts From Malawi's Perspective

Electoral shifts are relatively a new phenomenon in Malawi. However, coming from a background of a one-party state, this is not surprising. For close to 30 years (1966-1993) Malawi had a one-party system of government in which only the Malawi Congress Party (MCP) was allowed to operate in the country. The adoption of a one-party state was as a result of changes which were made to the republican constitution in 1966 (see Patel & Svasand, 2007; Patel, 2005; Meinhardt & Patel, 2003). The banning of other political parties meant that voters in Malawi had no any other options to choose from when they were faced with an election. Consequently, the issue of party switching was not there in Malawi during this period. However, with the return to multiparty democracy in June 1993 (after a national referendum) things changed in Malawi. The formation of new political parties was now allowed and these parties worked alongside the existing Malawi Congress Party. Notable new parties during the democratization period were the Alliance for Democracy (AFORD) of Chakufwa Chihana and the United Democratic Front (UDF) of Bakili Muluzi (Patel, 2005). Initially, the two parties worked as underground multi-party pressure groups. They were eventually formally registered in 1993 (Patel, 2005). It is important to note here that the re-adoption of multi-party democracy in Malawi, just like in many countries in Sub-Saharan Africa, followed the third wave of democratisation which blew across the region in the 1990s (Mozaffar, 1997; Nur, 2015).

2.6. Founding Democratic Elections in Malawi

In addition to the proliferation of political parties, the holding of periodic elections became yet another defining feature of the new Malawi. Elections are generally considered the fundamental element and the most important activity in democratic systems. As Asingo (2009, p.8) explains, elections offer an institutionalised means of

mass political participation and a basic means by which the people of a democracy bend government to their wishes. Because they provide primary mechanism by which democratic governments obtain the authority to rule (Clark, Golder & Golder, 2013), elections constitute the basis of legitimacy of a government (Maendeleo Policy Forum, 2016).

Malawi held its founding democratic elections in June 1994 in which the main challengers were Dr Kamuzu Banda of the then ruling Malawi Congress Party (MCP), Bakili Muluzi of the United Democratic Front (UDF), and Chakufwa Chihana of the Alliance for Democracy (AFORD) (Patel & Svasand, 2007; Patel, 2005). Muluzi of the UDF won the elections with 47 per cent of the overall cast votes (Patel & Svasand, 2007; Patel, 2005). During this time and up until 2019, elections in Malawi were managed under a single-member plurality electoral system (First Past the Post - FPTP). Under first past the post, a candidate is declared a winner by simply obtaining more votes than any other contestants (Patel & Svasand, 2007, p.85). However, in June 2020 the plurality electoral system was abandoned in favour of a clear majoritarian system. The shift to an absolute majoritarian system was triggered by the constitutional court ruling in February 2020 in which “majority” as for provided for in the Republican Constitution of Malawi was interpreted as being 50 per cent plus one of the valid votes (International Foundation for Electoral Systems [IFES], 2020).

The implication of this ruling was that any future president of Malawi would now be elected by a clear majority.

During the 1994 and 1999 elections, a significant portion of the electorate in Malawi demonstrated a strong partisanship attachment. Partisanship attachment is a term that

describes one's affiliation or identification with a particular political party (Edward & Kindler, 2013). This partisan attachment is evidenced by moderate changes in the regional distribution of legislative seats among the three major political parties of the time - MCP, UDF, and AFORD (see **Table 2** and **Figure 1** below).

Table 2: Regional Share of Legislative Seats Among Parties in Malawi (1994 and 1999 Elections)

Party	1994 Elections				1999 Elections			
	No. of seats won				No. of seats won			
	Northern region	Central Region	Southern Region	Total No of seats won	Northern Region	Central Region	Southern Region	Total no of seats won
AFORD	33	3	0	36	28	1	0	29
MCP	0	51	5	56	4	54	8	66
UDF	0	14	71	85	1	16	77	94
Independents	0	0	0	0	0	1	3	4
Total	33	68	76	177	33	72	88	193

Sources: Lembani, 2014; Malawi Electoral Commission, 1999, 1994

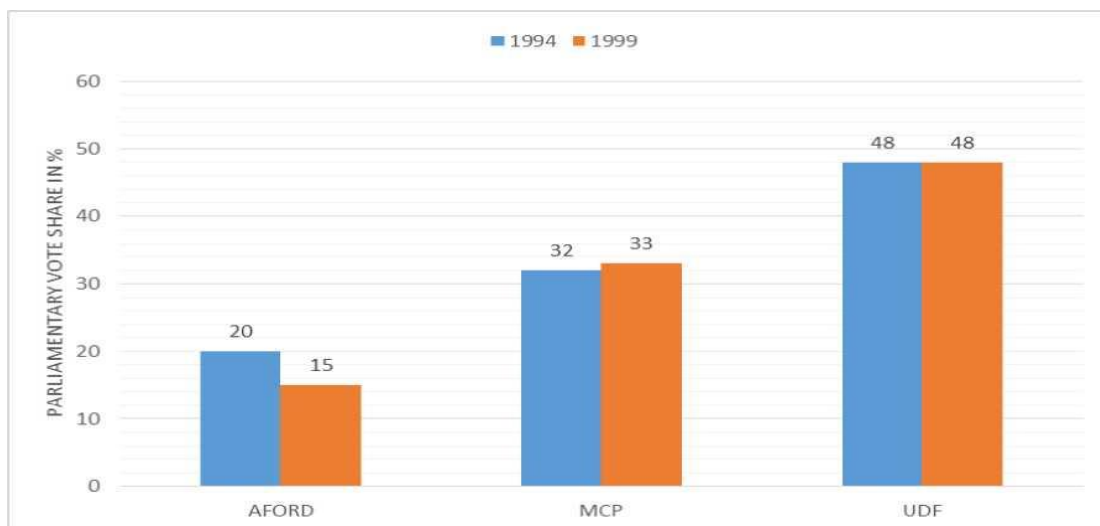


Figure 1: Legislative Seat Share among Major Parties in % (1994 and 1999

Elections). **Sources:** Lembani, 2014; Patel, 2005; Patel &Wahman, 2015.

2.7 From Stability to Instability

The stable voting behaviour which was demonstrated in the 1994 and 1999 elections began to dissipate in later elections (2004, 2009, and 2014). A substantial portion of voters began to float – they began to switch parties during elections. This change in voting behavior is evidenced by significant changes in the regional legislative seat share among political parties (see **Figure 2**).

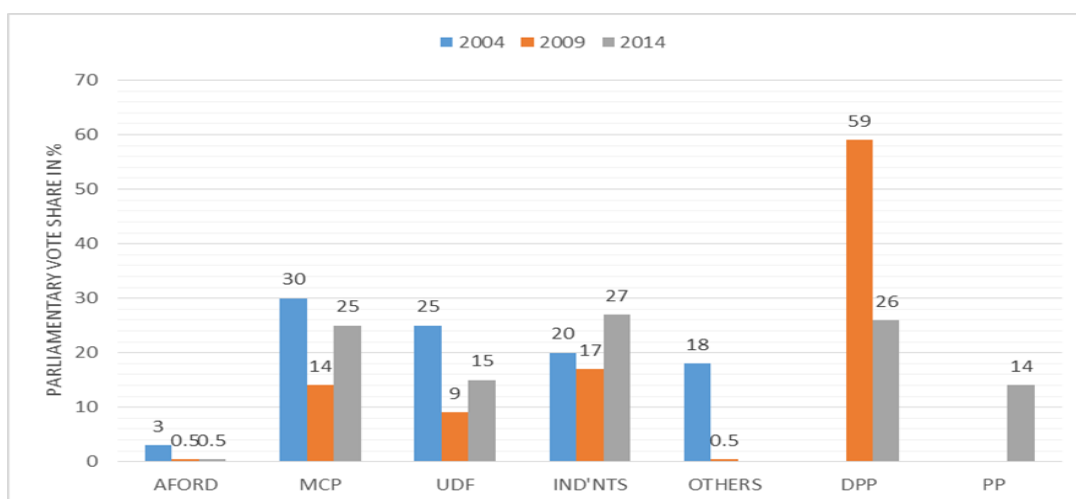


Figure 2: Legislative Seat Share among Parties in Malawi in % (2004, 2009, and 2014 Elections). **Sources:** Lembani, 2014; Patel, 2005; Patel &Wahman, 2015

2.8 Variations in the Level of Electoral Shifts in Malawi

As earlier stated, there have been variations in the occurrence of electoral shifts in Malawi. Some constituencies tend to experience more instances of electoral shifts than others. Notable constituencies with a history of persistent cases of electoral shifts include Nkhatabay South East, Chikwawa South, and Nsanje South West. Nkhatabay South East is found in the lakeshore district of Nkhatabay in the northern part of Malawi while Chikwawa South and Nsanje South West constituencies are found in Chikwawa and Nsanje districts in the southernmost part of Malawi (see **Appendix 4**).

2.9 Explaining Variations in the Level of Electoral Shifts in Malawi

Scholarly inquiries on electoral volatility in Malawi have been so rare and where they have taken place, for example in the case of Asingo (2009) and Ishiyama (2005), only brief references are made to Malawi. Thus, very little is known for certain as to why some electoral districts in the country tend to experience recurring instances of electoral shifts than others. Nonetheless, the fact that incidences of vote switching began to be more pronounced in subsequent elections (2004, 2009, 2014) is quite suggestive. During this period, Malawi was experiencing a reconfiguration of its party system. Major political parties were experiencing breakaways which eventually led to the formation of new political parties (Patel & Svasand, 2007; Lembani, 2006; Patel, 2005). The notable breakaway parties during this period included the Republican Party (RP) of Gwanda Chakuamba, the National Democratic Alliance (NDA) of Brown Mpinganjira, the Movement for Genuine Democracy (MGODE), and the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) of Bingu wa Mutharika (Lembani, 2014).

RP was an MCP fragment, NDA and DPP were UDF splinter groups while MGODE was an AFORD breakaway faction (Patel, 2005, Lembani, 2014).

The literature on electoral volatility cites the presence of too many political parties in the political system as one of the factors that often lead to voters' volatility (Bertoa & Schneider,2012, Dassonneville,2015,2012). The argument here is that with too many political parties voters are presented with a number of options to choose from. Again, the availability of too many political parties is said to reduce ideological and policy differences between parties thus making it easier for voters to transfer votes between parties with similar ideological profile (Dassonneville,2012).

While the fragmented party system thesis does explain why voters may switch parties from one election to another during elections it fails to explain why there are variations in the level of occurrence. For example, the fragmented party system thesis fails to explain why some voters in a country respond to the party system reconfiguration by switching parties and why others remain stable in their party preferences. The skeptic view about the efficacy of the fragmented party system thesis is also shared by some scholars. For example, Asingo (2009) has demonstrated that the presence of new political parties in the political system is not sufficient reason for voters to switch parties during elections. Asingo observes, for example, that in the 2004 elections, a significant number of voters in Malawi opted for independent candidates despite the availability of numerous other options (old as well as new political parties). Institutional factors therefore have limited explanatory efficacy when it comes to electoral volatility especially with regard to variations in the level of occurrence. However, in other regions of the world, Western Europe and North America in particular, electoral research findings have revealed the efficacy of voter-centred approaches in explaining national variations in the occurrence of electoral shifts.

2.10 History and Attributes of Political Parties at the Centre of Electoral Shifts

There were six political parties which were at the centre of electoral shifts in the three volatile constituencies. These parties were: AFORD, MCP, RP, UDF, DPP and PP. A brief account of the history and attributes of these parties is provided below. This account was intended to serve two purposes, firstly to ascertain whether voters were switching between the old parties only or they were switching from one extinct party to the newly launched party. Secondly, to ascertain the end-status of each of these parties, that is whether the parties involved ended up as minority or majority.

2.10.1 Malawi Congress Party (MCP)

This is the oldest political party in Malawi having been in existence since 1944, first as the Nyasaland African Congress (NAC), and later, in 1959, as the Malawi Congress Party (MCP) (Svasand & Khembo in Patel & Svasand, 2007; Patel, 2005). The party is credited with ending colonial rule in Malawi and subsequently bringing in self-rule and independence in 1963 and 1964 respectively. MCP was in power for 31 years (1963-1994) (Patel, 2005). The party's long serving leader was Dr Hastings Kamuzu Banda who was also Malawi's first president. MCP was voted out of government in the founding democratic elections of 1994. It was replaced by the United Democratic Front (UDF) which was led by Bakili Muluzi, a former politician in the MCP-led administration (Patel, 2005). Despite being out of government for about 25 years (1994-2019), MCP remains one of the major political parties in Malawi. The party is more popular the central region of Malawi where it continues to dominate in the regional share of legislative seats (see Patel, 2005; Lembani, 2014).

2.10.2 Alliance for Democracy (AFORD) and the United Democratic Front (UDF)

The two parties started as underground pressure groups in the period leading up to the collapse of a one-party system in Malawi. They were formally registered in 1993 (UDF in August and then AFORD in September) (Patel,2005). AFORD's founding leader was Chakufwa Chihana, a former trade unionist while Bakili Muluzi, a former politician in the MCP-led administration and a businessman, was the founding leader of the UDF. The UDF became the first ruling party in the post-Kamuzu era having defeated MCP in the founding democratic elections of 1994. The party went on to win two more presidential elections in 1999 and 2004, respectively (Patel,2005; Patel &Svasand,2007).Unlike MCP, the electoral support for AFORD and UDF has gone down over the years as evidenced by the ever dwindling regional legislative seat share in each passing national election year (see www.mec.org.mw). The two parties are currently in the state of minority.

2.10.3 Republican Party (RP), Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) and Peoples Party (PP)

These three parties emerged as a result of splits in the country's major parties. For example, the Republican Party was an MCP fragment. It was formed by Gwanda Chakuamba in 2004, just few months away to the general elections of that year (Patel,2005). Chakuamba was formerly the leader of MCP. Though it was new on the electoral market, RP managed to win about 8 % of the legislative seats in 2004 (15 seats - 9 in the south and 6 in the north) (Lembani, 2014;www.sdn.org.mw/elections). However, the party did not survive beyond the 2004 elections.

It soon got disbanded and its leader joined the UDF led-government which was now under president Bingu wa Mutharika (Svasand & Khembo in Patel & Svasand, 2007).

The Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) was a UDF splinter group. It was formed in February 2005 by Bingu wa Mutharika who was then the sitting president of Malawi (Svasand & Khembo in Patel & Svasand, 2007). Though the party is relatively new compared to AFORD and UDF, it has proved to be a power to reckon with in Malawi's politics. The party won two consecutive presidential elections, one in 2009 and another in 2014. In the 2009 elections DPP emerged as a national party as it got a majority vote in both presidential and parliamentary elections in all the country's three regions. In presidential elections its candidate Bingu wa Mutharika got an overall vote of 66% -95 % in the north, 52 % in the centre, and 68 % in the south - (Lembani, 2014). In parliamentary elections the party won 59 % of the parliamentary seats (114 seats [53 in the south, 37 in the center, and 24 in the north] (www.mec.org.mw). However, just like UDF, DPP's electoral support has declined. For example, in 2014 its presidential candidate Peter Mutharika won with only 36% of the overall valid votes cast, 60 per cent of these votes came from the south while 21.6% came from the centre and 26.2% were from the north (Patel & Wahman, 2015, p.131). In parliamentary elections, the party got 51 seats - down from 114 in 2009, 33 of the 51 seats were from the south while 11 were from the centre, and 7 from the north (www.mec.org.mw). Though it is now largely a southern region political grouping, DPP still remains one of the major political parties in Malawi after the Malawi Congress Party.

The Peoples Party (PP) was a DPP splinter group. It was formed in 2011 by Joyce Banda who was then the sitting vice president of Malawi. This was during the reign of

Bingu wa Mutharika of the DPP. The Peoples Party used to draw much of its electoral support from the north. For example, of the 26 parliamentary seats that it won in the 2014 elections 13 of them were from the north while 5 were from the centre and 9 from the south (www.mec.org.mw). PP's electoral support has also gone down. For example, in 2019 the party got only 5 parliamentary seats, from 27 in 2014. Three of these seats were from the north while the two others were from the south (Malawi Electoral Commission, 2014). The party remains a minority.

2.11 Causes of Electoral Shifts

The literature on electoral research offers various explanations on the factors that might lead to electoral shifts and to their variations in the level of occurrence. Most of these explanations, however, tend to revolve around economic-related factors (Duch, 2001; Asingo, 2009), and institutional factors which include the period of democratisation, the number of parties in the political system, and the entry and exit of parties on the electoral market (Bertoa & Schneider, 2012; Rowe-Jones, 2012).

While institutional and economic factors do explain why electoral shifts occur they fail to explain the national variations that are often experienced in the level of occurrence. Again, institutional and economic factors fail to explain stability and change in voting behaviour that occur under the same prevailing political and economic conditions in a country. Antwin (2018) as well as Asingo (2009), for example, have shown that some voters stick to the incumbent even in the face of untold hardships and poor economic conditions. Yet according to the economic voting thesis, voters will often opt for an opposition party in the face of poor economic performance (Duch, 2001). Asingo (2009) has also shown that the availability of new parties on the electoral market is not a sufficient reason for voters to abandon their

previous parties. In his study of 30 Sub-Saharan African countries, Asingo observed that some voters opted for independent candidates despite the availability of new political parties. This brief account exposes the weaknesses of the institutional and economic factors as explanatory variables of electoral shifts.

Because of the limited explanatory power of institutional factors, this study adopted voter-centred approaches to understand the factors that make certain constituencies in Malawi so unstable in their voting preferences. As mentioned before, a significant number of electoral researchers in Europe and North America have relied on political sophistication and political disaffection theses to explain variations in the occurrence of electoral shifts in a country. This study has also adopted the same explanatory variables. No any scholarly inquiry in Malawi has ever engaged political sophistication and political disaffection theses in unpacking the determinants of electoral shifts. What follows is a discussion of how political sophistication and political disaffection explain incidences of electoral shifts and their subsequent variations in the level of occurrence.

2.11.1 Political Sophistication

Political sophistication is a concept that is often cited when thinking about an ideal democracy, a democracy where citizens are not only informed about politics but they are also involved in it (Dassonneville, 2012). In this study, political sophistication is equated to political awareness (Kuhn, 2009), to the holding of information about politics (Luskin, 1987), and staying abreast of political news (Dassonneville & Hooghe, 2014). It is also about citizens' capacity to understand, process, and utilize new political information (Lawrence, 2006). Political sophistication is measured by a number of indicators which include voters' level of education, political interest, and exposure to political information (Dassonneville, 2012; Dalton, 2007, 2013).

Evidence seems to suggest that the politically informed and politically interested voters tend to be more unstable in their voting preferences than the politically uninformed and disinterested voters (Dassonneville, 2012; Dalton, 2007,2013). Following is an account of how exposure to political information influences vote-switching.

2.11.1.1 Political Information

Being politically informed means being exposed to political news or affairs either through the social or mass media or interpersonal discussions about politics (Druckman, 2005; Vasilopoulos, 2012). The conventional wisdom in political science is that people who know more about politics differ from those who know less (Druckman, 2005; Vasilopoulos, 2012). One of the observed differences is that informed voters tend to make independent electoral choices based on things like leader image, performance, and campaign issues whereas uninformed voters tend to rely on partisan cues when making voting decisions (Willocq, 2016, 2015; Garzia, 2011). In a nutshell, political sophistication leads to voter volatility because it weakens the bonds between parties and voters (Dalton, 2013, 2007). A strong bond between parties and voters is considered quite critical if voters are to remain stable in their voting preferences (Dassonneville, 2012, 2014).

2.11.2 Political Disaffection

Political disaffection is a term that is used to describe citizens' disillusionment with political actors and institutions (Dassonneville, 2012). Like political sophistication, political disaffection is also determined by a number of factors which include citizens' level of political trust, satisfaction with democracy, and external political efficacy (Zelle, 1995; Dalton & Weldon, 2005). The observation here is that party switching tends to occur among voters who are politically disaffected (dissatisfied)

(Dassonneville,2012,2014, Willocq,2016, Zelle,1995). Following is an account of how political trust, satisfaction with democracy, and external political efficacy (political disaffection variables) induce electoral volatility.

2.11.2.1 Political Trust

Political trust is a term that is used to describe citizens' level of support for and confidence in politicians and political institutions (van de Meer, 2017; Parker, Parker & Towner, 2015; Seyd, 2016). Citizens tend to develop a high sense of political trust when they believe that the incumbents perform to their expectations (Hetherington, 1998). Citizens' level of political trust is oftentimes assessed through a survey (Seyd,2016). Citizens are asked about their perceptions with regard to the responsiveness of different political actors [politicians, political parties, and government institutions] (Dassonneville, 2015, 2012; Willocq, 2016, 2015, Seyd,2016). Electoral research in Europe and North America has shown that vote switching tends to occur among voters with a low sense of political trust (Dassonneville, 2015, 2012, 2014; Dalton & Weldon, 2005; Madrid, 2005; Willocq, 2015; Duch, 2001).

2.11.2.2 Satisfaction with Democracy

This is yet another predictor of electoral shifts within the political disaffection thesis. Evidence suggests that voters who express satisfaction with how democracy works in a country tend to vote for the incumbent while those who express dissatisfaction tend to vote for the challenger (Dassonneville, 2012, 2015; Zelle,1995; Willocq,2016; Dalton & Weldon, 2005).

2.11.2.3 External Political Efficacy

Political efficacy refers to the feeling that political and social change is possible and that the individual citizen can play a part in bringing about this change (Campbell, Gurin and Miller, 1954 cited in Schulz, 2005). Having a high sense of political efficacy is usually viewed as desirable for the stability of democracy. As Wright (1981) cited in Schulz (2005) explains, in the modern democratic society, citizens should have the feeling that they have some power to influence the actions of their government. Political efficacy is considered an important predictor of political participation which includes voting (Schulz,2005).

Political efficacy presents itself in two forms, namely; internal political efficacy and external political efficacy. External political efficacy refers to the individual's belief in the responsiveness of the political system (Schulz,2005). It is about the extent to which voters believe they can influence change (Dassonneville, 2014, 2012). The empirical observation is that vote switching tends to be high among voters with a high sense of external political efficacy (Dassonneville, 2012, 2015; Willocq,2016).

2.12 Theoretical Framework

This study was anchored in two theories, namely; the cognitive mobilisation theory and the frustrated floating voter theory. The two theories were chosen because of their ability to explain variations in the occurrence of electoral shifts in a country. As earlier observed, institutional factors fail to achieve this. In addition, the two theories were able to complement each other in explaining shifts in party preferences. Evidence seems to suggest that some voters do not necessarily switch parties because they are politically sophisticated but because they are politically dissatisfied with the some political actors and institutions (Dalton & Weldon, 2005; Willocq, 2016, 2015).

What follows is an account of how the two theories explain variations in the level of electoral shifts in a country.

2.12.1 Cognitive Mobilisation Theory

This theory was developed by Russell Dalton (1984) to explain shifts in political attitude and behaviour which the industrial democracies began to experience from the late 1960s (Donovan, 2018). A significant number of voters in western democracies were no longer guided by partisan cues in their electoral decisions. Instead they began to make independent voting decisions based on short-term forces such as “policy preferences, performance judgments, and candidate image” (Garzia, 2011). Dalton’s cognitive mobilisation theory was intended to explain this new trend of electoral behaviour. In his theory, Dalton cites rising levels of education and information explosion as the major factors behind the individualisation of voting preferences in the US and Europe (Donovan, 2018). Dalton argues that new developments in the mass media, especially the coming in of television news networks and later on internet, have made it easier and cheaper for citizens to obtain more information about politics. Coupled with the attainment of higher levels of education, advances in media technology have made people more sophisticated than before. Dalton has called this new development, **a process of cognitive mobilisation** that is the acquisition of new political values, new attitudes, and changes in political behaviour as a result of exposure to political information in the mass media (Donovan, 2018). The main argument in Dalton’s cognitive mobilisation theory is that high levels of political sophistication emanating from the process of cognitive mobilisation have weakened the ties between voters and political parties. Because of the weakened ties, most voters are no longer guided by partisan attachment in their electoral decisions

(Dassonniville,2012,2015, Dalton,2013,2007, Willocq,2016,2015). Partisan attachment is considered a pre-requisite for a stable voting behaviour.

Dalton's cognitive mobilisation theory identifies a number of indicators of political sophistication of which only three are discussed in this study. These three indicators are; level of education, exposure to political information, and interest in politics (Dalton, 1984 in Donovan,2018). Voters who display a high level of each one of these attributes are said to be highly sophisticated and therefore more inclined to switch parties in successive elections. Numerous electoral studies in Europe and North America which include those of Dassonneville (2015, 2012, 2014), Willocq (2016, 2015), Garzia (2011), and Dalton (2013, 2007) have demonstrated the efficacy of political sophistication in explaining electoral shifts and their subsequent variations in the level of occurrence.

2.12.2 Frustrated Floating Voter Theory

This theory was developed by Carsten Zelle (1995). The frustrated floating voter theory considers vote switching as an expression of voters "mood of protests" (Dassonniville,2012). According to Zelle floating voters are "somewhat less satisfied with the political system, less trusting in parties, and less happy about their favourite party." Thus, the switching of parties in this case is interpreted as an expression of dissatisfaction with one's favoured party as well as with some political institutions (Willocq, 2016;Dassonniville, 2012). However, Zelle maintains that the switching of parties does not, in itself, signify a shift of party allegiance. It is simply an expression of disillusionment with the conduct or performance of one's favoured party. Zelle explains that a "frustrated floating voter" denotes a model of a citizen who wants to preserve an affective and positive relationship with his favourite party.

However, in the event that his favourite party proves to be unworthy of his trust, disappointment about that party may elicit a feeling of frustration that might eventually lead to vote switching” (Willocq,2016, Dassonneville,2012).

Political disaffection lies at the heart of the frustrated floating voter theory (Dassonneville,2012; Willocq, 2016). According to Lee Kaid and Holtz-Bacha (2008) political disaffection is term that is generally used to describe negative attitudes and feelings towards one’s political system. Political disaffection is operationalised by means of long-term stable political attitudes which include the level of satisfaction with democracy, political trust, and external political efficacy (Zelle, 1995, Dalton & Weldon, 2005). According to the frustrated floating voter theory, voters with a low sense of political trust, satisfaction with democracy, and external political efficacy are more inclined to switch parties than those with a high sense of the same attributes (Dassonneville, 2012; Willocq, 2016).

2.13 Summary of Chapter Two

This chapter was an appraisal of previous related studies on why some regions or constituencies in a country may experience high instances of electoral shifts than others. The appraisal relied on studies which were made in Europe and North America. The review has shown that in Europe and North America variations in the level of electoral shifts emanate from variations in the level of political sophistication and political disaffection among the electorate. The review has further shown the inefficacy of institutional factors in explaining national variations in the level of electoral shifts. Most importantly, the review has revealed knowledge gap on the determinants of electoral shifts in Malawi. Earlier, the chapter discussed determinants of voting choices in democratic systems as well as the models of voting behaviour within which these determinants can better be explained.

The chapter also looked at electoral shifts from a global as well as Malawi's perspectives. The chapter also made a brief account about the history and attributes of the political parties which were at the centre of vote switching.

CHAPTER THREE

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

This chapter offers an explanation of the qualitative research methods which were used to address the research problem. The chapter begins by explaining the philosophical underpinnings of the study. It then goes on to justify the use of qualitative case study design. The chapter also discusses specific methods which were used in the identification and recruitment of research participants, data generation and analysis. Finally, the chapter explains ethical-related issues and limitations of the study.

3.2 Philosophical Underpinnings of the Study

This study was anchored in the interpretivist research tradition. At the core of an interpretive research paradigm are two main views; that social reality (truth) is relative, it differs from person to person (Scotland, 2012; Lindsay Mack, 2010) and that the social world does not exist independently of our knowledge of it (Grix, 2004). These beliefs have a number of methodological implications. For example, the fact that the social world does not exist independently of the researcher implies that the knowledge of the social world can only be gained through an interaction between the researcher and the researched (Elshafie, 2013). It also means that this interaction has to take place in the natural setting where the phenomenon is being experienced. This study was conducted in one of the constituencies (Nkhatabay South East) where persistent cases of electoral shifts are experienced. Again, the researcher was physically involved in the collection of data. As Creswell (2009) explains, in an interpretivist research, the researcher becomes an instrument of data collection.

Again, the belief by interpretivists that social reality is relative means that the researcher can only gain an understanding of the social world through the use of naturalistic methods of inquiry. According to Cohen and Crabtree (2006), the naturalistic methods of inquiry include interviews, observations, and document reviews. This study used interviews and document analysis in its generation of data.

3.3 Research Design

A research design is a plan that shows how a researcher intends to study an empirical question (Buttolph-Johnson, Reynolds & Mycoff, 2016, p.166). In this study, the researcher adopted a qualitative case study design in order to understand why certain constituencies in Malawi experience persistent cases of electoral shifts. As Buttolph and her colleagues explain, the proper goal of a research study by a political scientist is understanding or interpreting phenomena. An understanding of a phenomenon is possible with a case study design due to a number of reasons. Firstly, as Zainal (2007) observes, a case study method usually involves a small geographical area or a very limited number of individuals as the subjects of the study. In this study, only one constituency (Nkhatabay South East) was involved and only 30 purposively selected individuals took part in the investigation.

Secondly, as Yin (1994) explains, in a case study design the empirical inquiry takes place in the real-life context of an issue and that the inquiry uses a multiple sources of evidence. In this study, Nkhatabay South East constituency was the real life context in which vote switching was being experienced. Again, more methods were used to generate data, these methods were focus group interviews, key informants interviews, and document reviews. The research process was guided by two theories, namely; the cognitive mobilisation theory and the frustrated floating voter theory.

The specific aspects of the study which were guided by a theory were as follows: the formulation of study objectives, the collection and analysis of data as well as the presentation and assessment of findings. The use of a theory was necessary because it helped the researcher to focus on areas which were relevant to the study. Numerous research scholars who include Yin (2003), Perry (2000), and Baxter and Jack (2008) have defended the use of a theory in a case study. Baxter and Jack, for example, have argued that the use of a theory not only serves to guide the collection and analysis of data but it also determines the direction and scope of the study.

3.4 Research Methodology

The study used qualitative research approach to address the research problem at hand (electoral shifts). Qualitative research is basically an interpretive research approach in which the researcher seeks to “understand, explain, and demystify social reality through the eyes of different participants” (Lindsay Mack, 2013). As earlier explained, interpretivists believe that knowledge can only be generated through interaction between the researcher and the social world. The choice of qualitative research approach was therefore necessitated by the need to have a thorough understanding of the causes of electoral shifts in the constituency under investigation. Creswell (2009) has cited the goal of the research study as one of the factors that would influence the choice of a research design.

3.5 Site of the Study

This study took place in Nkhatabay South East constituency, as earlier indicated. The constituency is located in the lakeshore district of Nkhatabay in the northern part of Malawi. Nkhatabay South East constituency, alongside two others - Chikwawa South and Nsanje South West, has a history of persistent cases of electoral shifts. Notwithstanding this fact, this study was confined to only one constituency. The use

of one constituency allowed for an in-depth understanding of the issue under investigation in the sense that it enabled the involvement of a relatively small group of respondents and a thorough examination of the individual characteristics of these respondents. As mentioned before, this study sought to examine the extent to which the individual characteristics of voters tend to influence shifts in party preferences. Therefore, a close examination of the research participants was necessary. In addition, being a qualitative research design, a small sample from one geographical unit was enough to address the needs of the study. As Khalifa Elmusharaf (2012) explains, in a qualitative research, a small number of interviews, narratives or focus groups can help yield a significant amount of data to address the research question. The selection of Nkhatabay South East constituency was done through a simple random sampling. According to Bobbie Latham (2007), in a simple random sampling each element of the study population has an equal chance of being selected. Therefore, in this study, Chikwawa South and Nsanje South West constituencies were equally legible for the study. The selection procedure went like this: the researcher wrote the names of the three constituencies on three separate pieces of paper. The papers were then placed in a hat. The hat was presented to a colleague whose face was blindfolded with a piece of cloth. This colleague was then asked to pick any one of the pieces from the hat. According to Bobbie Latham (2007), simple random sampling is appropriate when the study population is small.

3.6 Population Sampling

While the sampling of the study site was achieved through simple random sampling techniques, the sampling of research participants was done non-randomly (purposively). In purposive sampling the researcher deliberately chooses who to include in the study based on their ability to provide necessary data (Parahoo, 1997).

Individuals with characteristics relevant to the study are chosen (Anderson, 2010). The researcher, therefore, opted for non-random sampling methods in order to get the desired information which could help address the research question. In this study, the researcher was particularly interested in vote switchers – voters who had voted for different parties in two or more than two elections in Nkhatabay South East constituency in the period between 1994 and 2014. Prospective research participants were supposed to meet the following requirements:

- They were supposed to be 29 years of age and above at the time of the inquiry. This age requirement was necessary because it ensured the respondent's likelihood of having voted in more than one election in the period between 1994 and 2014. Electoral laws in Malawi demand that the eligible voter be a citizen with 18 years old and above (The Republican Constitution of Malawi, 2006). This study took place in February 2018. Thus, if one was 29 years old in 2018, the assumption was that he or she was 25 years old in 2014 and 20 in 2009 meaning that he or she was qualified to vote in two different elections. Therefore, in this study legible respondents were those who said they were born in the years from 1989 backwards, that is 1988, 87, 86, and so on.
- The participants were also expected to be those who had voted for different parties in two consecutive or more elections in the period between 1994 and 2014 and in Nkhatabay South East constituency. The researcher relied on recall questions to obtain this information.

For purposes of authenticity with regard to voting choices, the respondents' responses were compared with the prepared list of winning candidates and their parties in Nkhatabay South East constituency in the period between 1994 and 2014

(see **Appendix1**). The identification and recruitment of research participants were done in collaboration with two ward councillors both of Nkhatabay South East constituency. The councillors belonged to an opposition party, the Peoples Party (PP). The identification and recruitment of the respondents were purposively done so as to meet the requirements of the study as earlier explained. The recruitment exercise lasted for almost a week (five days).

3.7 Data Collection Methods/Instruments

Three different methods were used to collect data and these were focus group interviews, key informants interviews, and document reviews. Focus group and key informant interviews were used in the generation of primary data while documentary sources were used in the secondary data generation. It should be pointed out here that before the commencement of the actual data collection exercise, the focus group interview guide (see **Appendix 3**) was piloted in Nkhatabay North West Constituency. Nkhatabay North West Constituency was convenient considering that it is found in the same district with the targeted study area. In addition, the constituency showed similar characteristic of vote switching in all the elections under study (1994 to 2014). After piloting, the errors identified were corrected by the researcher to come up with a final document which was perceived by the researcher to be addressing the research questions. The study used the improved focus group interview guide to collect data from the three focus groups.

3.7.1 Focus Group Interviews

This was the main method of generating data. In focus group interviews individuals who are known to have been involved in a particular situation are selected and asked about their involvement (Bryman,2008). Quite often the selected individuals are those who share certain characteristics which are deemed relevant for addressing the

research question at hand (Anderson, 1990; Marshall & Rossman, 2011). In this study, the researcher was looking for people with the following characteristics: having voted in more than two elections in the period between 1994 and 2014, having voted for different parties in consecutive elections, and having voted in the constituency under investigation (Nkhatabay South East). These characteristics were necessary for addressing research questions. Focus group interviews were used because of their ability to generate accurate accounts of why things happen the way they do.

Realistic account of events is possible in focus groups because, unlike in the conventional one-to-one method of interviewing, focus groups allow for the interaction and exchange of ideas among group members. Individuals argue with each other and challenge each other's viewpoints (Bryman, 2008; Bloor, Frankland, Thomas & Robson, 2001). The probing of each other's viewpoints enables the researcher to have an immediate feedback or clarification on the data he is collecting (Dilshad & Latif, 2013). Because focus groups allow for the interaction and exchange of ideas among group members, they are considered more naturalistic than individual interviews. As Wilkinson (1998) observes:

“The process of coming to terms with a social phenomenon is not undertaken by individuals in isolation of each other. Instead, it is something that occurs in interaction and discussion with others.

In this sense, focus group reflects the process through which meaning is constructed in everyday life and to that extent can be considered as more naturalistic than individual interviews.”

The study had three focus groups each with 10 participants - five men and five women. Ten was considered optimal enough for purposes of obtaining as varied opinions as possible and also for easy management of the groups. Members to the focus groups were purposively selected from Sanga and Chintheche wards in Nkhatabay South East constituency with the assistance of ward councillors. The councillors and their teams were particularly important in authenticating the identities of the prospective research participants. The selected prospective participants were subjected to a screening process to ensure their eligibility for the study (see **Appendix 1**). Notwithstanding the screening process, the overriding criterion was the shifting of parties from one election to another. It did not matter whether the participants all switched to the same party or different parties, to a small party or major party. Of great importance was the act of shifting parties in successive elections in the period between 1994 and 2014. The prospective participants who failed to meet the requirements of the study were dropped. Five groups, comprising ten members each, were initially recruited for the study. However, only three groups were involved. The cutting point was determined by what in qualitative research parlance is called information redundancy or saturation point. The condition of information redundancy obtains when additional research participants no longer add new information to the study (John Latham, 2013; Guest, Bunce, & Johnson, 2006). The saturation point became apparent with the first group of respondents. Nonetheless, two more groups were involved for the sake of trustworthiness of the findings.

While members of the focus groups were drawn from the same ethnic grouping (Tonga), they differed in their demographic characteristics. For example, they had different occupations, levels of education, and age range.

The participants also professed different political affiliations (see 4.4 p. 65). Segmentation of the group was based on the education levels of the members as indicated in **Table 3** below.

Table 3: *Segmentation of Focus Group Members Based on Their Level of Education*

Focus Group 1 (10 members)	Focus Group 2 (10 members)	Focus Group 3 (10 members)
Without Formal Schooling + With Some Primary Ed.,	With Secondary Ed., JCE + MSCE)	With College + University Ed.,

Open-ended questions were used during the interviews. This had double advantages. On one hand, open-ended questions enabled the participants to express themselves fully and in their own words. On the other hand, the researcher was able to follow up on questions. All this enabled the researcher to generate rich and diverse data that in the end helped to address the research questions. Each group member was given a chance to respond to each and every question of the study. This was an important thing to do considering the fact that apart from knowing the motivations behind party switching the researcher also wanted to examine the individual characteristics of the participants. Knowledge of the individual characteristics of the respondents was the core objective of the study.

3.7.2 Key Informant Interviews

These are qualitative in-depth interviews with a selected group of individuals who are likely to provide needed information, ideas, and insights on a particular subject (Kumar, 1989). Quite often key informants are people who know what is going on in the community, people who have firsthand knowledge about the community (UCLA, n.d). However, this does not imply that key informants are drawn from the investigated

communities only. As Kumar puts it, key informants may also include any individuals who possess particular knowledge or information as required by the investigator. Like focus group members, the key informants were also purposively selected for the study but their participation was based on their willingness to talk. To this effect, only six men participated in the interviews which were done through telephone. Four others declined the interviews. They did not pick up their phones despite several attempts. Telephone interviews were preferred over face-to-face interviews because of the busy schedule of the participants. Those who participated in the interviews were two traditional authorities and two ward councillors all drawn from Nkhatabay South East constituency and two political science university lecturers. The local leaders were chosen because of their closeness to the people and their role in communities while the two academicians were selected because of their professional expertise in politics. Key informant interviews were used for purposes of validating what was already learned from focus group interviews. Put slightly different key informants were used to cross-check findings which were derived from focus group members.

3.7.3 Document Reviews

Document review is a way of collecting data by reviewing existing documents (Centre for Disease Control and Prevention, 2009). Most of the reviewed documents in this study were generated through the internet. The documentary sources used in this study included public records such as the Malawi Electoral Commission (MEC) official elections results, journal articles, and books. The documentary-generated data were used to provide context to the study and this was true with MEC's publications and also with some journal articles on the individual-level determinants of electoral shifts. Documentary sources (journal articles) were also employed in the analysis of data and in the discussion of results.

3.8 Data Validation and Reliability

In this study, data validation was achieved through what is known as respondent validation or member checking (Bryman, 2008). Focus group members were provided with what each one of them said during the interviews for purposes of correcting factual errors. In addition, the findings from the focus group members were cross-checked with the information which was gathered from the key informants (data triangulation).

3.9 Data Analysis

Data analysis is the process of making sense out of the collected data (Thomas & Nelson, 1996). The researcher used inductive thematic approach as well as deductive framework approach in analyzing the data. In inductive thematic analysis the labelling and grouping of data (coding) is based on the emerging data framework whereas in the deductive framework analysis the coding of data relies on pre-defined codes drawn from either research questions or a theory (Sunday, n.d). The collected data were in form of field notes and contained the spoken word of the participants. The analysis was done manually. The first step towards data analysis involved data reduction in which volumes of data were reduced to manageable levels by clustering them around relevant common themes. Data reduction was done through the process of coding according to which data are organised into conceptual categories. Data reduction does not only condense the data but also makes them appear intelligible (sensible). Tables were used to display the condensed data. As Miles and Huberman (1994) explain, displaying data in tables or charts allow for the easy drawing of conclusions. During the process of data reduction, both inductive and deductive approaches were applied. Inductive thematic approach was especially useful in coding the data that were addressing research question number one in which the respondents were asked to state the reasons for their inconsistency in party preferences.

The labelling and classification of data here were based on the emerging empirical data. On the other hand, the deductive framework approach was applied to the data which were addressing the remaining five research questions (two to six) which revolved around the individual characteristics of the voters and the determinants of their voting choices. Here, pre-defined codes which were drawn from the theoretical framework were used to assign the observed characteristics of the respondents and the determinants of their voting choices to different clusters. The clustered empirical data were then compared (matched) with the theoretical framework of the study in order to establish patterns or variances between them and for an appropriate interpretation of the data. In qualitative research parlance, this technique of data analysis is known as pattern matching (Perry, 2000;Baskarada, 2013). The unit of analysis was the individual participant, and not the group. Putting the individual group member at the centre of analysis was necessary as it enabled the researcher to ascertain the individual characteristics of the respondents, a task which was at the core of the study. Onwuegbuzie (2009) observed that using the group as the unit of analysis tends to preclude the analysis of individual focus group data.

3.10 Ethical Issues

Prospective respondents were notified in advance about the study and its purpose. This was done through ward councillors who acted as contact persons for the study. There was, thus, an informed oral consent from the participants. Participation was voluntary. The identities and records of the participants were kept confidential.

3.11 Limitations of the Study

One of the limitations of this study was that it only addressed the issue of voting switching. The study did not address the question of why other voters are stable. The weakness of this approach is that it leaves the reader with no idea as to whether vote

switchers in Malawi have characteristics that are different from stable voters as suggested by the electoral research literature. Another limitation was that the study was confined to one constituency and it involved few purposively selected individuals. The impact of all this is that the research findings cannot be generalisable. Again, the limited scope of the study means that the reader is left with limited knowledge about the drivers of party switching in Malawi.

Finally, the study relied on recall information and not panel observations (data). This posed the challenge of ascertaining the voting preferences of the respondents despite the rigorous screening exercise that they went through. As Dassonniville (2015) explains, it cannot be assumed that all respondents in such nature of a study can have an accurate memory of how they voted years ago. Dassonneville has observed that panel data provide the most correct accounts of voting behaviour.

3.12 Summary of Chapter Three

This chapter unpacked the philosophical underpinnings which guided the study. It also explained the research design, methodology, and the specific methods that were used in population sampling, collection, validation and analysis of data. Finally, the chapter explained ethical issues and limitations of the study.

CHAPTER FOUR

EMPIRICAL RESEARCH FINDINGS

4.1 Introduction

This section presents the research findings generated from focus group interviews as well as key informant interviews. The study sought to examine the extent to which voters' party preferences are influenced by their level of political sophistication and their sense of political disaffection. As mentioned before, studies in Europe and North America have shown that vote switching tends to occur among voters with a high level of political sophistication and with a high sense of political dissatisfaction. The study wanted to examine the degree to which these observations could hold true for some constituencies in Malawi.

Though the study was wholly qualitative in nature, some simple counting was used in the presentation of the findings. The use of counting was considered necessary for purposes of precision and robustness of the findings. As Maxwell (2010) explains, numerical data enables the researcher to assess the amount of evidence in his data that bears on a particular conclusion. Maxwell also argues that the use of counting (numbers) in a qualitative research helps to identify and correctly characterise the diversity of perceptions or beliefs of the group that is being studied.

The findings are presented in a narrative form. The presentation has been guided by the sequence of the research objectives as outlined in chapter one.

4.2 Why the Respondents Switch Parties on the Election Day

The researcher wanted to hear from the respondents themselves (vote switchers) as to why they vote for different parties every time there are national elections. The researcher learnt that failure by political parties and their representatives (MPS) to fulfill campaign promises was the main reason why the group under investigation (vote switchers) was changing parties election after election.

“We keep on changing parties in the hope that a new party would be better than a previous one.”

Each one of the focus group members agreed on this. However, members differed on the kind of campaign promises which were not being fulfilled. Thus, while the failure by parties and their representatives to fulfill campaign promises was the commonly held view for switching parties, the specific unfulfilled promises which were being mentioned tended to represent minority views of some group members, not everyone. Following is an account of specific responses that the researcher got from the study participants (vote switchers).

Eight out of thirty respondents said they change parties because their elected representatives (MPs) together with their parties fail to bring development in their communities.

“They promise us a lot of things during political campaigns. They will talk of building schools, teachers’ houses, and local bridges. They will talk of enough supplies of drugs in our health centers but they do nothing after elections.”

This view was corroborated by four key informants who included two traditional leaders drawn from the constituency under investigation and two political science

lecturers from two different universities. In separate interviews, the traditional leaders said once elected parties and their representatives do nothing on the issue of development (*Akavoteledwa sabweletsa chitukuko*). “*Sakwanilisa zomwe amalonjeza.*” (*They do not fulfill their campaign promises*). Similarly, in separate interviews, the two academicians suggested that MPs and their parties in the said constituency do not live up to the expectations of voters. “*Parties do not meet the demands of people in the constituency. Therefore people are dissatisfied with their performance as well as the performance of the government itself,*” one of the academicians said. “*Voters in that constituency might be basing their electoral decisions on development agenda. So if parties fail to deliver on that agenda voters have no choice there but to switch sides as a way of punishing them,*” another academician observed.

Another group of eight respondents (vote switchers), attributed the failure by elected representatives to fulfill their campaign promises to shifts in home of residence. They observed that once elected a good number of MPs stop living in the village, instead they start living in town. “*Often times this change makes it quite difficult for us to contact them because sometimes they do not even answer our phone calls.*” This view was corroborated by one of the key informants (a traditional leader).

Some respondents (4 out of 30) shared the view that parties and their representatives do not attend to peoples’ problems especially when they are bereaved. “*In times of bereavement people expect help from their MP either in form of transport or coffin. But this kind of help has not been forthcoming,*” the members observed.

Six more other members attributed their vote-switching to failure by parties to conduct “thank you rallies” after winning the elections. *“This sort of conduct creates the impression that we are no longer useful. So we have to penalise their behaviour,”* said one of the six whose views the other five members shared.

One respondent cited MPs defections to other parties, especially to the ruling party, as a reason for switching parties. He argued that the conduct was a betrayal of his wishes.

Three more respondents (vote switchers) shared the view that some MPs are bad mannered. *“Some MPs are very rude especially in the manner they talk to people,”* one of them charged. This view was corroborated by one of the key informants (a traditional leader) who said that, *“Aphungu ena makhalidwe alibe. Amayankhula mwankhanza kwa anthu (Some MPs have no manners. They are very rough to the people). Iwowo samadziwa kuti anthu ndima “auditors,” amawona kuti kodi uyu amayankhula mbwanji (MPs do not know that people act as “auditors”. They observe how somebody talks).”* These findings are summarized in **Table 4** below.

Table 4: *Why the Investigated Group Switch Parties on the Election Day*

Reasons	No. of Respondents Holding Such Views in %
Failure by party representatives (MPs) to initiate development (building of schools, teachers' houses, local bridges, and markets).	27 %
MPs failure to listen to peoples' problems.	13 %
MPs living in town after winning elections	27 %
MPs Defecting to ruling parties.	3 %
Parties' failure to hold "thank you meetings" after winning elections.	20 %
MPs' bad character- tough talking and arrogance	10 %

4.3 Political Information and Shifts in Party Preferences

The study sought to examine the extent to which exposure to political information influences the respondents in their voting behaviour. According to Dalton's cognitive mobilisation theory politically informed voters are more inclined to switch parties on the Election Day than those who are not. To gauge their level of exposure to political information, focus group members were asked if they followed political events in the country and to state the sources of their political information (news). The members were also asked if at all they engaged themselves in political discussions either with their colleagues, friends or relations. The cognitive mobilisation theory expects politically informed citizens to be keen followers of political events and also to engage themselves in interpersonal discussions about politics.

The study revealed that the majority of the respondents (18 out of 30) followed political events in the country while others (12) did not. Radio and mobile internet were mentioned as the main sources of political news for the informed respondents. On the question of discussing politics, the study found out that the same group (18 respondents) which professed exposure to political news was also equally engaged in interpersonal discussion about politics. On the other hand, those who said they did not follow political events (12 respondents) also said they did not engage in any political discussions. These findings, expressed in percentage, are illustrated in **Table 5** below.

Table 5: *Number of Politically Informed and Uninformed Respondents in %*

Total no. of Respo ndents	Total No of Responde nts by Gender		No of Informed Respond ents in %	No. of Informed Respondents by Gender in %		No. of Uninformed Respondents	No. of Uninformed Respondent s by Gender	
	M	F		M	F		M	F
30	15	15	60%	67%	53%	40%	33%	47%

The table above shows that the majority of the investigated group (60 per cent) were politically informed while 40 per cent others were not. In terms of the cognitive mobilisation theory, therefore, the majority of the respondents were politically sophisticated.

4.4 Political Sophistication and Party Identification

The main argument in the cognitive mobilisation theory is that political sophistication weakens the voter-party ties thereby increasing the likelihood of vote switching (Dassonneville, 2015,2012). Therefore, though the study did not have a particular objective on the link between political sophistication and party identification it was necessary to find out from the respondents (vote switchers) about their closeness or non-closeness to any political party. The common position in the electoral research literature is that strong voter-party attachment tends to lead to a stable voting behaviour while weaker party attachment leads to electoral instability (Dassonneville, 2014, 2012, 2015; Dalton, 2013, 2007; Kuhn, 2009). In view of this, each of the respondents was asked if he or she was closer to any political party and to state the name of that party. The majority of the respondents (25 out of 30) said that they were closer to a political party while few others (5 out of 30) said they were not. The findings, expressed in percentage, are illustrated in **Table 6** below.

Table 6: *Number of Party Identifiers among Respondents in %*

Total Number of Research Respondents	Number of Party Identifiers in %	Parties Identified With + Number of Identifiers in %	Number of Non-Party Identifiers in %
30	83 %	PP - 52 %	17%
		MCP - 28 %	
		DPP - 20 %	

4.5 How Vote Switchers Form Party Preferences

The cognitive mobilisation theory expects vote switchers to be guided by short-term motives in their voting preferences. These short term motives include parties' positions on issues, candidate image, and past performance (Garzia, 2011; Dassonneville, 2012; Willocq, 2016). The study therefore sought to establish the extent to which this observation could hold true for the group under-investigation. The respondents were asked to state the factors that they consider when deciding which party to vote for. The majority of the respondents (25 out of 30) said they base their party preferences on short-term forces while few others (5 out of 30) said they were guided by partisan cues such as the political party the candidate belongs to. Specific responses that the researcher got were as follows:

“We decide which party or candidate to vote for based on the promises we get especially about development.”

This view was shared by the majority of the respondents (17 out of 30). The most cited developmental issues were construction of local bridges and teachers' houses, provision of ambulances and drugs in hospitals. These views were corroborated by two key informants (a political science university lecturer and a traditional leader). According to the lecturer, voters in Nkhatabay South East constituency are informed by the development agenda in their voting preferences. “They would always vote for a person whom they believe would deliver on the development agenda.” Similarly, the traditional leader said people in the area would always vote for a party which they believe would deliver on campaign promises. However, in separate responses, six other study participants (vote switchers), said they look at the personality of the candidate when voting, *“Timawona khalidwe la munthuyo povota.”* This view was corroborated by one of the key informants - a traditional leader. The chief said that people in his area consider the character of the person when voting.

“People here will usually not vote for somebody with a bad character even if that person has money,” he said. Two more other respondents said they look at past performance of either a party or the candidate himself when making voting decisions. “*Timavotela chipani chomwe munthu wake wakhala akuthandiza anthu m’mbuyomu munjila zosiyanasiyana*” (We consider the party whose candidate has been helpful to the people). On the other hand a group of three respondents said they are guided by the party which the candidate represents, “*Timawona chipani chomwe munthu akuyimila.*” Two others said they find out from their colleagues which party they could vote for, “*Ndimafunsa anzanga zachipani chomwe ndingavotele,*” said each one of the two in separate responses. These findings, expressed in percentages, are summarized in **Table 7** below.

Table 7: Things Respondents Look at When Deciding Which Party to Vote For

Influencing Factors	No of Respondents in %
Development issues (local bridges, teachers houses, ambulances, drugs in hospitals)	56.6 %
Candidate image (“ <i>timaona khalidwe lamunthuyo</i> ” - we consider the character of the person)	20 %
Past performance	6.6 %
“The party that the candidate belongs to”	10 %
“I ask my friends which party to vote.”	6.6 %

4.6 Political Trust and Shifts in Party Preferences

According to the frustrated floating voter theory party switching occurs among voters with a low sense of political trust. The study therefore sought to establish the level of political trust among the respondents, all being party switchers. Previous related studies relied on respondents' self-reported sense of political trust to measure their level of political trust (Dassonnville, 2015, 2012; Willocq, 2016, 2015). Similarly, in this study, the researcher relied on the respondents' own reported levels of political trust to measure their levels of political trust. The respondents were asked about their trust in members of parliament, the national assembly, political parties, the police, and the courts. The study observed that the majority of the respondents (about 73%) lacked trust in each of these institutions. The results, expressed in percentages, are illustrated in **Table 8** below.

Table 8: *Level of Political Trust among the Respondents Expressed in %*

Political Actors/Institutions	No. of Group Members With Trust in %	No. of Group Members Without Trust	Total No. of Group Members in %
MPs	23 %	77 %	100
Political parties	27 %	73 %	100
The Judiciary	40 %	60 %	100
The Police	20%	80 %	100
The National Assembly	27 %	73 %	100

On average the table above shows that 73 per cent of the respondents expressed lack of trust in the political institutions cited in the study while the remaining 23 per cent

said they have trust in the institutions. The respondents gave various reasons for their lack of trust in some political actors and institutions. On members of parliament, some respondents (14 out of 30) said they have lost trust in parliamentarians because they do not bring development to their areas. This view was corroborated by one of the key informants (a political science university lecturer) who said most voters, including those in Nkhatabay South East constituency, are driven by the development agenda in their electoral support. *‘Therefore in situations where elected leaders do not meet the expectations of voters, the level of trust among voters declines,’* the lecturer explained.

On political parties, each of the 30 respondents shared the view that political parties serve their own interests and not of the voters. They also said parties do not implement their policies. This view was corroborated by yet another key informant - a university lecturer again - who observed that political parties in Malawi do not meet the demands of voters. On the police, most of the respondents (17 out of 30) said they tend to serve the interests of politicians and not of the ordinary people. The 13 others said the police in Malawi are corrupt. *“People are told to pay for their bail,”* one of the respondents said. About the courts, the majority of the respondents (27 out of 30) said they tend to favour people with money. This group of respondents shared the view that the courts in Malawi do not conclude cases which involve “big people” in society. *“They would rather conclude cases which involve ordinary people than “mabigi” (senior citizens),* one of the group members said.

The respondents also shared the view that the National Assembly serves its own interests and that the MPs do not consult them on what to discuss in the National Assembly. This view was corroborated by two key informants - a traditional leader

and an academician. In separate responses, both the chief and the academician observed that MPs in parliament do not serve the interests of voters. *“This frustrates people and in the end people lose trust in them,”* the academician said. The preceding findings, expressed in percentages, are summarized in **Table 9** below.

Table 9: Reasons for Lack of Political Trust among the Respondents

Political Actors/ Institutions	Reasons	No of Respondents Holding Such Views in %
Members of Parliament	“They do not bring development”	46.6 %
	“They stay in town”	16.6 %
	“They defect to ruling parties”	6.6 %
	“They do not assist people”	13.3 %
	“They do not hold party meetings”	10 %
	“They do not consult people”	6.6 %
Political Parties	“They serve their own interest”	100 %
	“They do not implement policies they promised”	100 %
The Police	“They are corrupt – people are asked to pay for police bail”	43 %
	“They serve political interests”	57 %
The Courts	“They are corrupt – they favour people with money”	57 %
	“They do not conclude cases	

	that involve big people”	43 %
The National Assembly	“It serves its own interest”	100 %
	“MPs do not consult people on things that affect them”	100 %

4.7 Level of Satisfaction with Democracy and Shifts in Party Preferences

According to the Frustrated Floating Voter theory the switching of parties tends to occur among voters who are dissatisfied with how democracy works in a country. The respondents were therefore asked about whether they were satisfied or dissatisfied with how democracy works in Malawi. The majority of them (27 out of 30) said they were not satisfied with how democracy works in Malawi while three others said they were satisfied. The dissatisfied respondents gave different reasons for their position (*see Table 10 below*).

Table 10: *Why Most Respondents Are Dissatisfied With How Democracy Works in Malawi*

Reasons for Dissatisfaction	No of Dissatisfied Respondents, Expressed in %
“People are not free after expressing their views”	17 %
“Transfer of government power along ethnic and family lines.”	20 %
“Greed by political leaders.”	13 %
“Biased state media”	3%
“Theft of public funds and corruption”	13%
“Nepotism in areas of employment and public positions”	13%
“Lack of respect for the elderly.”	3%
“Misuse of personal freedoms - porno films being watched in	3%

public places, instructing children in schools how to use condoms.”	
“Lack of respect for chiefs.”	3%

The respondents who expressed satisfaction with the performance of democracy in Malawi also provided reasons for their position. Two of them said there was freedom of expression in the country while one said there was political tolerance.

4.8 External Political Efficacy and Shifts in Party Preferences

External political efficacy is basically about citizens’ belief in the responsiveness of the political system (Schulz, 2005). According to the Frustrated Floating Voter theory, party switching tends to occur among voters with a low sense of external political efficacy. The researcher therefore wanted to establish the sense of external political efficacy among the respondents (vote switchers). The literature on electoral research offers various indicators of external political efficacy which include the question of whether voters think taking part in an election makes any sense. Thus, the respondents were asked if they believed their involvement in voting was at all meaningful. The majority of the respondents (27 out of 30) said taking part in voting was necessary. Three others, however, said it was meaningless arguing that their vote could not influence any political changes. Most of the respondents in the study, therefore, had a high sense of external political efficacy. These respondents gave various reasons on why taking part in voting makes sense (See **Table 11** below).

Table 11: *Level of External Political Efficacy Among The Respondents*

Respondents In Total	No. with high sense of external political efficacy	Why Voting Makes Sense + No. Expressing the View	No. with low sense of external political efficacy	Why Voting Does Not Make Sense + No. Expressing the View
30	27	<i>“To put in power Leaders who can assist.”</i> 7	3	<i>“Politicians serve their own interests.”</i> 2
		<i>“It’s the only way of ensuring development in our area.”</i> 4		<i>“The party I vote for always loses the presidency.”</i> 1
		<i>“It’s our right to vote.”</i> 7		
		<i>“Ndiye demokalaseyo. Kuvota muvisankho.”</i> (Voting is what democracy is all about). 5		
		<i>“To change parties in government. Government power needs to rotate between parties.”</i> 4		

4.9 Summary of Chapter Four

This chapter was a presentation of the research findings on why voters in some constituencies in Malawi switch parties from election to election. The study was conducted in Nkhatabay South East constituency in the northern part of Malawi. It addressed six research questions. The first question was seeking explanations from the respondents (party switchers) about their inconsistencies in party preferences when voting. The other five questions involved an examination of the individual characteristics of the respondents. Specifically, the researcher wanted to establish the level of political sophistication and political disaffection among the respondents and relate this to their voting behaviour. The study learnt that failure by MPs and their parties to fulfill campaign promises was the main reason why the respondents (party switchers) were switching parties from election to election. When deciding which party to vote for, the study revealed that most of the respondents were guided by non-partisan cues which included personality of the candidate, performance perception, and party's position on issues. On political sophistication, the study observed that the majority of the respondents were politically informed, were engaged in interpersonal discussions about politics, and were also politically interested. In addition, the majority of the respondents were party identifiers.

With regard to political disaffection, the study observed that most of the respondents lacked trust in political actors and institutions and that they were not satisfied with how democracy works in Malawi. Nonetheless, the majority of the respondents expressed a high sense of external political efficacy.

CHAPTER FIVE

ASSESSMENT OF RESULTS

5.1 Introduction

This chapter assesses the findings of the study with particular reference to the two theories which guided the study. The assessment shows the extent to which the empirical observations address or fail to address theoretical explanations on the role of political sophistication and political disaffection in voters' volatility with regard to some constituencies in Malawi. The political sophistication thesis as espoused by Russell Dalton (1984,2007,2013) holds that party switching tends to occur among voters who are politically sophisticated (politically informed and politically interested). On the other hand, the political disaffection thesis as advanced by Zelle (1995) contends that the switching of parties by voters on the Election Day is a function of political dissatisfaction. As earlier indicated, the studies which have demonstrated the influence of political sophistication and political disaffection on vote switching have been done exclusively in Europe and North America. The study therefore wanted to establish the extent to which the observations made in these studies could help explain the Malawi scenario. The assessment of the study results follows the sequence of the research questions as provided for in Chapter One.

5.2 Empirical Findings and Their Link to Theory

The responses that the researcher got on why the respondents switch parties on the election day pointed to disillusionment with the performance and conduct of political parties and their representatives (MPs) after winning the elections. This finding supports the frustrated floating voter theory according to which voters switch parties

as an expression of their disillusionment with the party they previously voted for. Nonetheless the switching of parties, according to the theory, does not in itself signify a shift in party allegiance (party re-alignment). Instead, it is simply a sign of “*a mood of protest*” against one’s favoured party. In his own words, the proponent of frustrated floating voter theory, Carsten Zelle (1995) explains that:

“Vote switchers want to preserve the affective positive relationship with their favourite party. However, if their favourite party eventually proves to be unworthy of their trust, disappointment about that party may trigger a feeling of frustration which eventually lead them to party switching.”

That party switching might not actually translate into party re-alignment seem to hold true with the respondents in this study (vote switchers). As earlier observed, despite being professed party switchers, most of the respondents identified themselves with a party implying that their unstable voting behaviour was purely a matter of protest than a shift in party allegiance.

On the question of exposure to political information, the study showed that most of the respondents were politically informed confirming the cognitive mobilization theory that vote switchers are mainly those who are politically aware of what is happening around them. According to Dalton (2007), the proponent of cognitive mobilisation theory, exposure to political information (news) enables voters to make informed and independent voting choices. The implication of this is that when voters are politically aware of what is happening they do not require party direction on how to vote on the Election Day. As Berelson, Lazarsfeld, and McPhee (1954) explain, politically informed voters know on their own “what the issues are, what their history is, what the relevant facts are, and what parties stand for.”

While the preceding finding does confirm the cognitive mobilisation theory on the link between political interest and vote switching, it contradicts the traditional floating voter theory as developed by the Columbian University researchers (Berelson, Lazarsfeld & McPhee, 1963; Lazarsfeld, Berelson & Gaudet, 1968). According to this school of thought, “Stability in vote is characteristic of those interested in politics and instability of those not particularly interested.” Despite being politically sophisticated (politically informed) most of the respondents in the study were found to be party identifiers – they belonged to a party. Dalton’s cognitive mobilisation theory expects vote switchers to be weakly attached to parties. Thus, the finding confirms the cognitive mobilisation theory in the sense that by switching parties from election to election the respondents demonstrated weak psychological attachment to their parties.

In the electoral research literature, voters who feel strongly attached to a party are associated with a stable voting behaviour – they tend to vote for the same party election after election (Dassonnville, 2014, 2012; Heywood, 2002; Campbell, Converse, Miller & Stokes, 1960).

On how vote switchers form their party preferences, the study found out that the majority of the respondents (who were politically sophisticated) base their voting choices on issues, candidate personality, and retrospective evaluation of party performance (short-term motives). To this effect, the cognitive mobilisation theory was confirmed according to which politically sophisticated voters are guided by short-term forces in their voting preferences (Garzia, 2011; Willocq, 2016). On the question of political trust, the study found out that the majority of the respondents lacked trust in political actors and institutions. This finding supports the frustrated floating voter theory according to which vote switchers have a low sense of political trust.

According to van der Meer (2018), political trust constitutes one of the necessary pre-conditions of democratic rule as it lays weight to the legitimacy of the political authority and political institutions. This view is shared by Marrien and Hooghe (2011) who have observed that citizens are more likely to abide by the decisions of political institutions if they perceive these institutions to be legitimate. One way of achieving legitimacy is by doing things that meet the expectations of the masses, something that also ensures their sustained trust in political actors and institutions.

Thus, declining levels of political trust among some citizens, however small in number, must be a cause of a great concern for a country's democracy. As Marrien and Hooghe explain, low levels of political trust among citizens have the propensity of undermining the stability of democratic political systems. The two scholars have demonstrated that politically distrusting citizens tend to create a social environment which makes it more difficult for political leaders to govern and implement legislation. Politically distrusting citizens are associated with less support for law compliance within a society (Marrien & Hooghe, 2011).

In the study, the majority of the respondents also reported lack of satisfaction with how democracy works in Malawi. This confirmed the frustrated floating voter theory that party switching tends to occur among voters who are dissatisfied with how democracy works in a country. That the majority of the respondents expressed dissatisfaction with the state of democracy in Malawi was not surprising considering the fact that they had also reported low sense of political trust in politicians and political institutions such as the courts and the national assembly. The link between the respondents' dissatisfaction with the state of democracy and the performance of

politicians and political institutions in Malawi should be obvious. Since the respondents had expressed lack of confidence in political actors and institutions on whose shoulder democracy rests they should find it quite difficult to be impressed with the quality of democracy that emerges out of such actors and institutions. The study also observed that the majority of the respondents had a high sense of external political efficacy. This finding seems to contradict the frustrated floating voter theory which expects the switching of parties to occur among voters with a low sense of external political efficacy.

As stated before, having a sense of high external political efficacy implies that citizens are satisfied with the performance or responsiveness of political actors and institutions. In such situations, one should expect voters to vote for the incumbent and not the challenger and therefore to be stable in their voting behaviour. However, as earlier observed, respondents in the study expressed low sense of trust in government institutions, particularly in the Malawi police service, the national assembly, and the courts. The respondents also expressed lack of trust in politicians and political parties. All this means that the respondents did not believe that government institutions together with the politicians were doing a commendable job for the country. A possible explanation to this inconsistency could be that while the respondents were not satisfied with the performance of government institutions and politicians they nonetheless believed that they have the potential to influence change. In this sense, therefore, the external efficacy expressed here was not that of trust and satisfaction with the responsiveness of political actors and institutions in Malawi, instead it was about the respondents' conviction that they have the ability to induce change through their vote.

5.3 Conclusion

This chapter presented an assessment of the research findings with regard to a theory, that is whether the findings agree or disagree with what the theory is advancing. The assessment of the results has generally shown the efficacy of the two theories (the cognitive mobilization theory and the frustrated floating voter theory) in explaining instances of vote switching among the investigated group.

CHAPTER SIX

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

6.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the main conclusions drawn from the study as well as the recommendations with regard to areas for further studies. The chapter begins by restating the objectives of the study and its main findings. It then goes on to draw the main conclusions of the study. This is followed by an assessment of the extent to which the findings and conclusions have addressed the objectives of the study. Finally, the chapter offers recommendations with regard to future studies in areas which were not properly addressed by this study.

6.2 Research Objectives, Findings and Conclusions

As a matter of reminder this study took place in Nkhatabay South East constituency which lies in the lakeshore district of Nkhatabay in the northern part of Malawi. The study focused on vote switchers only and it had six objectives to address. The first objective was to establish personal motivations behind party switching among the respondents. The study found out that failure by parties and their representative (MPs) to deliver on their campaign promises was the overriding factor behind party switching among the respondents. This finding reveals lack of responsiveness on the part of parties and their representatives to the needs of the investigated group. The finding also demonstrates the suitability of the political disaffection thesis in explaining the electoral behaviour of the investigated group. The political disaffection thesis attributes vote switching to voters' dissatisfaction emanating from poor performance by political actors and institutions (Zelle, 1995; Soderlund, 2008; Willocq, 2016).

It can be argued to this effect that the main finding as well as the conclusion drawn from it do satisfy the demands of the first objective of the study and its accompanying research question notwithstanding the fact that the respondents provided different reasons as to why they felt that political parties and their representatives were not delivering on their campaign promises.

The second objective of the study was to examine the extent to which exposure to political information influences electoral choices of the respondents. The cognitive mobilisation theory, one of the theories in which the study was anchored, posits that vote switchers tend to be those who are politically informed (politically sophisticated) (Dalton, 2007, 2013; Dassonneville, 2015). The study observed that the majority of the respondents, who were all party switchers, were politically informed – the group said it followed political events through the mass and social media as well as through interpersonal discussions about politics. This finding shows the relevance of the cognitive mobilisation theory in explaining why the group under investigation switches parties' election after election. Again the finding signifies the influence of political information on the investigated group when it comes to its voting preferences. Thus, the finding as well as the conclusion drawn from it does address the second objective of the study.

In its third objective, the study sought to establish how the group under investigation forms its party preferences during the election. The cognitive mobilisation theory suggests that vote switchers tend to be guided by short-term voting motives such as candidate image and retrospective evaluation of government performance (Garzia, 2011; Willocq, 2016).

The study observed that the majority of the respondents are guided by the candidate image when they are deciding which party to vote for – they do not rely on partisan cues such as party affiliations or ethnicity. The finding shows that the group under investigation makes independent electoral choices. To this effect, the finding also demonstrates the relevance of the cognitive mobilisation theory in explaining why the group under investigation switches parties from one election to another. Thus, this finding as well as the conclusion drawn from it does satisfy the demands of the third research objective.

The fourth objective of the study was to assess the influence of political trust on voting preferences among the respondents. This objective was anchored in the frustrated floating voter theory which posits that vote switching tends to be common among voters with a low sense of political trust in political actors and government institutions (Zelle, 1995; Soderlund, 2008; Willocq, 2016). The empirical observations confirmed this proposition as the majority of the respondents expressed lack of trust in all of the political actors and institutions they were asked about - members of parliament, political parties, the courts, the national assembly, and the police. According to Parker, Parker and Towner (2015) voters' level of political trust can be judged by the extent to which they believe political leaders keep their campaign promises, use their position for personal gain, appear to be honest or can generally be trusted to do the right thing. In addition, the extent to which government institutions appear to do what is right equally matters to voters (Parker, Parker & Towner, 2015). The conclusion that can be drawn from this finding is that the investigated group takes matters of political trust quite seriously such that their perception about political trust does have a bearing on their voting decisions.

The empirical observation as well as the conclusion drawn from it does meet the demands of the fourth objective of the study.

The fifth objective of the study was to find out, among the respondents, the level of satisfaction with how democracy works in Malawi. According to the frustrated floating voter theory vote switchers tend to be those who are dissatisfied with how democracy works in a country. The study observed that the majority of the respondents were not satisfied with how democracy works in Malawi confirming the frustrated floating voter theory. This finding signifies that the country's state of democracy does matter to the investigated group when it comes to its voting preferences. Finally, the study wanted to assess the level of external political efficacy among the respondents. The political disaffection thesis posits that vote switching tends to occur among voters with a low sense of external political efficacy (Dassonnville, 2015, 2012; Willocq, 2016). Contrary to this view, this study observed that the majority of the respondents had a high sense of external political efficacy. Among other things, most of the respondents believed that taking part in voting makes sense arguing that this can help bring about the much needed change in Malawi. The finding shows that a sense of high external political efficacy matters when it comes to vote switching especially with regard to the investigated group and other voters who may have individual characteristics similar to those of the investigated group. Though the finding seems to contradict the theoretical proposition it nonetheless addresses the fifth study objective in the sense that the study was able to establish the level of external political efficacy among the respondents. The study was also able to show which level of external political efficacy was responsible for the inconsistent electoral behaviour of the respondents.

6.3 Recommendations for Future Research

Future related studies should strive to include more constituencies as opposed to one. The constituencies ought to have a history of both stability and change in voting behaviour. Such a comprehensive approach would offer many advantages which include the following: Firstly, the approach would help to tell whether political sophistication and political disaffection bear similar impact on the voting preferences of party switchers and stable voters. This study did not establish this because it was confined to only one constituency and to very few purposively selected vote switchers. Secondly, a comprehensive approach to the study of voters' volatility in would lead to an equally comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon in the country.

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1: *Screening Items for the Respondents Based on Elections Results (1994 - 2014), Nkhatabay South East Constituency*

The prospective respondents were supposed to be vote switchers and were expected to have voted in more than two elections in the period between 1994 and 2014. The respondents were therefore asked to recall their voting choices in the elections they purportedly took part in. In order to ascertain their legibility for the study, the respondents' answers were expected to match with those listed in the table below.

Election Year	Winning Party	Winning Candidate
1994	AFORD	Reverend Pat Banda
1999	MCP	Khumbo Chirwa
2004	RP	Khumbo Chirwa
2009	DPP	David Mphande
2014	PP	Noah Chimpeni

Source: www.mec.org.mw

Appendix 2: Focus Group Questionnaire

Research Topic: Electoral Shifts in Malawi: A Study of Nkhatabay South East
Constituency (1994-2014)

Questions

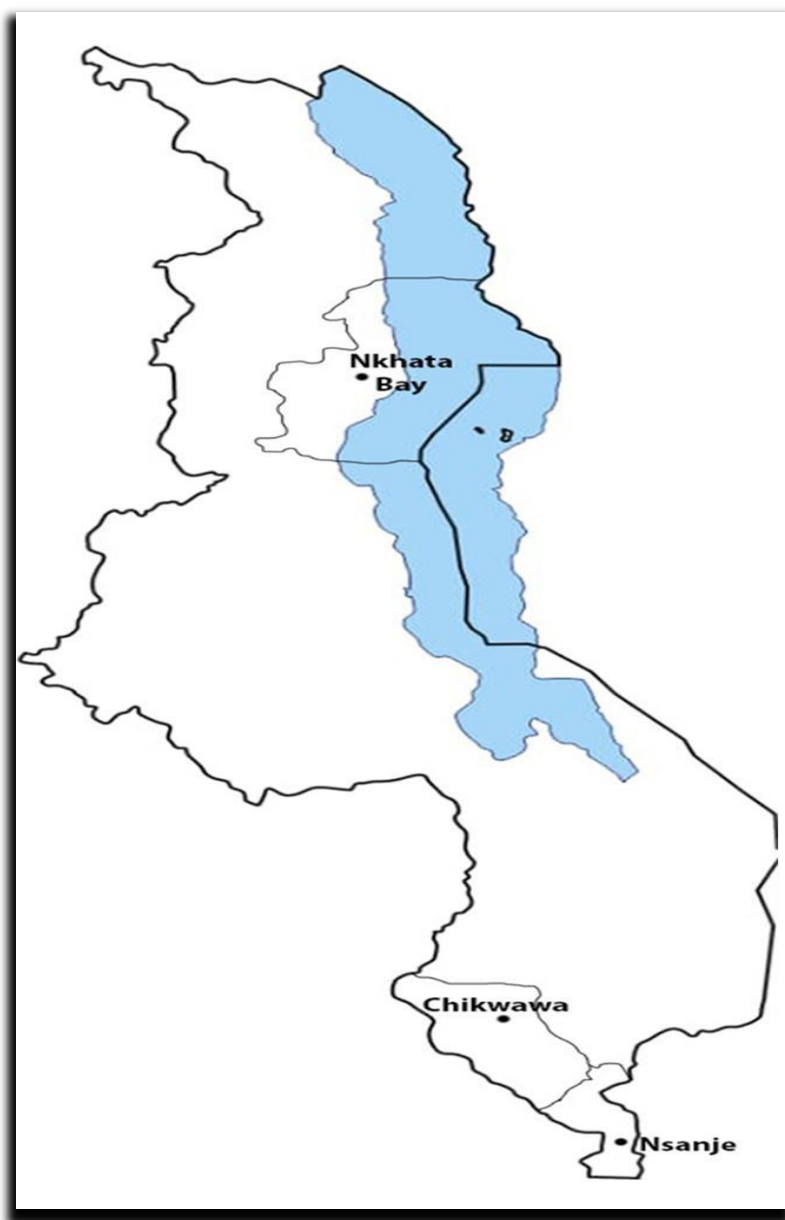
1. What makes you vote for a different party in each and every election?
2. What factors do you consider when deciding which party to vote for?
3. Tell me your views about the state of democracy in Malawi.
4. Do you follow politics in Malawi? If yes, what methods do you use to get informed about politics?
5. What can you say about your interest in politics?
6. Do you ever discuss anything about politics either with your friends, colleagues or family members?
7. Is there any political party in Malawi that you are close to? If “Yes” Which party is that?
8. Tell me something about your trust in the following:
 - i. Members of parliament
 - ii. Political parties
 - iii. The police
 - iv. The courts
 - v. The national assembly.
9. Do you think taking part in voting makes sense in Malawi?

End of Questions

Appendix 3: Key Informants Questionnaire

Question

What could be the reasons behind vote switching in some constituencies in Malawi?



Appendix 4: *Map of Malawi Showing District with Exceptional Cases of Electoral*

Shifts, Source: Generated by the Researcher