

MALAWI

Research paper's abstract



Malawi was a one party state until 1994 when the transition to multiparty democracy occurred. Multiparty democracy fragmented the Malawi polity based on regions evidenced by the first voting pattern in 1994 and regionalism, often coupled with tribalism have continued to provide anchorage for political parties and thereby creating fault lines for electoral violence. Also, religion has sometimes influenced electoral violence but only to the extent that it dovetails with other parochial identities especially regionalism and tribalism. After the transition to multiparty democracy, the number of political parties has increased from one to over fifty on the register. Electoral political parties have also increased to over ten and parliamentary parties have increased from the original three to about seven. The increasing number of political parties has come about because of disagreements in the original parties leading to factions and splits. More political parties have meant more intense competition and potentially more instances of electoral violence.

In a semi-literate society, the spoken word is the most effective tool for communicating important concepts and values. In Malawi it is a valuable means for projecting values of mutual coexistence, tolerance and unity in diversity. During all the five elections since the transition to multiparty democracy, political parties have tended to manipulate the use of language to achieve effects of insulting, defaming, castigating, ridiculing, mocking or scandalizing competitors and have fuelled violence. Malawian political parties are seen to have regional and tribal bases of support. Campaign activities, especially for presidential elections by any political party in regions other than their perceived regional and tribal base is a recipe for violence. Electoral system: Malawi uses first past the post electoral system. In a Malawian context, the system promotes exclusionary politics and entrenches the regional and tribal anchor strategies of political parties. Big man politics and personality cult sustained by a culture of handouts from political elites to ordinary masses, sometimes fuels senseless attitudes and violence as supports of various politicians seek to retain their 'big man'. The political culture in which political leaders take the role of 'father' with a duty of providing 'food and welfare' to the family, and their supporters regard themselves and are seen as 'family' quickly transforms simple electoral competition into a life or death competition and rationalizes the drive towards and the actual occurrence of electoral violence. Big man politics have been sustained by lack of clear ideological positions in political parties.

Among the working methods used, this research paper will present and discuss matrices of empirical data on electoral violence for five general elections. The data is being culled out first from print media reports. Leading newspapers are being reviewed covering a 12 months period before a general election and 3 months after the election for each of the five general elections. Furthermore, access to registers of incidents of electoral violence is being sought from the Electoral Commission for all the five period. Some section willd raw primarily from empirical data of occurrences of electoral violence. It is expected that data from the five general elections (20 years) will enable identifying violence prone locations and identify factors that motivate violence.