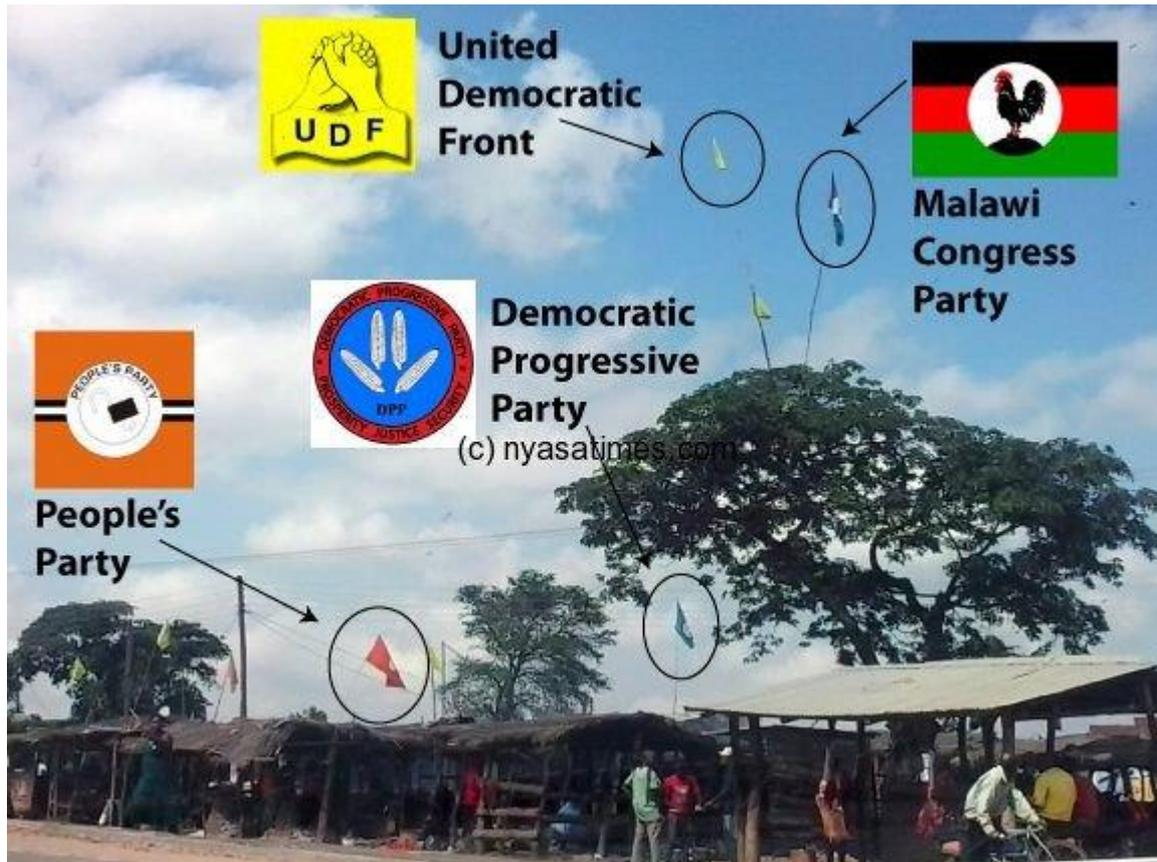


ESSAY TOPIC: IS IT IMPORTANT TO LIVE IN A DEMOCRACY
BY Frank Kaphesi, undergraduate, College of medicine.



Democratic parties in Malawi (Nyasatimes.com)

Democracy is best defined as “government of the people, by the people, and for the people.” (Abraham Lincoln) Democracy implies both popular participation and government in the public interest, and can take a wide variety of forms. (Heywood; 2007) I understand that democracy may not be a perfect system and the best form of government, but it is a better form of government when compared to other kinds, such as monarchy and dictatorship, and seems to be most effective.

Many deliberations have tended to look at three central democratic issues. First, who are the people, or how far should political power be distributed? Second, should the people in effect rule themselves, or should government be left in the hands of politicians and parties that claim to represent them? Third, what matters is it appropriate to decide collectively through the use of democratic processes?” (Heywood 2007)

The best example of democracy would be driven from the ancient Athens, who would meet in the marketplace to vote on decisions. Many terms have developed pertaining to

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democracy during the time. Bernard Crick once said, "Democracy is perhaps the most promiscuous word in the world of public affairs."

Today, according to Pinckney (1994) there are many varied conceptions of democracy, the ideologies underlying them, and their implications for the state, society and the citizen. These are: radical democracy, guided democracy, liberal democracy, socialist democracy and consociational democracy. The most relevant form of democracy today is liberal democracy. Pinkney (1994) has shown: Liberal democracy's objectives are representation and protection of diverse interests. The perception of society is aggregation of diverse individuals and groups, autonomous from the state. The state plays a role of the referee. The political process checks and balances to prevent tyranny of the majority, or its representatives, or of powerful minorities. Citizen participation is permitted and encouraged by means of electoral contestation. All citizens have the right of equality before the law. Actual and potential problems are elite domination on account of unequal distribution of resources. In liberal democracy it is important to note that society should be recognised as an aggregation of diverse citizens acting as both individuals and members of groups. (Young; 2).

Democracy has allowed for change in government without violence. Power is transferred between parties with elections. The citizens decide who rule, as any elected government only has a certain term and then has to face elections again and compete against other parties again to regain power. This election system prevent over powering of the ruling party, as the ruling party has to work to keep its citizens happy or they would not be into the next electoral term. Therefore the citizens gain a sense of control over control over participating in the voting process, and by choosing their government.

Democracy is a double edged sword though. Yes, democracy gives the power to the people, but people are easily influenced by those around them and especially the media. Indirectly the media do have a lot of influence on democracy, as they make citizens aware of the political scenario in the country in the condition that the media reports it to be, which may not always be the truth. The masses are therefore not entirely aware of the political issues in the country, and therefore make the wrong, misguided decision while voting during elections. The authorities also have to concentrate on working for the people, while trying

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to campaign to win votes during the elections, therefore possibly overlooking certain issues and losing focus on the current political problems. People also tend to follow a crowd, and the citizens may vote for a party under influence of the majority, and not voice his/her true opinion.

Democracy is most often portrayed to lead to peace, freedom and prosperity. It is a political system through which the majority of the population rules, and differs from other forms of political systems by the size of the ruling class .(Young, 2002) Democracy is basically rule by the majority, there are no limits to what the majority can be allowed to decided. Citizens do not realise the circumstances of their decisions or how their vote can change their reality, and can prevent them from becoming the minority. Those that suffer the most in a democracy are the minorities. The smaller the group number, the smaller say they have in policy decisions.

However, majority and minority change with every issue, so every citizen would probably find themselves in the minority at some point. Government has no fear of rebellion as majority rule. It is for reasons like this that voting is such a useful tool in choosing a proper representative government for the people. Unlimited democracy would not be a wise decision for a country, as citizens themselves have no proper skills in governing a country, as much as they think they know. A constitutional representative republic in which the people elect candidates to represent them is the best form of government discovered so far.

All of these points are theories however. There is a difference between democracies in theory vs. democracy put into practice. In theory, every democratic adult citizen would vote and make the decision that is right for them as an individual. This doesn't always happen thought, either the person will not vote, or would have not even registered to vote, or possibly voted for a candidate not because of that person's ideals and goals but because they were supposedly promised free housing. Society seems to have forgotten that voting is not a task, but a privilege that has been fought for. If you consider this thought, however, democracy in comparison to other forms of government works the best for the greatest number of people, which at some stage would hopefully be happy with a decision at some point. Citizens in a democratic countries are to vote on political, social and even economic issues, particularly the representatives they want to be in charge of making major decisions.

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The democratic elections prevent the monopoly of ruling authority so the elected ruling party would make sure that their policies will work for the people, as they will not be able to stay in power if their term reveals bad records.

However, democracy may involve immoral practices during elections. Candidates would use muscle power to draw the majority of votes, even trying to tarnish their opponents. For example now here in Malawi, dairy we hear news in the radios newspapers and also on television about opposition or ruling parties telling the population bad about the other.

In conclusion, I do believe that democracy is a good form of government. It is the option that matters as the people have the control (indirectly) over their own rights and democracy teaches citizens how to do this. It may not be the best form of government ever created, but it one of the better options. Every form of government is bound to have shortfalls. Different people have different views about the various political systems. Democracy aims to strike a balance between governing the people and allowing the people to make the decisions themselves, and democracy is the only form of government where such a balance can be found

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