



*Afrobarometer Briefing Paper No. 121*

**A Tale of Two Presidents:  
Assessments of ‘Chitsulo Cha  
Njanje’ and ‘Amayi’ in Malawi**

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## **1. Introduction**

This briefing paper uses a recent Afrobarometer public opinion survey to compare people’s assessments of the two most recent presidents of Malawi, the incumbent, Mrs. Joyce Banda, and her predecessor, the late Dr. Bingu wa Mutharika. The paper checks whether people make consistent comparisons given that President Banda had been in office for only two months at the time of the survey, while President Mutharika had served seven years in office. Having checked the consistency of the assessments, it examines which of the two is seen to be better. We expect that some people would honestly fail to assess both Presidents, and in particular that a sizeable proportion would be unable to assess President Banda because of her short period in office. We also expect that some people would form an opinion about President Banda based on her history as leader of a Non-Governmental Organizations (NGO), a Member of Parliament (MP), a Minister and as Vice President. As such it is necessary that we discuss briefly their political history in Malawi, after first introducing the Afrobarometer,

## **2. Afrobarometer Surveys**

The Afrobarometer is a comparative series of public attitude surveys, covering 35 African countries in Round 5 (2011-2013). It measures public attitudes on democracy and its alternatives, as well as evaluations of the quality of governance and economic performance. In addition, the survey assesses the views of the electorate on critical political issues in the surveyed countries. The Afrobarometer’s main goal is to produce scientifically reliable data on public opinion in Africa while strengthening institutional capacities for survey research, and sharing research findings to inform policy and practice. The Afrobarometer also provides comparisons over time, as four rounds of surveys have been held from 1999 to 2008, and Round 5 is currently underway.

During Round 5, Afrobarometer surveys will be conducted in 35 African countries using a common survey instrument and methodology. The instrument asks a standard set of questions that permits systematic comparison in public attitudes across countries and over time. The methodology is based on a national probability sample of 2,400 adult Malawians selected to represent all adult citizens of voting age, allowing for inferences with a sampling margin of error of +/- 2% at a 95% confidence level. The sample was drawn randomly based on Probability Proportionate to Population Size (PPPS), thus taking account of population distributions, gender as well as rural-urban divides. The sampling process ensured that every adult Malawian citizen had an equal and known chance of being selected in the sample. Fieldwork in Malawi was

conducted by the Centre for Social Research, between 4<sup>th</sup> June and 1<sup>st</sup> July, 2012. Previous Afrobarometer surveys were conducted in Malawi in 1999 (Round 1), 2003 (Round 2), 2005 (Round 3), and 2008 (Round 4).<sup>1</sup>

### **3. The Late Dr. Bingu wa Mutharika**

The late and former President of Malawi used to call himself *Chitsulo Cha Njanje*, meaning “railway steel”, for his toughness. Mutharika came on the Malawi political scene in 1999 when he contested as a presidential candidate for his United Party. He polled least among the presidential hopefuls (0.47% of the votes)<sup>2</sup>. After this terrible loss, he went into political oblivion until President Bakili Muluzi of the United Democratic Front (UDF) made him Deputy Governor of the Reserve Bank of Malawi (a technocratic post) and later Minister of Economic Planning and Development. He was subsequently appointed a presidential candidate for the UDF. He contested and won the 2004 elections on the UDF ticket, but he then ditched UDF and formed his own party called the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP). Supported by generous development partners and good weather conditions, the Malawi economy grew by an average of 7% between 2005 and 2009<sup>3</sup> under President Mutharika’s rule. This boosted his popular support such that the 2008 Afrobarometer survey found that 61% of adults said they would vote for him if elections were held then<sup>4</sup>. His government’s popularity was confirmed in the 2009 elections when he polled 66% and his party won an absolute majority in Parliament<sup>5</sup>, the highest vote share ever achieved since the re-introduction of multiparty democracy in Malawi in 1993.

However, this popular support soon started to wane following several unpopular decisions, among them the sidelining of the Vice President, the attempted imposition of Mutharika’s brother as the DPP torchbearer for the 2014 elections, and the enactment of a number of draconian laws such as the Media and Police Acts. as well as the expulsion of the UK High Commissioner. These decisions, coupled with declining economic conditions resulting from poor export earnings from tobacco and diminished foreign aid (and as evidenced by scarce foreign currency, fuel and basic commodities like sugar) galvanised civil society organisations to organise countrywide protest marches on July 20, 2011, during which 20 people were shot dead by the police. As a result, Dr. Mutharika’s popular support dissipated to the extent that by early 2012, civil society organisations were threatening that he must resign or face massive protests. Instead, on April 6, 2012 the president was taken ill and died. According to the *Report of the Commission of Inquiry* into the circumstances surrounding his death (Singini, et al. 2013), the economic malaise and loss of popular support just two years into his second term may have contributed to a cardiac arrest, which caused his death.

### **4. Mrs. Joyce Banda**

Ms. Banda became the President of Malawi on the 7<sup>th</sup> of April 2012 after the death of President Mutharika. People fondly call her *Amayi* (meaning mother). Before the presidential post, she

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<sup>1</sup> In earlier rounds sample size averaged 1200 respondents, with a sampling margin of error of +/-2.8% at a 95% confidence level.

<sup>2</sup> [http://africanelections.tripod.com/mw.html#1999\\_Presidential\\_Election](http://africanelections.tripod.com/mw.html#1999_Presidential_Election).

<sup>3</sup> This average was calculated from annual growth rates from *Annual Economic Report 2010 and 2007* (Ministry of Development Planning and Cooperation (2010, 2007)).

<sup>4</sup> Please refer to Afrobarometer Briefing Paper no. 75 (Tsoka, 2009) available at [www.afrobarometer.org](http://www.afrobarometer.org)

<sup>5</sup> [http://africanelections.tripod.com/mw.html#1999\\_Presidential\\_Election](http://africanelections.tripod.com/mw.html#1999_Presidential_Election).

held several political positions. Her political career began when she won the seat of an MP in 1999. She was later appointed a Minister, and held several ministerial portfolios up to the 2004 elections, when she won again as an MP. She was also appointed a Minister in the first Mutharika cabinet and became one of the founding members and trustees of the DPP. In the 2009 elections, she was selected as Mutharika’s running mate. She was also the first Vice President of DPP until she was expelled. This raised the Vice President’s popularity because she stood against the President’s undemocratic moves despite the public media’s negative campaign against her. She later formed her own political party, the People’s Party (PP). Her popularity also increased when she stood with the July 20 protesters and visited some of the families whose members were shot dead. Despite this, she remained the Vice President of the country until taking over as president following the demise of President Mutharika. The unconstitutional scheming of the ruling DPP party to deny her automatic ascendancy to the presidency further increased her popular support.

### 5. Comparing Two Months and Seven Years

This briefing paper is based on four questions asked by Afrobarometer that compared the two presidents or their governments. The first rates the level of democracy on a scale of 0 to 10. The second makes an assessment of citizens’ trust in each of their presidents. The third measures the level of corruption in the respective governments. The fourth assesses performance of the two presidents.

It is important to remember that by the time of the survey, Mrs Joyce Banda had been President for only two months, compared to seven years for Dr. Mutharika. The lack of familiarity with President Banda is generally reflected in higher levels of “don’t know” responses on questions assessing her performance. Even so, in all cases a majority were able to make an assessment. The reader is also reminded that within the two months of President Banda’s rule, some of the most visible signs of Dr. Mutharika’s failures were dealt with. In particular, foreign currency, fuel and sugar became available and queues disappeared.

#### *Level of democracy under Presidents Banda and Mutharika*

The Afrobarometer survey requests respondents to rate the level of democracy, on a scale from 0 to 10, during four presidential periods: 1) under Dr. Kamuzu Banda, 2) under Dr. Bakili Muluzi, 3) under Dr. Mutharika, and 4) under Mrs. Joyce Banda. Respondents were also asked to rate the level of democracy they expected the country to achieve in the future. Table 1 presents the average (mean and median) ratings for each of these eras.

**Table 1: Popular Ratings of the Average Level of Democracy by Presidential Era**

	<b>Mrs. Banda</b>	<b>Dr. Mutharika</b>	<b>Dr. Muluzi</b>	<b>Dr. Kamuzu Banda</b>	<b>Future</b>
Mean	5.5	5	5.2	3.8	9.2
Median	5	5	5	2	10
<b>N</b>	<b>2038</b>	<b>2120</b>	<b>2082</b>	<b>1807</b>	<b>2059</b>

*“On a scale between 0 and 10, where 0 means completely undemocratic and 10 means completely democratic, where would you place each of the following, or haven’t you heard enough to say? Our country today? Our country under the late President Bingu wa Mutharika? Our country ten years ago, in 2002 [Under President Bakili*

*Muluzi? Our country under one party rule under Dr. Kamuzu Banda? And on the same scale, where would you want our country to be in the future?"*

The worst era was that of Dr. Kamuzu Banda. This makes sense because it was an era of one-party one-man rule. There are, however, only minor differences between the three multiparty presidents. It is worth mentioning, nonetheless, that the current era (two months old, at the time of the survey) is rated the highest. Since this bulletin is focussing on comparing the latest two presidents, ratings for the two are further disaggregated by location, region and gender. We also define levels 0-3 as a low level of democracy, 4-7 as a moderate level of democracy, and 8-10 as a high level of democracy to facilitate the analysis. Table 2 presents the results by location and gender. Overall, the differences between the two presidents in terms of the proportion of people who rated their eras as having high levels of democracy are relatively modest. However, 11% more rated Dr. Mutharika's era as having low levels of democracy compared to Mrs. Banda's era.

**Table 2: Level of Democracy under Presidents Mutharika and Banda, by Location and Gender**

Level	Rural	Towns	Cities	Male	Female	Total
<b>Banda</b>						
Low	21%	17%	23%	21%	20%	21%
Moderate	38%	48%	48%	43%	38%	40%
High	25%	25%	20%	27%	21%	24%
Don't know	17%	11%	9%	10%	21%	15%
<b>Mutharika</b>						
Low	32%	35%	30%	38%	26%	32%
Moderate	30%	37%	42%	34%	29%	32%
High	25%	21%	22%	22%	27%	25%
Don't know	13%	7%	6%	6%	18%	12%

A similar picture emerges across location. Dr. Mutharika's era is consistently rated somewhat worse (i.e., more "low" ratings) than Mrs. Banda's era in towns, cities and rural areas (although the differences in "high" ratings are marginal).

However, there is a distinct gender disparity between men and women. Significantly more women (27%) than men (22%) rated Dr. Mutharika's era as highly democratic, while the opposite is true for Mrs Banda. More men (27%) than women (21%) associated her government with a high level of democracy. In general, women rated Dr. Mutharika's era better than Mrs. Banda's and vice versa for men.

**Table 3: Level of Democracy under Presidents Mutharika and Banda, by Region**

Level	Banda			Mutharika		
	North	Centre	South	North	Centre	South
Low	15%	19%	28%	26%	43%	32%
Moderate	46%	43%	49%	44%	33%	36%
High	31%	33%	18%	27%	22%	30%

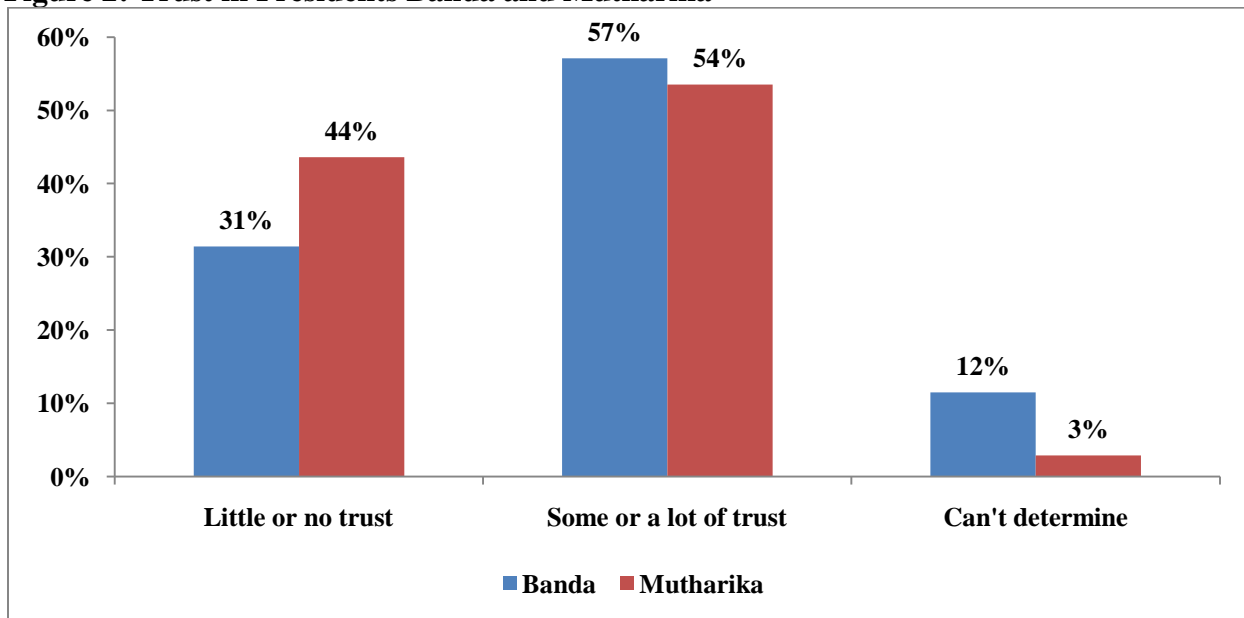
Table 3 presents the findings disaggregated by region. Under Mrs. Banda, it is residents of the South who seem least confident in democracy – the same region that was most confident in democracy under Dr. Mutharika. The Centre is in the opposite position, giving lowest marks to democracy under Dr. Mutharika (22% with a high rating) and highest under Mrs. Banda (33%).

This regional picture seems to suggest that the North and Centre are more sympathetic to Mrs. Banda’s rule, while the people in the South may have had a soft spot for Dr. Mutharika. This is corroborated by self-declared political party support. Mrs. Banda’s People’s Party has 51%, 27% and 21% partisan support in the North, Centre and South, respectively. The corresponding support for Dr. Mutharika’s DPP is 10%, 7% and 26%. It is apparent that the regional partisan differences have a strong impact on citizens’ perceptions of democracy. It is also possible that these regional partisan biases will affect the assessments of the two presidents in terms of levels of trust, corruption and assessments of their performance, issues which we examine below.

***Level of Trust in Presidents Banda and Mutharika***

Trust is a critical ingredient for establishing the legitimacy of public leaders in the eyes of society. When there is no trust between those who hold political office and the citizens, legitimacy becomes questionable. Trust in elected leaders has implications for civic participation, support of democratic institutions and governments (e.g., through paying taxes), and participation in development activities, among others. The Afrobarometer asked respondents how much they trusted both the current President Joyce Banda, and the former President Mutharika. Respondents could select among the following response options: ‘Not at all’, ‘Just a little’, ‘Somewhat’ and ‘A lot’. For the purpose of this analysis, these are combined into ‘Little or no trust’ and ‘Some or a lot of trust’. The survey findings reveal more distrust in President Mutharika than in President Banda, as can be seen in Figure 2.

**Figure 2: Trust in Presidents Banda and Mutharika**



*How much do you trust President Joyce Banda, or haven't you heard enough about her to say?  
 How much did you trust the late President Bingu wa Mutharika, or haven't you heard enough about him to say?*

Generally, cities have the most distrustful respondents (Table 4), while there is no significant difference between rural and town respondents. However, Mrs. Banda is more trusted than Dr. Mutharika by residents in all locations except cities, where the two were equally trusted. As expected there are more people that were unable to give their level of trust for Mrs Banda across all locations.

**Table 4: Trust in Presidents Banda and Mutharika, by Location**

Level of trust	Banda			Mutharika		
	Rural	Towns	Cities	Rural	Towns	Cities
Little or no trust	30%	33%	41%	43%	44%	47%
Some or a lot of trust	58%	56%	50%	54%	51%	50%
Don't know	12%	11%	10%	3%	5%	3%

*How much do you trust President Joyce Banda or haven't you heard enough about her to say? How much did you trust the late President Bingu wa Mutharika, or haven't you heard enough about him to say?*

The picture changes somewhat when the data are disaggregated by region (Table 5). Take the South for example: it has the highest level of distrust for Mrs Banda (42%) against 36% for Dr. Mutharika. The opposite is true for the North and Centre, which have higher levels of distrust for Dr. Mutharika than Mrs. Banda. This resonates with the findings on level of democracy explained earlier on.

**Table 5: Trust in Presidents Banda and Mutharika, by Region**

Level of trust	Banda			Mutharika		
	North	Centre	South	North	Centre	South
Little or no trust at all	19%	24%	42%	47%	50%	36%
Some or a lot of trust	64%	62%	50%	49%	46%	62%
Can't determine	17%	14%	8%	4%	4%	2%

Further assessment by gender is also consistent with the earlier findings on democracy. Specifically, more women than men trust Dr. Mutharika (60% vs. 47%) whilst more men than women trust Mrs. Banda (60% vs. 54%) (Table 6).

**Table 6: Trust in Presidents Banda and Mutharika, by Gender**

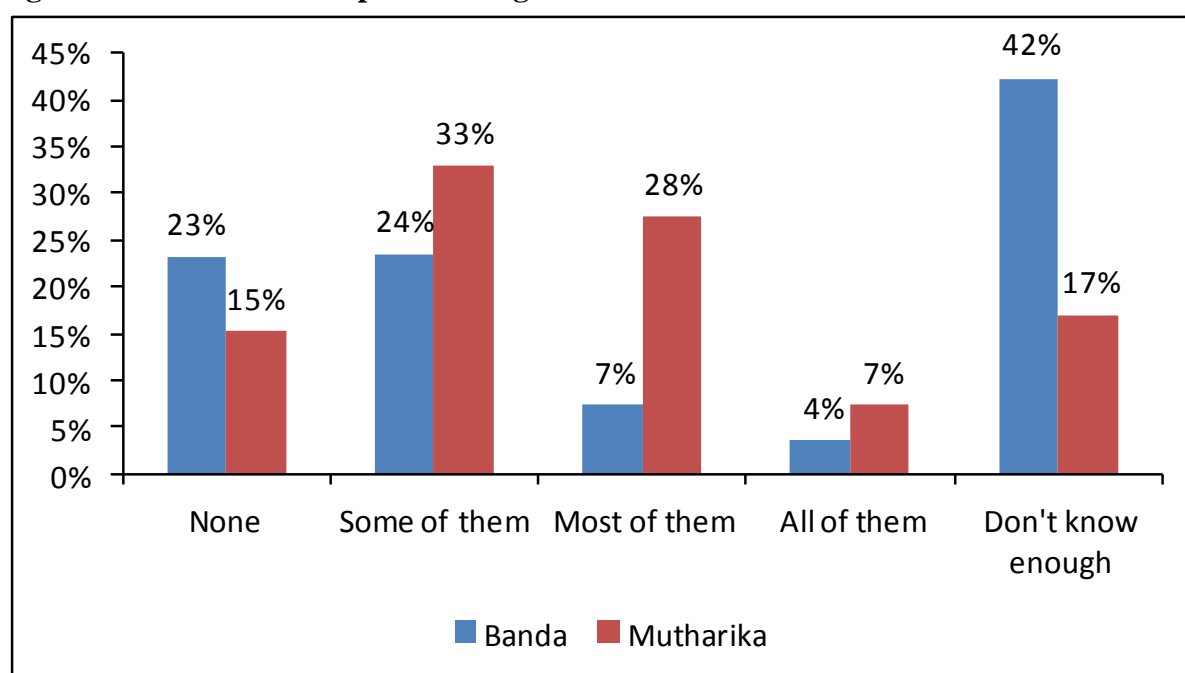
Level of trust	Banda		Mutharika	
	Male	Female	Male	Female
Little or no trust	31%	32%	50%	37%
Some or a lot of trust	60%	54%	47%	60%
Can't determine	9%	14%	3%	3%
Total	100%	100%	100%	100%

### ***Involvement of the Presidents and Officials in their Offices in Corruption***

Corrupt practices in government are a possible indicator of inefficiencies in public service delivery. Apart from affecting citizens' perceptions of government's response to the needs of the poor, who may not afford to pay for services, it is a cost to the economy. In Afrobarometer surveys, Malawians were asked to estimate how many government officials in the Banda and Mutharika administrations are/were involved in corruption.

The public reports that fewer officials in Mrs. Banda's government are involved in corruption compared to the late Dr. Mutharika's administration; just above a third Malawians (35%) report that most or all of the Mutharika officials are corrupt, as compared to 11% of officials in Mrs. Banda's administration. But a significant part of the difference is accounted for by the high levels who say they 'don't know' about the Banda administration. Clearly many people felt that it was just too soon to tell how officials in President Banda's office are handling their responsibilities.

**Figure 3: Perceived Corruption amongst Banda and Mutharika Officials**



*How many of the following people do you think are involved in corruption, or haven't you heard enough about them to say: President Joyce Banda and officials in her office?*

*And how much do you think the late President Bingu wa Mutharika and officials in his office were involved in corruption, or haven't you heard enough about them to say?*

Previous assessments showed that men are generally biased against Mutharika while women are biased against Banda. Table 7 presents the perceptions of men and women on corruption in the Mutharika and Banda administrations.

**Table 7: Perceived Corruption amongst Banda and Mutharika Officials, by Gender**

How many	Banda		Mutharika	
	Male	Female	Male	Female
None or some of them	50%	43%	47%	50%
All or most of them	10%	12%	40%	29%
Don't know/Haven't heard enough	40%	45%	13%	21%

The above table shows that the usual gender biases still exist in this assessment; women have more favourable impressions of the Mutharika administration, whilst men are more positive about the Banda administration. In this regard, we find more males (40%) than females (29%) reporting that 'most' or 'all' officials under Mutharika's government were corrupt, against just 10% of males and 12% of females who hold the same view for the current Banda administration.

However, even factoring in the gender biases, the Mutharika administration is perceived to have been more corrupt than the current Banda administration. The same perception holds when measured against location and region as depicted in Table 8.

**Table 8: Perceived Corruption amongst Banda and Mutharika Officials, by Location and Region**

How many	Rural	Towns	Cities	North	Centre	South
	<b>Banda officials</b>					
None or some of them	47%	48%	48%	59%	42%	48%
All or most of them	12%	14%	6%	9%	8%	16%
Don't know/Haven't heard enough	41%	38%	46%	32%	50%	36%
	<b>Mutharika officials</b>					
None or some of them	48%	48%	52%	51%	42%	53%
All or most of them	34%	38%	38%	35%	34%	36%
Don't know/Haven't heard enough	18%	14%	10%	14%	24%	12%

In general, more Malawians residing in cities believe that Mrs Banda's administration is clean. Further, more Malawians across the different locations report that "most or all officials" in Mutharika's government were corrupt. This picture changes when we consider the regional dimension. All regions consider the Banda administration to be cleaner than Mutharika's. There appear to be no strong regional biases. For example, we expected the highest clean bill for the Bingu administration to come from South. However, the highest rating is from the North. In fact, the highest proportion of those that said all or most of Bingu's officials were corrupt was from the South. Apparently, when it comes to the assessment of corruption, there are no strong regional biases.

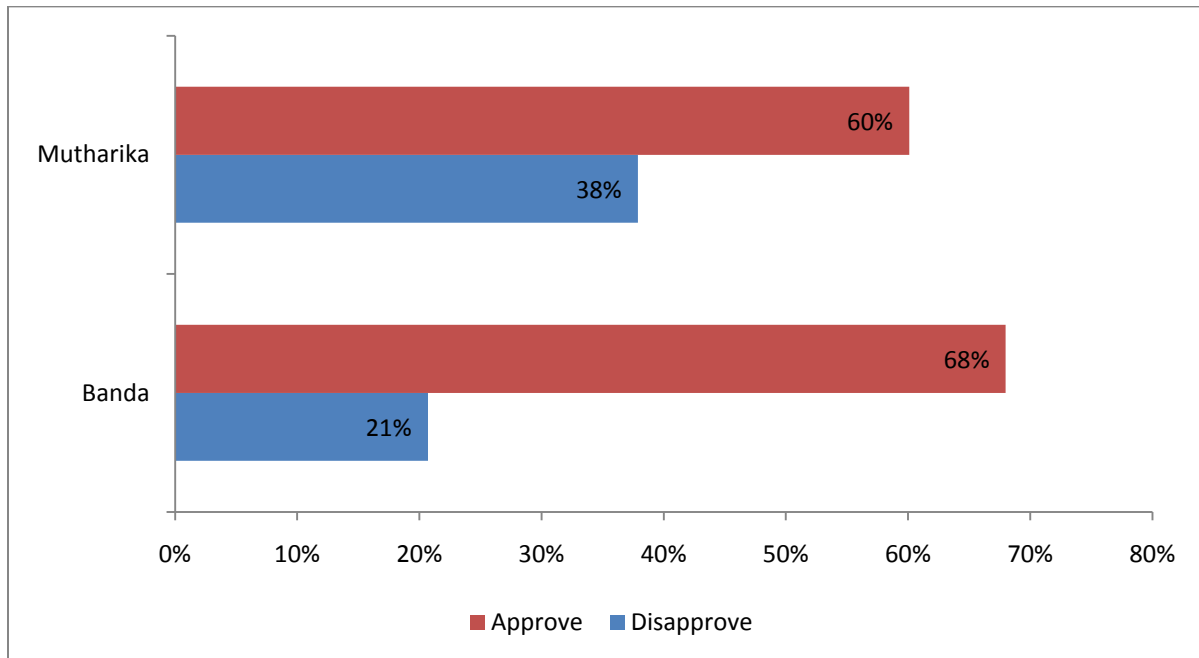
### ***Presidential Job Performance***

What about assessment of the performance of the two presidents? First we look at the general approval rating of the two as shown on Figure 4. Whilst the overall assessment is positive for both, the survey also reveals more positive approval for President Banda (68%) than the late



President Mutharika (60%). However, differences based on disapproval ratings are more substantial. More than a third (38%) disapproved of the late President Mutharika’s job performance, as compared to less than a quarter (21%) holding the same sentiments about President Banda.

**Figure 4: Job Approval for Presidents Banda and Mutharika**



*Do you approve or disapprove of the way that the following people have performed their jobs over the past twelve months, or haven't you heard enough about them to say: President Joyce Banda? And did you approve or disapprove of the way the late President Bingu wa Mutharika performed his job over the last twelve months, or haven't you heard enough about him to say?*

However, the usual gender bias persists (Table 9). More men than women approve of President Banda’s performance, while more women than men approve of President Mutharika’s performance. Thus the gender bias has permeated throughout the assessments.

**Table 9: Job Approval for Presidents Banda and Mutharika, by Gender**

	Banda		Mutharika	
	Male	Female	Male	Female
Disapproval rating	21%	20%	43%	33%
Approval rating	70%	66%	55%	65%
Can't rate	8%	14%	2%	2%

Further analysis by location (Table 10) reveals that President Banda receives a thumbs up in job performance from town respondents (73%), but her highest disapproval from city respondents (24%). In comparison, there is no significant difference in performance ratings for the late

President Mutharika across the three locations. Across regions, we see a strong majority (77%) from the centre approving of the way President Banda has performed during her two months in office. As expected, the highest approval rating for the late President Mutharika (66%) comes from the South – but that is the same approval rating President Banda gets in the region. Unexpectedly, President Banda receives the lowest approval and highest disapproval ratings from the Northern Region.

**Table 10: Job Approval for Presidents Banda and Mutharika, by Location and Region**

	Banda Performance			Mutharika Performance		
	Rural	Towns	Cities	Rural	Towns	Cities
Disapproval	21%	16%	24%	38%	39%	35%
Approval	68%	73%	67%	60%	59%	63%
Don't know	11%	12%	10%	2%	2%	2%
	North	Centre	South	North	Centre	South
Disapproval	34%	11%	26%	41%	42%	33%
Approval	48%	77%	66%	53%	56%	66%
Don't know	18%	13%	8%	6%	2%	1%

This is different from the pattern observed in the first two assessments (level of democracy and trust) where residences in the North and Centre highly approve President Banda, whilst the late President Mutharika receives more support from the South. In this assessment, the late President Mutharika receives positive ratings from the Central Region as well (56%). Similarly, we also observe President Banda receiving a thumbs up from residents in the South (66%), but relatively high levels of disapproval from her usual backers in the North, where only a plurality of 48% approve her job performance.

## 6. Conclusions

In light of the above findings, this brief concludes as follows:

1. In general the Banda administration is rated better than the Mutharika administration in all respects. This is particularly true if we discount the proportion of people who were unable to rate President Banda. There were very few cases when the Mutharika administration was seen in a more positive light than the Banda administration. The changes in the patterns of responses (i.e., higher levels of ‘don’t know’ responses) when it comes to the assessment of the level of corruption and job performance for the new administration gives us confidence that people provided their genuinely formed opinions, and not necessarily guess work.
2. Although we cannot offer any good reason, we conclude from the findings that men modestly favour President Banda while women modestly favour President Mutharika. The consistency in this finding across the different assessments demands a thorough qualitative study to unearth the reasons for the biases. This is particularly important because the survey interviewed equal numbers of men and women. We are also quick to point out that this bias also implies that the results observed could change if many of the

women who could not afford to form an opinion about President Banda and her government were able to do so.

3. There is no clear pattern coming from area of residence, i.e. rural areas, towns and cities. It is apparent that coming from either a rural area or town or city does not always mean favouring a particular President. In some circumstances respondents from towns or cities favoured President Mutharika while in others they favoured President Banda.
4. Using our findings on analysis by regions, we conclude that when it comes to assessing indicators that are easy to relate with, the usual biases do not play a very crucial role. When assessing the abstract level of democracy and trust, regional biases come into play. However, when it comes to assessing indicators that have direct effect, people suppressed their regional biases. This is an important hypothesis if proven to be true: Political parties that rely on regional biases can easily lose when other competing parties effectively prove to the electorate that they can deliver. In Malawi politics, relying heavily on regional support has proven to be a very dangerous approach to estimating party support, and indeed a politically suicidal approach that some political parties learned the hard way in the past.

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This Briefing Paper was prepared by **Maxton Grant Tsoka** at the **Centre for Social Research**.

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