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# FOOD SECURITY AND ELITE-RULER RELATIONS IN SUB-SAHARAN AFRICA:

## Exploring the impact of democracy on public goods provision

MICHELLE D'ARCY

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University of Gothenburg  
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## ABSTRACT

How does democracy impact on public goods provision? This question has provoked a wealth of empirical and theoretical investigation, but few answers that satisfactorily explain emerging patterns in Sub-Saharan Africa. Most existing accounts have focused on only one channel of influence – that between rulers and voters, arguing that democracy articulates demand for public goods provision through this mechanism. This paper focuses on a different relationship – that between rulers and elites – and argues that this mechanism can help to explain what has been happening on the supply side in public goods provision on the continent. The paper argues that democracy increases rulers’ need for patronage as a means of elite management, leading to a decline in capacity, and an inability to effectively supply public goods. The need for patronage is increased as democracy, by creating more routes to power, destabilizes rulers in relation to elites, who constitute their main rivals for power, and reduces their ability to employ strategies of control, thus making those of exchange more important. The argument is illustrated with a ‘most likely’ case of food security policy reform in Malawi.

**Michelle D’Arcy, Ph.D.**  
The Quality of Government Institute  
Department of Political Science  
University of Gothenburg  
michelle.darcy@gu.se

## Introduction

A now well established consensus contends that institutions are critical in determining economic and human development outcomes (North 1990, Hall & Jones 1999, Acemoglu, Johnson & Robinson 2001, Rodrik, Subramanian & Trebbi 2004), but debate persists about which institutions matter and how. This is especially true of one particular set of institutions: those associated with democracy. Although democracy is now the most prevalent regime type in the world and many core theories in political science predict that it will lead to better public goods provision, it is still not clear that this is in fact the case (Ross 2006). The mismatch between our existing theories and the observed empirical realities, as more and more developing countries democratize, suggests that the relationship may not be unidirectional. Understanding how democracy may matter, through a number of different channels, is the main objective of this paper.

The argument put forward here suggests that democracy has differential effects, both stimulating and depressing public goods provision, through different channels. While existing accounts have focused on how democracy affects the relationship between rulers and voters by creating institutions that can articulate demands for public goods, this paper looks at another important relationship that has to date been neglected in the literature: that between rulers and the elite. It argues that, while democracy may stimulate leaders to provide more public goods through the first channel, its effect through the second inhibits the ability to actually supply these goods. Democracy, as it is designed to do, destabilizes rulers in relation to elites, who constitute their main rivals for power, and makes the challenge of consolidating their position more difficult. It reduces the ability of rulers to employ strategies of control, making those of exchange in the form of patronage more important. This then leads to an increase in corruption, a decline in capacity, and an inability to effectively deliver public goods and turn the demands which democracy articulates into concrete realities.

The paper proceeds as follows: the first section gives a brief overview of the trends in public goods provision in Sub-Saharan Africa in the era of democratization. The next section surveys the existing literature, showing how it cannot fully and adequately account for the observed patterns. Sec-

tion Three presents the main theoretical argument on how democracy effects elite-ruler relations and the implications of this for public goods provision. Section Four provides a detailed empirical case study to illustrate the argument. Through a ‘most likely’ case of food security policy in Malawi, the African country which experienced one of the fastest transitions to democracy, the empirical analysis shows how it is only by integrating the channel of elite-ruler relations into an account of the impact of democracy, that we can fully explain public goods provision in the area of food security. Finally, the paper concludes with some thoughts on future directions for research.

## Section One: Trends in Public Goods Provision in SSA since Democratization

To try to establish the patterns in Public Goods Provision (PGP) in the last two decades in Sub-Saharan Africa, Table One presents data on development outcomes in four key areas related to PGP: education, health, food security and control of corruption. The data points are the percentage change between the dates specified. The table gives the overall average for the continent, and then the average for those countries categorized as ‘Free’, ‘Partly Free’ and ‘Not Free’ at the beginning and end of each time period.

TABLE ONE: PERCENTAGE CHANGE ACROSS FIVE AREAS OF PGP IN THE ERA OF DEMOCRATIZATION, TABULATED BY FREEDOM HOUSE CLASSIFICATION

Freedom House Classification	Primary Enrollment 1999-2009 (% Change)	Secondary Enrollment 1999-2009 (% Change)	Under Five Mortality 1990-2010 (% Change)	Control of Corruption 1996-2010 (% Change)	% Population Malnourished 1992-2007 (% Change)
<b>SSA</b>	11.7	21.3	-21	3	-19
<b>Free</b>	8	5.6	-17	-47.6	-27.6
<b>Partly Free</b>	0	-45.5	-20.9	16	15.3
<b>No Free</b>	21.8	65.9	-20.8	-8.8	-11.2

Sources: World Bank African Development Indicators, FAOSTAT

The Tables shows that, overall within the period of democratization, the average for SSA has improved in four areas. More children are enrolled at both primary and secondary level, fewer chil-

dren under five are dying, and fewer people are malnourished. The improvement in control of corruption is negligible and within the margin of error. However, when we tabulate by regime type it would seem that there are marked differences in performance between countries that are free, partly free and not free. Free countries have, on average, improved outcomes in health, education and food security. But they are perceived to have become more corrupt. This is also true of non-democracies, who have improved in health, food security and, most notably, education. They too are perceived to have become more corrupt. Countries deemed partly free perform the worst, on average: they have improved in under five mortality and control of corruption, but have a greater proportion of their population undernourished than in the past and have seen no improvement or declines in levels of enrollment.

The data presented in Table One is very crude and it cannot be used to draw any firm conclusions. However, the broad outline picture it presents is suggestive. Although, overall, the continent has improved across four areas, this trend does not seem to be driven primarily by democracies, either full or partial. Free countries have improved in four areas but so too have non-democracies. Partly free countries have the most mixed record, with improvements in some areas and declines in others. This aggregated data, then, does not immediately clarify the relationship between democracy and PGP. It, rather, presents a puzzling picture that is very much at variance with the existing theories of democracy, as detailed in the section below.

## **Section Two: Public Goods Provision and Democracy – Existing Theoretical Explanations**

Two main strands of interpretation are clear in the research that has sought to understand the impact of democracy on public goods provision: one has argued that democracy acts as a stimulant to the provision of public goods; and the other has made the case that democracy has encouraged politicians to adapt clientelist patterns of distribution within a democratic framework. However, neither theoretical interpretation can fully account for the empirical evidence of what has been happening in PGP in Sub-Saharan Africa since democratization in the early 1990s.

A large and well established theoretical literature argues that democracy stimulates PGP through a number of mechanisms: electoral competition constrains rent seeking behaviour by politicians (Lake & Baum 2001), and incentivizes them to produce public goods to secure the favour of the median voter (Meltzer & Richard 1981) and a winning coalition (Bueno de Mesquita et al 2003); freedom of information in democracies provides politicians with the more complete information they need to be responsive to public welfare (Sen 1981); and freedom of association enables interest groups to press for welfare enhancing reforms (Olsen 1993), with the key role that politically organized labour played in the evolution of the welfare state in Europe cited as an example (Korpi 1983, Esping-Andersen 1985). The introduction of democracy creates institutions that articulate demands for PGP and incentivizes politicians into responding to those demands.

There is some evidence to suggest that democracy has stimulated increased social spending and universal policy reforms in Sub-Saharan Africa. Half of all African countries have introduced some form of universal basic education or healthcare services, though far more have done so in the former than the latter sector (D'Arcy 2011a). These developments have been shown to have been precipitated by electoral competition (Stasavage 2005a & b, Carbone 2011). African democracies now spend more on the social sectors, especially on education (D'Arcy 2011b). Democracy seems to have stimulated a move to PGP provision in the manner that theory suggests.

However, despite these policy changes and elevated spending levels, the record of democracy, in general and in Africa in particular, on the actual delivery of public goods in ways that lead to concrete improvements in human welfare is questionable. The link between democracy and welfare outcomes, such as infant mortality and literacy rates, has been seriously called into question. Keefer has shown that young democracies underperform across a range of policy areas, from secondary school enrollment to control of corruption (Keefer 2007). Ross has shown that previous empirical results making a case for a positive relationship between democracy and PGP were driven by biased samples that exclude high performing non-democracies (Ross 2006). Once he corrected for this using a multiple imputation technique, he found no positive relationship between democracy and infant mortality. Although there have been some important policy developments, it is hard to find

empirical evidence that democracy in Africa has precipitated a shift to broad-based PGP bringing substantial gains in human wellbeing.

This finding would come as no surprise to those within the second strand of literature, who have focused on one of the main obstacles to PGP: political clientelism. If understood as transactions between politicians and citizens that involve material favours being offered in return for political support at the polls (Wantchekon 2003, 400), it is clear that the persistence of clientelist dynamics is a major inhibitor of the emergence of broad-based universalist politics.

Clientelism has long been seen as one of the defining features of African politics (Bayart 1993, Bates 1994, Bratton & de Walle 1996). For those who see clientelism as an inherent cultural trait, democracy has done nothing to affect its persistence (Chabal & Deloz 1999). However, others, who see clientelist behavior as a rational response to institutional incentives, argue that democracy has not only failed to change the clientelist behavior of politicians, but it has also made that behaviour worse. A number of mechanisms through which this happens have been suggested; political competition increases the value of marginal votes that can be targeted, heightening incentives to buy those votes (Kitschelt & Wilkinson 2006); competition also provides incentives for politicians, lacking credibility, to substitute PGP for clientelist promises (Keefer & Vlaicu 2007); it creates a dilemma for politicians as those who make the first moves away from the prevailing situation lose out (Geddes 1994); and voters in poor countries have a preference for short-term investment and spending that brings immediate tangible benefits (Charron & Lapuente 2010).

Despite the extent to which the prevailing wisdom posits that clientelism is a central feature of African elections, the empirical evidence to support the claim that voters 'prefer' clientelist politicians and receive tangible benefits from clientelist exchanges in return for their votes is highly disputed. A number of studies have argued that, when presented with a choice, voters do not choose clientelist policies (Lindberg & Minnion 2008, Young 2009, Lindberg and Waghorn 2010). This may be because the benefits to ordinary Africans of clientelist policies do not seem to have been that great. As Gavin Williams concluded: 'what is so striking about many African countries is how

little trickles down to the worse-off and how much sticks to a few hands at the top' (Williams 1987, 639). This does not seem to have changed in the era of democratization. There is in fact evidence that being in the same ethnic group as those in power may be a disadvantage and lead to penalties such as higher tax (Kasara 2007). In the absence of firm empirical evidence it is hard to conclude that clientelist machine politics, distributing targeted goods in return for votes, is a core dynamic of African politics.

Thus, both of these theoretical literatures put forward two contrasting arguments, neither of which are fully supported by empirical evidence. One predicts a positive relationship between democracy and PGP. The other expects political competition to increase clientelism and so decrease PGP. Both cannot be true and neither has received strong empirical confirmation. African democracies are now both more universalistic in some of their PGP policies, and more corrupt than they were in the 1990s. Neither of these theoretical accounts can explain this seeming paradox.

Part of the reason for this may derive from the fact that what both theories share is; firstly, an emphasis on only one channel through which democracy may affect PGP - the relationship between rulers and voters; and, secondly, an exclusive focus on demand side factors. In so doing they overlook; another important relationship that persists throughout, and is changed by, democratic transitions – that between rulers and elites; and the importance of supply side factors that determine whether or not the increased articulation of demands for public goods brought about by democratization can be realized by an improved supply of those goods. As a growing body of research shows, supply side factors to do with state capacity, quality of government and their inverse, corruption, are critical determinants of the extent to which PGP actually produces improvements in human development outcomes (Wagstaff & Claeson 2004, Rajkumar & Swaroop 2008, Holmberg & Rothstein 2010). Supply side factors affect not only delivery but also politicians rational calculations: in weighing up whether or not to invest in public goods, governments take into account how easy it is to supply goods and therefore realize an adequate political return (D'Arcy 2011b).

Any attempt to understand the relationship between democracy and PGP in developing countries must take both of these overlooked factors into account. While the voter-ruler relationship may be



paramount in advanced democracies, elite capture of political processes in developing countries is as, if not more, important to policy outcomes. And although the automatic translation of demand into supply is perhaps a defensible assumption in strong capable states, that is certainly not true of most weak and capacity constrained developing states. The presence of strong elites and the absence of strong states may mean that the relationship between democracy and PGP in developing countries is different. The next section tries to take both of these overlooked aspects into account, and presents a theoretical account of how democracy impacts on public goods provision under conditions of weak political and economic development. I argue that, in these conditions, democracy has a significant negative impact through the channel of elite-ruler relations, as it destabilizes rulers in their relations with elites and impacts on the kinds of strategies they can employ in managing them. It closes down opportunities to use strategies of control, making those of exchange more important, and these changes have important consequences for the ability of the state to supply public goods.

### **Section Three: Public Goods Provision and Democracy – The Importance of Elite-Ruler Relations**

While democracy may change the way that rulers relate to citizens, it does not change the fact that rulers need to manage their relations with elites, as they constitute the pool of possible challengers and contenders for power. Their success in doing so, and the kinds of strategies which they employ towards that end, will be a significant determinant of the regime's stability, the character of politics and policy outcomes. If this is the case, then this relationship will constitute an important mechanism through which institutional variables, such as democracy, impact on political outcomes, such as public goods provision.

There are a number of distinctive features of African polities that mean that elite-ruler relations are particularly important for explaining political processes and outcomes. Firstly, most African states have strongly centralized presidential systems with a concentration of power in the executive (van de Walle 2003). This makes the ruler (president) the key target of political claims, and the focus for political claimants. Secondly, most African countries have economies with low levels of economic

development and pre-industrial structures, meaning that there are fewer sources of wealth creation, and the state itself becomes the main means of acquiring resources and accessing economic power. Because economic and political power overlap in this way, the relative value of state resources and rents is higher, and the competition to acquire them more intense. It also means that the elite is a collection of individuals seeking personal advancement, rather than groups with at least some common policy interests (such as ensuring liberal trade policy). Thirdly, the absence of strongly institutionalized parties, with a clear ideological or policy-driven character, means that the relationship between the ruler and the elite is not mediated or constrained by the normal dynamics of party politics. Parties do not play the function of aggregating preferences from below, but rather are built from above as platforms of support from which individual elite personalities seek to advance their own agendas. In this context then, where elite influence, competition and fragmentation is high, and where their attention is directly almost exclusively towards the ruler, the relationship between the two is a, if not the, central dynamic of politics. How do rulers deal with elites, and how does regime type impact on their ability to manage this critical relationship?

### How do autocratic rulers manage elites?

In Africa in particular (Rothchild 1985) but also more generally (Mansfield & Snyder 2005), autocratic rulers have two main strategies available to them in managing elites: control, in the form of repression, and exchange, in the form of patronage. While most employ elements of both, the balance between repression and exchange may vary both between countries and over time: reduced reliance on one tactic will lead to an increased resort to the other. Where rulers either choose, or are forced, to scale back their tactics of control, those of exchange become more central, and vice versa. Control and exchange are in this way inversely related.

Both of these strategies have been observed to be central to the character of pre-democratic African politics. Most observers of African politics have long argued that exchange in the form of patronage has been the key tool used by rulers in their efforts to build intra-elite alliances (Bates 1984, van de Walle 2001). As Nicholas van de Walle has put it, rather than seeing patronage as a vote mobilization strategy, 'it is more useful to see clientelist politics as constituting primarily a

mechanism for accommodation and integration of a fairly narrow elite than a form of mass party patronage' (van de Walle 2003, 313). Appointments to cabinet and state boards, granting or withholding export licenses, the provision of public sector jobs are a means for rulers of building alliances, punishing opponents and preventing the rise of political rivals.

In addition to using patronage as a means of stabilized their position in relation to elites, autocratic African rulers have also employed tactics of control. By limiting and controlling the routes to power rulers can contain opposition and deny challengers. Most crudely, this can take the form of repression: harassment, intimidation, detention without trial, even assassination of political opponents from within the elite. Post-colonial African history is full of examples of politicians dying in mysterious circumstances.

In addition to outright repression, rulers can use more subtle tactics to control the routes to power. Where they control the economy, they are the gatekeepers to wealth and so have the ability to determine elite formation and membership. This was the case in most African countries for much of the post-colonial period, as high levels of state intervention in non-diversified economies allowed those in control of the state to determine who could participate in economic activity and therefore where the resulting rents accrued (van de Walle 2001). Where there were autonomous economic elites, such as Indians in many parts of East Africa, they were often ostracized, or in the most extreme cases, expelled (Mamdani 1993). Being able to control the economy, and so the routes to wealth, is a key means by which rulers can manage their position vis a vis the elite.

If economic power ultimately derives from ones political position, as was the case in Sub-Saharan Africa, then controlling access to political power is clearly critical. Where rulers control the military, the party and the state, they can block the possible avenues by which other members of the elite can challenge their position. Complete control of all of these avenues may not be necessary; Jomo Kenyatta in Kenya had much less control over KANU than his successor Daniel Arap Moi, allowing quite a high level of heterogeneity and debate within the party, choosing instead to rely more heavily on patronage in the form of 'harambee' (Widner 1992). This example from Kenya

underscores the way in which strategies of control and exchange are inversely related: reduced reliance on one leads to an increased resort to the other.

### **How do rulers in new democracies manage elites?**

The task that rulers in new democracies face in managing elites is far greater than that of their autocratic counterparts. The change in the rules of the game brought about by democratization strengthens the elite relative to the ruler, by creating more routes to power, and weakens the ability of rulers to respond to elite challenges, by removing the ability to employ tactics of control. In these conditions, exchange becomes more valuable than before, as the one remaining tool that rulers can use to stave off challenges from their elite rivals.

Democracy weakens rulers and strengthens the hand of elites by opening up the access routes to power. This is most true in situations where multi-party elections are held, parties are weakly institutionalized and barriers to party formation are few. Then members of the elite have the option of creating their own parties and using these support bases as a means of leverage in their relations with rulers. Although emerging African party systems in general have taken the form of a dominant party with a number of small, volatile parties the number of parties contesting elections is high (van de Walle 2003). Even dominant parties have proven to be unstable, particularly after third term elections, with increasing numbers of fissions and fusions (Rakner et al 2007). These patterns reflect the jockeying for position by members of the elite, and managing these centrifugal forces is critical for rulers. Failure to do so can lead to loss of power, as was the case, for example, in Ghana in 2000 where internal wrangling over Jerry Rawling's successor led to the National Democratic Congresses defeat at the polls (Nugent 2001).

The precariousness of the ruler's position in relation to the elite is exacerbated by their reduced ability to use tactics of control. Outright repression becomes more difficult as improvements in civil liberties, a more open civil society, and a freer press makes repressive tactics more visible and opens rulers up to sanction, such as the withdrawal of aid by international donors. Thus patronage

becomes the central tool available to rulers in their efforts to manage elites, and after a democratic transition can be expected to increase.

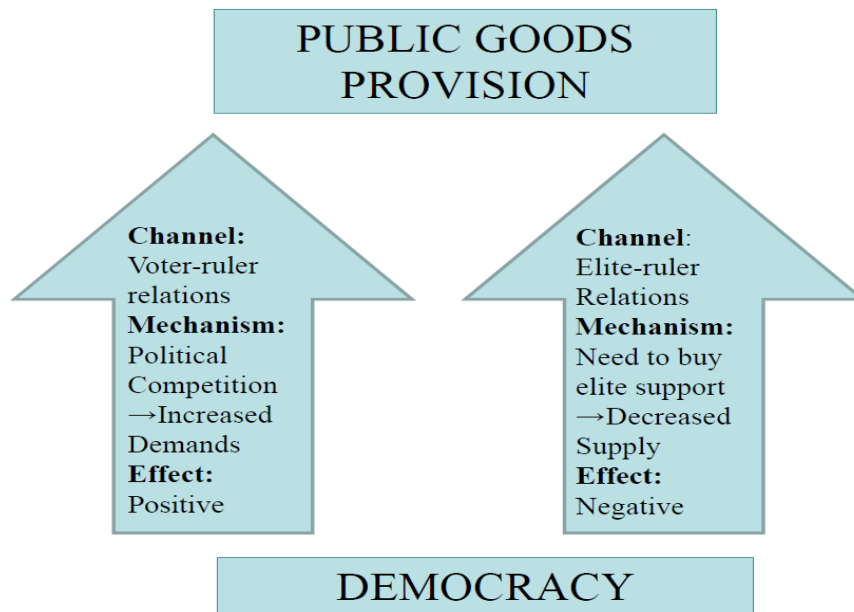
### Changed elite ruler relations and PGP

If, as argued above, we accept that democracy has an adverse effect on the ruler's ability to stabilize his position with relation to elites and increases the incentives to resort to patronage, how does this change affect PGP?

As mentioned in the previous section, the negative link between corruption, in the form of patronage, and public goods provision has been widely demonstrated (Wagstaff & Claeson 2004, Rajkumar & Swaroop 2008, Holmberg & Rothstein 2010). Patronage undermines the ability of the state to provide public goods in a number of ways: it increases the likelihood that public goods will be turned into club goods, distributed by patrons to clients in return for political support and favours; it corrodes the capacity of the bureaucracy by making political ties, rather than merit, the key criteria for appointments, and substitutes political for performance criteria in the assessment of bureaucratic practices; and it fragments policy focus away from assessment of need and towards that of political favour. In all of these ways an increase in patronage has serious implications for the ability of the state to deliver public goods. Thus, changes in elite ruler relations that result in increased patronage, will impact on the supply side factors governing the state's capacity to respond to demands for public goods.

Figure One, below, summarizes the argument so far. Although democracy may articulate demands for increased public goods through the channel of voter-ruler relations, and so be expected to have a positive effect on provision, through a second channel, elite-ruler relations, democracy increases the need for rulers to buy elite support, and hence depresses the ability to actually supply public goods. Taking this kind of scaled approach to democracy uncovers the different mechanisms through which institutional change can have an effect on policy outcomes, and underscores how its effect can vary in direction from one channel to another.

FIGURE ONE: THE IMPACT OF DEMOCRACY ON PUBLIC GOODS PROVISION THROUGH TWO DIFFERENT CHANNELS



Conceptualizing democracy in these differentiated terms raises the important question of which of these channels has the greatest effect. If their influence is different and countervailing, which takes precedence and can we say anything about the net effect of democracy on PGP? At least two points can be made in response to this question. Firstly, it is likely that there are important intervening variables – such as the level of economic development, party system, colonial legacies – which might be important in mediating the influence of each channel. For example, elite-ruler relations may matter less in countries where parties are strongly institutionalized, as the risk of factionalism and fragmentation is lower. Secondly, it is important to point out that the capacity required to supply public goods varies considerably across sectors, with some – such as education – requiring less than others – such as health (D’Arcy 2011b). This means that any change which negatively impacts on capacity – such as increased patronage – will impact on some, capacity intensive sectors, more than others. Rulers may be able to respond to demands for primary education more easily than primary healthcare, without reducing their parallel need to supply elite rivals with

patronage. Both of these points mean that the net effect of democracy on public goods provision may vary both across countries and across public goods.

However, in contexts where elite influence, fragmentation and competition is strong, and in sectors where capacity requirements are high, it is likely that the net effect of democracy is negative. Voters can only choose between the options presented to them and, if all of those choices are elite members in a party system driven by personality politics, even the ability of democratic institutions to effectively articulate demands may be constrained. Even when demand is communicated and responded to, effective delivery ultimately depends on supply side factors to do with state capacity and these are critically affected by levels of corruption.

An implication of this is that the positive effect of demand side factors associated with increased political competition on PGP will only be fully realized when the channel of elite-ruler relations ceases to matter. This could happen, in the short term, in moments of political crisis prompted either by external threat or internal deadlock, or in the long term, by the emergence of the factors mentioned above that act to constrain elite influence, competition and fragmentation (economic development and party institutionalization). This channel, then, potentially provides a means of understanding how democracy can produce both more universalism in some sectors, less in others and overall and increase in corruption.

## **Section Four: Empirical Analysis – A ‘Most Likely’ Case of Democracy and PGP**

In order to illustrate the theoretical argument, this section presents a case study of the effect of democracy on one area of public goods delivery, food security, in one African country, Malawi. Food security is a particularly useful area of PGP to take as the dependent variable. Morally, the issue of whether or not a state can feed itself has to be one of the most basic areas of concern. Politically, the ability of the state to provide enough food for its people is key to its legitimacy, and inability to do so can be a flashpoint of political contestation. Theoretically, food security is partic-

ularly suited to studies of the conditions under which politicians choose to provide goods in a public or clientelist manner, as it entails the distribution of highly divisible goods, fertilizers and seeds. Achieving the goal of collective food security, a public good, requires foregoing the immediate benefits to be derived from using these inputs as private goods. Perhaps for these reasons, food security has been central to a number of the classical theoretical accounts of the relationship between democracy and welfare: most obviously Sen's work on democracy and famine (Sen 1981); and also Przeworski's extensive empirical investigation on the relationship between democracy and development which was prompted by the question 'How can we feed all?' (Przeworski et al 2000).

Malawi provides a compelling case study, as it provides a 'most likely' case for existing theories. Malawi was the African country with one of the most dramatic and sudden democratic openings, and was the only African state to move directly from a Freedom House categorization of 'not free' to 'free' from one year to the next. Hastings Banda, Malawi's ruler for thirty years, was defeated in the first multi-party elections in 1994. The election was highly competitive and his party, the MCP, went from being the only party to being one of three parties with reasonably evenly spread vote-share. If democracy was to have an effect on public goods provision anywhere in Africa, either for better or for worse, it should have had an influence in Malawi.

However, the country's record on PGP since democracy does not fully support either of the two main theoretical accounts outlined above. In the fifteen or so years since democratization Malawi has both introduced some of the most universal policy reforms, and seen one of the most rapidly rising rates of corruption. Malawi is the only African country which currently has both free primary education and free primary healthcare. They also introduced a landmark small-holder farm input subsidy scheme in 2005. However, as well as becoming more universalist in its policies, Malawi has also become more corrupt. According to the World Bank's Governance Indicators, Control of Corruption in Malawi declined from a score of -.36 in 1998 to -.76 in 2004, a decline of 110% (Kaufmann & Kraay 2009). This may explain why not all of these policy reforms have led to effective improvements in delivery and outcomes. Despite healthcare being nominally free, the 2004 Demographic and Health Survey found that child immunization rates had declined since 1992. Although primary completion rates have increased from 37% in 1993 to 58% in 2009, the average



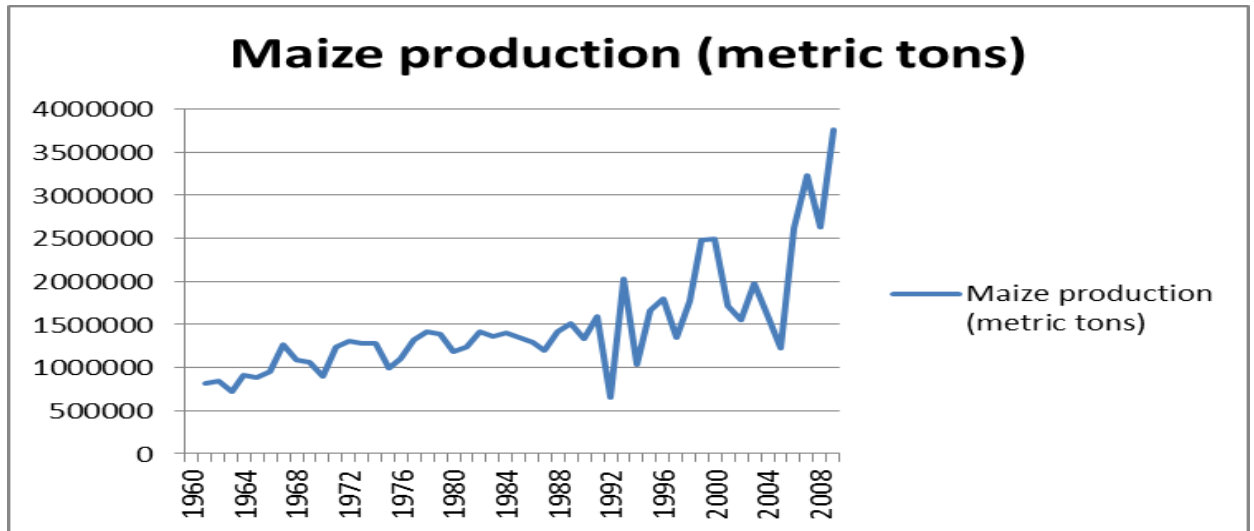
number of years children attend primary school has remained the same (World Bank 2011). The patterns in food security are described in detail below.

Thus, the issue of food security policy in Malawi presents an interesting empirical challenge to existing theoretical accounts. Democracy has produced more universalist policies but also led to more corruption. The empirical analysis below, which uses detailed process tracing overtime, explores the effect of democracy on elite-ruler relations and explains these puzzling patterns.

### **Democracy and Food Security Policy in Malawi, 1964-2009**

There are three distinct phases in food security outcomes in post-Independence Malawi. This can clearly be seen in Figure Two, which shows production levels of the national subsistence staple, maize, from 1964 to 2009. In the first phase from 1964 to the early 1990s, Malawi was relatively food secure; maize production, though subject to fluctuation, was generally increasing. Over the whole period production increased from 900,000 to 1.5 million metric tonnes (World Bank 2011). This phase gave way to a period of increasing insecurity as maize production began to fluctuate dramatically in the 1990s, in a context of a population that was now three times the size of that at Independence. Maize production in 1994 was at the same level as 1975, though the population was then almost double the size. This pattern of dramatic fluctuations in maize production persisted until 2005, when Malawi witnessed its biggest ever harvest. Rapid increases in maize production continued in subsequent years.

FIGURE TWO: MAIZE PRODUCTION IN MALAWI, 1960-2009



Source: World Bank's African Development Indicators

These three phases map closely onto the tenure of the three rulers that Malawi has witnessed, and can largely be explained by the policy regimes they presided over; Hastings Banda, who ruled from 1964 to 1994, and pursued a bifurcated policy approach that invested heavily in agriculture, but skewed policy in favour of estate agriculture and slowly squeezed small-holder farming; Bakili Muluzi, Malawi's first democratically elected president from 1994 to 2004, who followed a policy approach of intermittently supporting small-holders, while using the regulatory framework as a means of patronage; and Bingu wa Mutharika, elected in 2004 and currently Malawi's president, who introduced a successful fertilizer scheme that led to record harvests. Although other factors, such as international market conditions and climate were also important determinants of food security outcomes, the different character of these three distinct policy regimes was critical in determining food security outcomes. Explaining the political processes that produced these policy regimes is the main objective of the empirical section of this paper.

The first policy regime saw Banda pursue a dualistic agriculture policy, investing heavily in improving agricultural productivity, but in a way that was skewed in favour of export-orientated estate farming. This approach carried on from that of the British who, as the colonial power, had created

an economic structure that centered on the production on settler estates of cash crops for export, supported by peasant farming that supplied subsistence crops and labour (Kydd & Christiansen 1982). Banda did not fundamentally alter these patterns of production, but rather intensified them by investing heavily in the estates producing the main cash crops – tobacco, tea and sugar. This shift in emphasis is reflected in the changing share of estate versus small-holder production in exports; the share of estates increased from 60% in 1968 to 85% in 1988 (Kaunda 2002, 17).

The small-holder sector received considerable state support, but its productivity was slowly squeezed over time. Throughout most of Banda's rule, smallholders received subsidized inputs – fertilizer and seeds – and credit, meaning that productivity gains were relatively sustained. However, the Agricultural Development and Marketing Corporation (ADMARC), the body that controlled maize prices and regulated the market, was used as a means of extracting the surplus gained from smallholder production, and reinvesting it in the estates (Kydd & Christiansen 1982). This slow systematic squeezing of the sector was made worse, in 1981, by the removal of agricultural subsidies, as part of the country's Structural Adjustment Programme with the IMF. Although these were reinstated in 1986, the declining productivity of the small-holder sector was not fully arrested. The 1991-2, in a context of severe drought, the maize harvest was the lowest in Malawi's post-Independence history (World Bank 2011).

During the first ten years after democratization, a second policy regime emerged, which saw a fragmentation of agriculture policy, with stop-start subsidy schemes and persistent failure to reform the regulatory framework. Soon after the 1994 election, the government, under pressure from donors, removed the fertilizer subsidy scheme that had been in place. In the following years, maize production fell until, in 1998, the government re-launched a programme, the 'Starter-Pack' scheme which provided subsidized seeds and fertilizers. Following this policy initiative, maize production recovered in the late 1990s. However, the scheme was scaled back to become a 'Targeted Input Programme' in 2000, focusing only on the poorest families. Maize production again fell and in August 2001 it was clear that certain parts of the country were facing severe shortages. This production crisis was exacerbated by the fact that the National Strategic Grain Reserve, an institution that had been established in 1999 but had very low fiscal reserves and capacity, had sold off all of

Malawi's grain reserves. Several hundred people died of starvation and hunger related diseases, making it the worst famine in Malawi's history (Devereux 2002).

The third policy regime, beginning in 2005, witnessed the introduction of a highly successful fertilizer subsidy scheme and Malawi entered a period of increased and sustained food security. In 2004-05 the country had again faced severe food shortages. The next year, in response, the government introduced a fertilizer subsidy scheme with the explicit purpose of achieving national food security. The scheme was targeted at productive but resource constrained smallholder farmers, who were approximately 50% of farmers in the country (Dorward & Chirwa 2011). They were given vouchers redeemable off the cost of seeds and fertilizers. The scheme has widely been seen as a major success (Denning et al 2009). In the year following its introduction Malawi experienced the largest harvest on record, half a million tonnes above what they needed to feed the population. In the 2006/07, the surplus more than doubled.

It is not immediately clear comparing across these three policy regimes, how the introduction of multi-party elections in 1994 impacted on policy and food security outcomes. Autocracy did not automatically lead to food insecurity, nor did democracy lead mechanically to food security. In fact, the transition to democracy seems to have either failed to alleviate, or contributed to undermining food security, before it ultimately produced policies that led to improved performance. Existing theories about the impact of democracy can account for only one of these outcomes; those who predict that democracy will lead to greater public goods provision can account for the later improvements, but not for the initial decline; those who predict that democracy will undermine public goods provision can account for the initial decrease in public goods provision, but not for the later positive changes. Since democratization in Malawi seems to have led to both less and more food security, the question that needs to be answered is through which mechanisms democracy leads to different food security policy and outcomes.

As argued above, the mechanism suggested in existing accounts, the effect of political competition on the relationship between rulers and voters, cannot alone fully account for these changes, and our analyses need to take into account an alternative channel of influence: the effect of political opening

on the relationship between rulers and the elite. To understand the effect of democracy on food security policy through this channel, the next section looks at elite-ruler relations before and after democratization, and then relates these changes to the variation in food security policy discussed above.

### Ruler-Elite Relations under Hastings Banda

Within a few weeks of becoming President of the newly independent Malawi, Hastings Banda faced a political crisis, as all but one of his ministers resigned or were dismissed over proposals designed to limit the powers of the presidential (Baker 2001). Those involved in the push against Banda included former loyalists, and party co-founders, Orton Chirwa and Kanyama Chiume. Amid widespread violence and intimidation, all but one of the former ministers fled the country. Some returned subsequently and played a prominent role in Malawian politics, even into the 1990s (Kayuni & Tambulasi 2010). Others, like Chirwa, were pursued by Banda's secret policy, even in exile.

The Cabinet Crisis of 1964-65 clearly demonstrates the importance that managing relations with the elite played in Banda's continued survival. In a context of low trust, where allies often became enemies and vice versa, he had to consolidate his position in relation to the elite, as they were the pool of potential contenders for his title. How Banda handled the crisis also demonstrated the key ways in which he could do so; he used both his legal powers as President, and extra-legal intimidation, to remove the rebels; and he used the newly vacated seats to promote and reward a new cadre of supporters. This combination of control and exchange was to become the hallmark of Banda's strategy in managing his relationship with the elite.

Unlike other African dictators, Banda established firm control over both party and state, and he used this control to block the routes to power for other members of the elite<sup>1</sup>. The Malawi Congress Party (MCP), founded by Banda and others in 1960, quickly became autocratic in nature (McCracken 1998). As early as 1958, under its predecessor organization, the Nyasaland African Congress (NAC), Banda had acquired the power to make all appointments and dismiss any member

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<sup>1</sup> This contrasts, for example, with the approach of Jomo Kenyatta in Kenya. Kenyatta allowed a relatively high level of debate and even dissension in KANU, but kept firm control of the institutions of the state (Widner 1992).

of the party (McCracken 1998). In 1960, when the NAC became the MCP, Banda was made President for Life. He further entrenched his control in 1970, when he granted himself the power to directly appoint 25% of MPs (Kaunda 2002). In 1981 this was changed to become an indefinite number of seats. As Malawi was a one-party state, the MCP was the only access route to the upper echelons of power. By controlling the membership of the party, Banda could control which members of the elite were in and which were out.

In addition to the party Banda also took firm control of the institutions of the state, routing the sinews of the administrative system towards the President's office. District Commissioners, who were appointed by and reported to the President, controlled the budget of the District Development Committees, responsible for local level development projects. This meant that MPs had to lobby the District Commissioners to allocate funds to their constituencies for their preferred projects, thus routing their access to resources through bureaucrats who were controlled by the President. District Commissioners themselves were never allowed to become too powerful and were moved around frequently (Kaunda 2002). Although they were meritocratically selected, their career paths were constrained to prevent them from becoming too autonomous. Local chiefs, who had a role in local level administration collecting taxes and keeping the peace, were also appointed by the President, under the 1967 Chiefs Act. Dividing up responsibilities between officials, playing party members against state bureaucrats were all ways for Banda to ensure that all roads to power independently but directly led to the Presidential Palace.

Banda's control of the formal political institutions was also underpinned by abuses of the law and extra-legal intimidation. The youth wing of the MCP, the Young Pioneers, continued to play the role they had assumed during the violence that ensued from the Cabinet Crisis, harassing opponents of the regime (McCracken 1998). The most notorious example of extra-legal violence was the so-called 'Mwanza Incident' of 1983, which saw three cabinet ministers and one MP killed in a car crash that was widely seen to have not been accidental (Kaspin 1995). Many members of the elite were also either prosecuted on dubious charges or held for long periods without trial; Guanda Chakuamba, who had staunchly supported Banda during the Cabinet Crisis, fell out of favour in 1981 and was sentenced to twenty-two years in prison on charges of sedition; Brown Mpinganjira, who Banda had appointed as Chief Information Officer in 1985 was detained the following year

and held without trial for five years (Kayuni & Tambulasi 2010). Both of these men were prominent members of the elite who went on to be influential in politics after Malawi's transition to democracy.

These strategies of control were not independent from those of exchange. In fact, the two were mutually constitutive. It was Banda's control of the political system, and more particularly the economy, which enabled him to use exchange to cement elite alliances. He had moved quickly after Independence to undercut the existing economic elite, European settlers who owned estates in the South, and put himself in a position of power in relation to the economy. He did this not only by subjecting European settlers to violence (Baker 2001), but also by systematically re-orienting trade and investment away from the South and towards the Centre, the homeland of his ethnic constituency, the Chewa. Of four development plans that ran from 1968 to 1972, the Centre was the site of a disproportionate number of projects, which were also the best served and longest running (Kaspin 1995, 607). Banda furthered this re-orientation by moving the national capital from Zomba in the South, to Lilongwe in the Centre. The displacement of existing elites that resulted from these actions, combined with the establishment of the state's agricultural regulatory body ADMARC, gave Banda effective control over the most productive sector of the economy, estate agriculture, and made him the gatekeeper to personal wealth.

Access to this lucrative sector was the main form of patronage used by Banda to secure elite support. The granting of loans for investment, export licenses and access to extension services were used selectively to favour political allies and disbar potential opponents (Kaspin 1995). However, Banda was also careful not to let individuals become too wealthy or powerful. In 1984 he introduced a cap on production valued at 30 million Kwacha (Kaunda 2002). He also banned political donations, so that the wealth he allowed members of the elite have access to could not then be used against him to acquire a political following. The use of access to the lucrative parts of the economy as a means of patronage was not unique to Malawi, and has been seen as one of the classic tactics used by autocratic rulers to secure their position (Bates 1984).

As the success of this form of patronage and strategy of exchange depended on the profits to be gained from the export of cash crops grown on estates, Banda had to ensure the productivity of the sector. This meant ring-fencing patronage within a small elite group at the centre, and allowing a competent bureaucracy and functional policy making process to carry on below it. The civil service during the autocratic period was meritocratically recruited, and is generally seen to have been relatively professional, competent and well-motivated (Kaunda 2002, Chisinga 2010). It also required consistent investment. As the elite were 'eating the profits' (Booth et al 2006), reinvestment had to come from an alternative source: the small-holder sector. Profits from small-scale agriculture, which involved the cultivation of cash crops as well as subsistence staples, were systematically channeled through ADMARC, and reinvested in the estate sector. The financing for the input subsidies that ensured the productivity of the small-holder sector mostly came from foreign aid (Kydd & Christiansen 1982).

Banda's successful management of his relationship with the elite rested on his ability to block their access to power through his control of the political system and his use of access to the economy as a form of exchange. While he managed to hold on to power for thirty years, the sustainability of these strategies deteriorated over time. The oil and commodity price shocks of the late 1970s and the war in Mozambique, which blocked access to key ports and produced a high number of refugees, reduced exports and created a situation of acute fiscal distress. The profits to be made from estate agriculture diminished and the effect was a 'gradual realignment of interests within Malawi's political elite resulting from the drying up of political patronage' (McCracken 1998, 232). Without resources for exchange available to him, his position in relation to the elite became more precarious.

Elite disquiet, in combination with the widespread distress that the productivity collapse created, provided the backdrop to the protests that eventually led to the introduction of multi-party elections. In March 1992 the Catholic bishops issued a formal protest against Banda, which initiated a wave of demonstrations by students and factory workers (Kaspin 1995). This, in combination with pressure from the international community, who began withholding aid, eventually led to a referendum on reform in June 1993 and the first multiparty elections in 1994. In these elections Banda and the MCP were defeated by Bakili Muluzi and the newly formed United Democratic Front



(UDF). Malawi was the only African country in the early 1990s that went directly from the Freedom House status of 'Not Free' to 'Free' in the space of a year. The effect of this dramatic change on elite-ruler relations and food security policy is analyzed in the next section.

### **The Impact of Democratization on Elite-Ruler Relations:**

#### **Muluzi and the Elite: Destabilization and the Recourse to Patronage**

In May 1994 Baliki Muluzi became the first democratically elected President of Malawi. He was not new to politics: he was appointed as an MP by Banda in 1977, and subsequently served as Minister for Education, and as Secretary General of the MCP. Despite holding these positions, he had not been one of Banda's close allies: he had been excluded from the normal form of patronage during Banda's reign – access to estate agriculture, he had been imprisoned for allegedly stealing from the state and in 1982 he had resigned all his political positions (Kayuni & Rambulasi 2010). In common with the other members of the elite, he saw the introduction of multi-party elections as an alternative route to power. Democracy provided a way for those who had been excluded from power to finally pursue it themselves.

Just as political opening enabled Muluzi himself to come to power, so too did it create options for other aspirant members of the elite. Muluzi co-founded the UDF with Brown Mpinganjira and Aleke Banda, both of whom had been detained without trial certain periods during Banda's reign. Yet despite their initial alliance, Mpinganjira, subsequently left the UDF to form his own party, the National Democratic Alliance, and in 2001 he was arrested and charged with being involved in planning a coup. With many members of the elite, including former allies, coveting his position, Muluzi's need to manage his relations with the elite was no less than Banda's had been. However, democratization significantly altered the strategies he could employ to do so.

The change in the formal rules of the game that accompanied the move to democracy closed down many of the strategies of control that had been used by Banda to contain elite opposition. The improvements in civil liberties and judicial autonomy, though still imperfectly realized, made tactics

of outright repression very difficult. Although Muluzi arrested Banda in January 1995 for the killings associated with the Mwanza Incident, he could not detain him indefinitely without trial, as Banda had been able to do to others. Nor could he produce enough evidence to convict him, and eventually he was acquitted by a jury in December 1995 and died two years later in 1997. Though Muluzi tried on a number of occasions to detain and prosecute political enemies, he was not able to act as Banda had and either use the law as a weapon or ignore it when it suited him.

The increasing autonomy of the judicial system also acted to protect and enforce civil liberties: freedom of association, speech and the independence of the press. Although Muluzi formed the Young Democrats, his own equivalent of Banda's Young Pioneers, his ability to use them as an instrument of harassment and intimidation was constrained. In 2001, they were involved in a campaign of intimidation against the opposition. In response, church groups formed a justice and peace commission that protested at the increase in state-sponsored violence (Freedom House 2002). Civil society organizations were more active and the press was freer, meaning that, although human rights infringements continued, Muluzi did not have the same latitude as Banda had had to employ extra-legal intimidation as a means of controlling elite challengers.

As well as leading to improvements in civil liberties, democracy reduced Muluzi's ability to control and to block the routes to power. Minimizing monopolies on political power is one of the key changes that democratic reform is designed to achieve. In the Malawian case, even more than normal, there were particular aspects of institutional design that meant that the routes to power were many and the incentives to take them were high.

Rakner et al, in a very insightful piece, have outlined how this was the case (Rakner et al 2007). Firstly, under the terms of the 1993 Constitution, the Presidential candidate with the most votes, rather than with a majority of votes, wins. This means that the threshold for winning was low relative to other countries and encouraged more politicians to seek office, thus lowering the threshold even more. Muluzi became president in 1994 with 47% of the vote and his successor, Bingu wa Mutharika, in 2004 won with 36%. In each election there were between four and five contestants. Secondly, presidential and parliamentary elections were held at the same time, encouraging presi-

dential aspirants to form their own parties, something which was not difficult to do. Under the 1993 Political Parties Registration and Regulation Act, the bar for forming a new party was set very low: all that was required were the names and addresses of 100 registered members, in addition to the submission of a party constitution and manifesto. The growing number of parties competing elections in Malawi reflected these low barriers to entry: in 1994 only three parties won seats, but in 2004 ten did so. Thirdly, the electoral system encouraged elite aspirants to run alone. Single member constituencies with simple plurality vote provided a disincentive to opposition coordination. In the 1999 election, although the MCP and AFORD formed an alliance to fight the presidential election, they did not coordinate for the legislative elections. In the next election the opposition even failed to coordinate for the presidential election. If they had Mutharika would probably not have been elected: he got 36% of the vote while the two main opposition candidates got 28% and 25% respectively.

All of these factors combined to create a situation where parties split regularly and formed alliance easily, leading to an increasingly fragmented party system. In 1994, 513 candidates ran for parliament, 84% from the three main parties (Rakner et al 2007). In 2004, twice as many candidates stood for election, only 30% of whom were from the three main parties. Of the 11 new parties who contested the 2004 elections, five were directly linked to struggles over leadership within existing parties. The most high profile of these splits in the 2004 election was Guanda Chakuamba who, unhappy about John Tembo's nomination as the MCP's presidential candidate, had left to form the Republican Party and ran against both Tembo and Mutharika in the election. Mutharika's appointment as the UDF's candidate had also created schisms in that party: the single largest group of new MPs in 2004 were Independents, most of whom were former UDF MPs who had resigned over the choice of candidate. The high level of fragmentation in the political system reflected the jockeying for position among members of the elite.

Democracy changed the rules of the game in a way that created more routes to power for members of the elite. Those who sought either the ultimate prize of the Presidency or the still substantial prize of a cabinet seat, no longer had to direct their claims through a party controlled by the ruler. They had the alternative to go it alone, splinter existing parties and form alliances of convenience. This political environment, where parties were weakly institutionalized and personality-driven, was

opportunity-ripe for elite aspirants, but very challenging for those who succeeded in becoming rulers. It meant that the position of Muluzi in relation to the elite was precarious: he had greater need to manage relations with the elite and fewer tools to do so.

With a reduced ability to employ strategies of control, the only alternative left to Muluzi was to increasingly use exchange instead. Both quantitatively and qualitatively based assessments of Muluzi's tenure argue for an increase in the overall levels of patronage. According to the World Bank's Governance Indicators, Control of Corruption in Malawi declined from a score of -.36 in 1998 to -.76 in 2004, a decline of 110% (World Bank 2011). In 2000, the Public Affairs Committee, an umbrella civil society organization representing church and religious groups, published a highly critical report detailing the widespread and endemic corruption of Muluzi's rule. In 2004, a policy document commissioned by DfID concluded that under Muluzi 'patronage drove policy' (Booth et al 2006). The consensus opinion of experts, civil society observers and donors, seems to be that corruption, particularly in the form of patronage, increased under Muluzi's presidency.

This increased level of patronage, reflecting Muluzi's increased need to buy elite support, was ultimately a strategy with diminishing returns. In 2002, when Muluzi tried to alter the constitution to allow him to stand for a third term, the Anti-Corruption Bureau uncovered evidence that Muluzi had bribed certain MPs to vote in favour of the proposed change (Freedom House 2003). The most blatant example of this was his appointment of the MP who proposed the amendment in parliament to a seat in cabinet (Rakner et al 2007). Cabinet seats were one of the key tools of exchange used by Muluzi: just before the 2004 election, he expanded the number of cabinet seats to 48, making it one of the largest in Sub-Saharan Africa (Rakner et al 2007). However, the value of a cabinet seat diminished as the number of positions increased. Muluzi's attempt to alter the constitution failed and in the final stages of his rule, a vicious cycle was evident where Muluzi had more and more recourse to patronage, with lower returns, leading to even more attempts at exchange.

The increased recourse to patronage was not simply a function of Muluzi's idiosyncratic leadership style, as some observers have claimed (Booth et al 2006). It was, rather, a rational response to the altered ruler-elite relations created by the democratic transition. As democracy closed down the

opportunity to use control in managing elites, exchange in the form of patronage became more important. Democratization destabilized the position of the ruler in relation to the elite, and altered the ways in which he could manage them.

### **Mutharika and the Elite: Fragmentation and Crisis**

The destabilization of elite-ruler relations set in motion by democratization reached its apex under Muluzi's successor, Bingu wa Mutharika. He faced a complete fragmentation of the party system and protracted political crisis in such a way that managing his relations with the elite became a virtually impossible task. Strategies of control continued to be ineffective – though he did try to employ them on a number of occasions – but, critically, so too were those of exchange: the elite were too fragmented for patronage to be effective in building a sufficient alliance. The destabilization produced by democratization ultimately created a state of deadlock in relations between the ruler and the elite.

Prior to his appointment as the UDF candidate, Mutharika had had a fraught relationship with Muluzi, featuring favour and falls from grace that were typical of elite-ruler relations under Muluzi as described above. He had been Secretary General of the Common Market for Southern Africa (COMESA) but was fired from that position in 1997 under allegations of mismanaging funds. Muluzi, who was Chairman of COMESA at the time, allegedly had a hand in his sacking (Kayuni & Rambulasi 2010). Mutharika then went on to form his own political party, the United Party (UP), and contested the 1999 presidential election. After he performed poorly, he dissolved the UP and rejoined the UDF. Muluzi employed his usual tactic for dealing with dissenting members of the elite and offered him the position of Deputy Governor of the Reserve Bank of Malawi, and after that, of Minister for Education. When he was appointed as the UDF candidate in 2004 it was seen by many as a move by Muluzi to appoint a relative outsider who he would be able to control (Booth et al 2006).

The appointment of Mutharika served to accelerate the pace of elite and party fragmentation set in train by democratization. As has been mentioned above, his appointment led to an exodus of UDF

MPs, who went on to fight the 2004 election as Independents. This, and widespread dissatisfaction with Muluzi, led to the UDF's worst electoral performance. Although Mutharika was re-elected, as the opposition candidates split the vote, the UDF lost 44 seats and were no longer the largest party in the parliament. Although they managed to form a government through an alliance with Chakuamba and his Republican Party, their position as a party was severely weakened.

The fragmentation of the UDF and the party system continued as Mutharika moved to strengthen his position in relation to his biggest elite rival: Muluzi. In July 2004, a few weeks after the election, Mutharika launched investigations into ten former ministers over the disappearance of \$93 million (Freedom House 2005). He arrested the UDF's Chief strategist, Humphrey Mvulu, and four senior UDF politicians on corruption charges. These actions led to a growing sense of outrage in Muluzi and his supporters and culminated, in February 2005, in Mutharika's resignation from the UDF, pre-empting attempts to expel him. The day he announced his resignation was National Anti-Corruption Day and in his speech Mutharika declared 'My sin, as far as the UDF is concerned, is because of my anti-corruption stance' (BBC 2005).

The splintering of the ruling party created a situation of protracted political deadlock. Mutharika formed his own party with some former UDF members, the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP), and in July 2005 the remaining members of the UDF moved to impeach Mutharika, leading to an impasse which delayed the passing of the budget and ultimately required the mediation of civil society groups and former Zambian president Kenneth Kaunda. The UDF re-launched impeachment efforts again in October, when Muluzi was called to appear before the Anti-Corruption Bureau. The instability continued throughout 2006, 2007 and 2008, as Mutharika used anti-corruption charges as a means of undermining his opponents, not only among Muluzi's faction in the UDF but also within the newly formed DPP. The opposition retaliated with renewed efforts at impeachment and the situation was further exacerbated by a Supreme Court ruling on the constitutionality of floor crossing, which put 60 seats in jeopardy. Finally, Muluzi was arrested in 2008, not long after he had been chosen as the UDF's candidate for the 2009 election.

The stalemate in ruler-elite relations was ultimately only broken by the 2009 election. Mutharkia was returned with 66% of the vote. The DPP became the dominant party, with 113 of the 193 seats in parliament. Many prominent politicians were casualties of the campaign, including Chakuamba and Mpinganjira. Most observers attributed his success to a number of popular policy reforms, most notably the fertilizer subsidy scheme (Freedom House 2010, Africa Research Bulletin 2009). As he could not use control or patronage as a way to consolidate his position with the elite, he had focused on robbing them of electoral support and policies with mass popular appeal were one of the key tools in doing so.

This section has argued that democratization in Malawi had a profound impact on elite-ruler relations. The changes in the formal rules of the game had the effect of; destabilizing rulers in relation to elites, limiting the ability to use control and increasing the reliance on patronage; fragmenting the elite and the party system in a way that ultimately led to political crisis and deadlock. Explaining how these changes impacted on food security policy is the objective of the next section.

### **Democracy and Food Security Policy: Explaining the Effect of Changes in Elite-Ruler Relations**

The destabilization of elite-ruler relations and the increased recourse to patronage produced by democratization had both a direct and an indirect impact on food security policy under Muluzi. The direct impact was clearly visible through the way in which Muluzi used the institutions relating to food security policy – the Ministry of Agriculture, ADMARC, and the National Strategic Grain Reserve – as a means of patronage. This led to the politicization of the bureaucracy, a fragmentation of policy making, and ineffectiveness in implementation.

Muluzi used key appointments as a way to win the support of key members of the elite. For example, he appointed Chakufwa Chihana as Minister of Agriculture. Chihana was the leader of the Alliance for Democracy (AFORD), the third party in what was at that point a three party system. Although Chihana was widely seen as one of the least effective ministers (Booth et al 2006), he was

not removed from his position as Muluzi needed AFORD's support: the dangers of an AFORD-MCP alliance had been clearly demonstrated in the 1999 election.

The use of key offices in this way, as a form of patronage, had the effect of politicizing the bureaucracy and undermining its efficacy. The Ministry of Agriculture saw four Permanent Secretaries in four years, as Ministries became fiefdoms of elite appointees and became involved in their own struggles for power. Chihana, who was also Vice President, tried on a number of occasions to launch development strategies to rival the presidents (Booth et al 2006, 20), leading to a fragmentation in policy making. This use of the bureaucracy for political purposes undermined the morale, professionalism and effectiveness of the civil service, a clear break from the tradition under Banda (Kaunda 2002). In light of this policy was not effectively made or implemented.

The impact of declining efficiency was particularly harmful in relation to one of the key institutions needed to ensure food security – the National Strategic Grain Reserve (NSGR). The NSGR had been established in 1999, after donor pressure for responsibility for grain reserves to be taken away from ADMARC and given to an independent agency. However, Muluzi did not want to cede control of the reserve, and the new Agency was never given proper support or funding. This meant that the NSGR was never able to fully carry out its vital role in ensuring emergency stocks of grain to protect ordinary Malawians from fluctuations in grain supply and prices. In 2001 the NSRG, on the basis of inaccurate information and ineffective policy projections, sold off all of Malawi's reserve grain. 2001 turned out to be one of the worst years of food shortage in Malawian history (Devereux 2002).

Muluzi did not only use jobs as a means of patronage, contributing to inefficiency, he also used the grain reserve itself, enabling profiteering. After the reserve was sold off in 2001, reports emerged that well connected members of the political and economic elite had been allowed to buy the grain cheaply from the NSGR, reselling it later in the year, when acute food shortages had driven prices up (Devereux 2002). Although the amount of grain involved, about 60,000 metric tonnes, was not enough to make it the sole cause of the famine that year, the ineffectiveness of, and corruption within, the NSGR was a significant contributing factor.



In addition to the direct effect that the increased use of patronage in elite-ruler relations had on food security policy, there was also an indirect effect, through its impact on government-donor relations. As subsidy schemes were expensive and government revenues low, their introduction required donor support, either through direct funding or through broader budgetary support that freed up resources from other sectors. Each of Malawi's subsidy schemes since 1994 had been enabled by donor funding: the Starter Pack Scheme by a consortium; the Targetted Input Programme by DfID; and the Agricultural Input Subsidy Programme (AISP), though not directly funded by donors, happened at a time when aid was increasing and Malawi was on course to qualify for debt relief.

The increase in corruption under Muluzi had a detrimental effect on donor willingness to work with the Malawian government in general, and to get involved in food security policy in particular<sup>2</sup>. In 2000, following the publication of the Public Affairs Committee's report on corruption in government, the UK threatened to withdraw aid. When, the following year, the allegations of corruption at the NSGR emerged, they did so, along with the US, the EU and Denmark. Overseas Development Assistance as a percentage of GDP dropped by ten percentage points that year; from 24% to 14% (World Bank). The corruption scandal also made the government reluctant to declare a famine, which delayed donor responses to the unfolding humanitarian situation. The fraught relationship with donors, rooted in concerns about corruption and efficacy, had a direct impact on food security outcomes.

To argue that elite-ruler relations had a profound effect of food security policy outcomes, is not to say that voter relations did not matter at all. Discussions about food security have been at the heart of political debates surrounding elections (Chinsinga 2010). The incentives to improve PGP and provide ordinary Malawians with increased food security certainly existed. However, the ability of rulers to respond to these incentives was undermined by the need to use patronage to manage relations within the elite. This meant that, although democracy provided a way to articulate demands for PGP through the channel of voter-ruler relations, it undermined the ability of rulers to respond to these demands through the channel of elite-ruler relations.

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<sup>2</sup> The lack of commitment to subsidy programmes was also, importantly, related to differences in donor policy preferences. See Chinsinga 2010 for a full discussion.

It was only when this second channel was deadlocked and blocked by political crisis that its influence was suspended and the incentivizing effect of democracy, through the first channel, fully realized. In 2005, relations between Mutharika and the elite had reached a stalemate, as detailed above. A political outsider to begin with, he had few allies, and the elite had fragmented to such an extent that patronage had become an insufficient tool of elite management. It was in this context that he introduced the successful subsidy scheme in 2005.

Although there may have been an element of luck in the fact that the first year of the scheme witnessed good rains, the AISP became a way for Mutharika to rob his elite rivals of electoral support. When presented with the opportunity to vote for a party that had delivered tangible improvements to wide sections of the population, an option they had not been presented with before, Malawians took it. In the process they virtually wiped out the existing parties, and removed some of the key members of the elite, who had dominated politics in Malawi since Independence. Improved PGP became a way for Mutharika to consolidate his position in relation to the elite, and was the only way to do so in the face of political crisis and deadlock.

## **Conclusion**

This paper has argued that, in order to understand the effect of democracy on public goods provision in Sub-Saharan Africa, we need to look beyond the voter-ruler relationship and consider an alternative mechanism: the relationship between elites and rulers. Using the case-study of food security policy in Malawi, it has shown that democracy has a destabilizing effect on elite-ruler relations, removing the ruler's ability to use strategies of control and increasing their reliance on those of exchange, in the form of patronage. This dynamic led to intermittent commitment to universal policies in food security, but a declining ability to deliver as the regulatory control framework and the inputs to policy were increasingly used as patronage in ruler-elite bargaining. The positive stimulus which democracy provided through the voter-ruler channel was only fully realized when elite-ruler relations were deadlocked. The momentum of elite fragmentation, set in motion by the transition to democracy, accelerated as time went on and eventually led to protracted political crisis

where even patronage became an ineffective tool of elite management. It was in this context that Malawi finally introduced policy reforms that led to food security, as undercutting elite rivals electoral base became the only way for the ruler to survive.

Although the theoretical framework presented here successfully explains the Malawian case, much work remains to be done to establish its generalizability. As noted earlier, Malawi had one of the fastest democratic transitions and in this way may be somewhat exceptional in an African context. More gradual democratic openings may not have destabilized elite-ruler relations to quite the same extent, and instead led to more gradualist changes over time. Equally, other factors that impinge on elite-ruler relations would need to be taken into account, such as economic structure, historical legacies of party organization, ethnic composition etc. Looking at these factors can help explain why elite fragmentation has been so pronounced in some countries, like Kenya, and not so much so in others, like Ghana.

While much research remains to be undertaken, this paper has sought to demonstrate that the relationship between rulers and elites needs to be at the centre of our theoretical accounts of how African democracies function and how they deliver public goods. This relationship has either been ignored completely, and assumed to disappear as countries democratize, or been taken as an immutable constant, and assumed to remain static over time. To fully understand how democracy impacts on public goods provision, and the welfare outcomes that we care about, we need to consider its effect on both the relationship between rulers and voters, and rulers and elites. It is only by doing this, that the puzzling patterns produced by two decades of democratic reform in Africa can begin to make sense.

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