



The Program on Governance  
and Local Development  
at Gothenburg



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Working Paper  
No. 27 2020

The Program on Governance  
and Local Development



UNIVERSITY OF  
GOTHENBURG

**Front Cover Image:** Joyce Banda, former president of Malawi, at Chatham House, UK, June 2012  
(Source: Chatham House, Flickr)

# **Do Women Face a Different Standard? The Gender and Corruption Factors in the 2014 Presidential Elections in Malawi**

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## **Acknowledgements**

We thank the Research Council of Norway (grant no. 14002) for funding the 2015 survey in Mangochi, Salima, and Rumphu, as part of the project “Democratization, Political Participation, and Gender in Malawi.” We thank the Swedish Research Council and the Research Council of Norway (grant no. 14003) and Program on Governance and Local Development (GLD) at the University of Gothenburg for funding the focus groups. We thank Ryan Moore for research assistance on this paper.

## **Abstract**

Incumbency advantage is a key characteristic of African politics. Since the reintroduction of multiparty elections in 1994, corruption has been a persistent feature of the various administrations in Malawi. From this perspective, the incumbent president Joyce Banda of the People's Party's (PP) loss of the presidency after two years in office is a puzzling outcome of the 2014 elections. The paper explores why the incumbency advantage did not accrue to Banda, drawing from national public opinion surveys and focus group discussions conducted after the 2014 elections. We argue that, while faced with a major corruption scandal, 'Cashgate', Banda paid a heavier price than male incumbents facing corruption scandals before her. Her electoral fate is consistent with studies demonstrating that women holding political offices are scrutinized more than men and, when they transgress female gender stereotypes of incorruptibility, they are judged to a higher standard.

**Key words:** Africa, elections, Malawi, corruption, gender.

## 1. Introduction

Incumbency advantage is a well-established characteristic of African politics and high level corruption is also common. The perks of holding office are believed to translate into the re-election of incumbent presidents. The scholarly literature explains this phenomenon by pointing to neopatrimonial patterns and lingering authoritarian tendencies (Bratton and van de Walle, 1997; Erdman and Engel, 2007; Hyden, 2005) and semi-authoritarian features (Carothers, 2002; Diamond and Plattner, 2001; Levitsky and Way, 2010). Weak institutions and personalized power limit the constraints on the executive and enable incumbents to personalize public funds and construct durable patronage networks that magnify the advantages of incumbency (Cheeseman, 2010).

Malawi is no exception. Confirming the expectations in the literature, incumbents in Malawi have been disproportionately advantaged at the polls in all elections since the reintroduction of multiparty politics in 1994. Yet, in the May 2014 elections, incumbent president Joyce Banda of the People's Party (PP) lost the presidency after two years in office. She was replaced by Peter Mutharika of the Democratic People's Party (DPP), who won the presidential elections with 36 percent of the vote in a field that featured twelve candidates. In this study, we take as a point of departure the puzzling outcome of the 2014 elections and explore why the incumbency advantage did not accrue to Banda. We particularly focus on corruption and gender stereotypes and argue that, while many leaders have been linked to corruption scandals, Banda was punished at the polls in part due to her gender.

The 2014 elections in Malawi were contested in the shadow of a major corruption scandal, dubbed locally as 'Cashgate.' Described as "the biggest financial scandal in Malawi's history" ("Cashgate", 2014), Cashgate involved the looting of public resources through the exploitation of weaknesses in the Integrated Financial Management System (IFMIS). The perpetrators transferred funds from government bank accounts to vendor accounts for goods and services that were never supplied, after which the transactions were then deleted from the IFMIS system (Baker Tilly, 2014). Coming to light eight months before the May 2014 general elections, the Cashgate scandal became the major talking point of the 2014 elections campaign, leading a large number of commentators to attribute Banda's eventual election defeat to her government's inability to fight corruption (Kainja, 2014; Mapondera and Smith, 2014; Kondowe et al., 2014; Zimmerman, 2015). Kainja (2014) summed up the election effects of Cashgate on Banda's re-election chances as a "cocktail of scandals and high-level corruption

in [Banda's] administration [that] overturned her [election] fortunes." Zimmerman (2015: 230) echoes this view arguing that, "Cashgate had significantly shifted support away from Banda in the six months prior to the election." For his part, Jomo (2014) contends that, "...Cashgate... was probably the biggest nail to be hammered home into [Joyce Banda's] political coffin" (Jomo, 2014).

Yet, corruption is endemic in Malawi. The Anti-Corruption Bureau estimates that 30 percent of the gross annual budget is lost to corruption each year ("Malawi Losing", 2013). While Cashgate is the largest corruption scandal to have emerged in Malawi to date, corruption and mismanagement were not unique to Banda's rule. Presidents before her, all men, had been accused of high levels of corruption. Since Cashgate links back to the implementation of the country's IFMIS, which was implemented in 2005, the scandal cannot be attributed to Banda's two years in office alone. Does this observation suggest a gender bias and that allegations of corruption hurt Banda as the female incumbent presidential candidate more than corruption had previously appeared to hurt her male predecessors? In this article, we investigate the effects of Cashgate on the 2014 elections, with specific reference to Banda's performance. We draw from several national public opinion surveys that were conducted prior to, and after the Cashgate scandal as well as data from focus group discussions conducted in 2016. Based on our analysis of various data sources, we argue in this article that Banda paid a heavier price because of Cashgate than male incumbents facing other corruption scandals before her. Corruption did not seem to affect her predecessors' re-election bids. The electoral fate of Banda in 2014 is consistent with studies demonstrating that women holding political offices are more visible and scrutinized to a greater degree than men and that, when they transgress female gender stereotypes of incorruptibility, they are judged to a higher standard than men. In the long run, this translates into reduced re-election prospects for the women involved.

Our findings are tentative. A number of additional factors may also account for Banda's failure to be re-elected. For instance, Banda's road to office was unorthodox. When Mutharika unexpectedly passed away in 2012, Banda assumed the presidency without having formally contested any elections, and after having established a new party—the People's Party (PP)—while in office. Prior to this, internal frictions within the DPP and a fall out between Mutharika and Banda led to her expulsion and that of several of her followers from the party. Although Banda's party had governed for two years, it only contested elections for the first time in 2014. PP's short duration, and the fact that Banda had not been elected President, may also have negatively influenced her legitimacy among voters (Dulani and

Chunga, 2015). Additional research in other cases, and the use of observational and experimental methods, may rule out alternative explanations and further strengthen our argument that women leaders face a different standard than men when confronted with allegations of corruption.

Following this introduction, we first review the theoretical literature on gender and corruption. We then move to the background of Cashgate as it unfolded during Banda's presidency, before moving to our analysis of the survey data conducted before the 2014 elections. A concluding section discusses the implications of our findings for further research on the relationship between gender and corruption.

## **2. Theorizing the Relationship Between Gender and Corruption**

Two pioneering studies by the World Bank sparked an intense debate regarding the correlation between gender and corruption, ultimately fostering the consensus that expanding women's role in government is an effective means of controlling corruption (Transparency International, 2014). Controlling for civil liberties, income, and education, these studies found that lower levels of corruption were associated with higher proportions of women in parliaments (Swamy et al., 2001; Dollar et al., 2001). Swamy et al. (2001) also found bribery and corruption to be less severe when women hold a larger share of political seats and senior level positions in government and bureaucracy. The studies identified a mechanism in which women were considered to be less involved in corruption and, as a result, levels of corruption could be expected to decrease as more women were elected to political positions. Following the positive findings from these studies, increasing the ratio of women in politics became an important tool to attempt to combat corruption (Dollar et al., 2001; Rothstein, 2016). Summarizing the debate fifteen years later, Rothstein (2016) holds that while studies consistently have shown that democracy is not a safe cure against corruption, increased gender equality seems an important factor for corruption control.

Initially, many scholars attributed this relationship to essentialist arguments that women are less selfish, more charitable and altruistic, and more risk adverse than men. Not only are these widely held gender stereotypes, but there is also experimental evidence showing that women act more ethically and consistently with the public good than men (Rivas, 2013). Yet, others have argued that the relationship is spurious. Sung (2003) suggests that both gender equality and lower levels of corruption might be jointly caused by variables such as rule of law and the level of democracy. In a similar vein Grimes

and Wängnerud's (2012) study of political nominations in Mexico find that women who make it into political office often have different backgrounds than their male counterparts, and that comparisons of action when in office are misleading.

Other studies accept that a relationship between electing women and lower corruption exists, but question whether women are inherently more honest or adverse to corruption than men. Instead, they argue, the relationship is due to women's structural marginalization (Easarey and Chirillo, 2013) and the exclusion of women from clientelistic networks accounts for the relationship (Goetz, 2007). Tripp (2001), and later Bjarnegård (2013), suggest that female politicians may not be more honest, but simply have more limited access to the informal, clientelistic networks of their male counterparts. Similarly, Al Hassan-Alolo (2007), relying on primary data from Ghana, finds that women are not less corrupt than men if exposed to political environments characterized by corrupt opportunities. Based on data from World Value Surveys, Easarey and Chirillo (2013) question the existence of a direct causality between women in office and reduced levels of corruption and argue that context matters. While a relationship between high numbers of women in political office and reduced levels of corruption holds for democratic countries, the relationship is not present in autocracies. Easarey and Chirillo link this finding to accountability and the presence of credible political institutions. They argue that, as women are considered more adverse to risk, in the presence of strong accountability institutions, women may be less likely to risk illegal acts (2013: 379-82). Conversely, in the absence of legal sanctions and accountability, the positive relationship between high number of female politicians and lower levels of corruption disappears.

With regards to the developing world, which is often characterized by weak accountability institutions, we know relatively little about how the relationship between gender and corruption unfolds. We do not know whether women—once they enter positions—have a dampening effect on the levels of corruption. Currently, there is scant evidence to support the notion that governments led by women are less corrupt than governments led by men. Based on Latinobarometer perception data, Schwandt-Bayer (2010) finds little evidence to suggest that women politicians are perceived as less corrupt. Indeed, corruption scandals have recently plagued the presidencies of Costa Rica's President Laura Chincilla (2010-2014) as well as Chile's Michelle Bachelet. In August 2016, Brazil's President Dilma Rousseff was impeached due to a highly publicized corruption scandal involving unauthorized budget reallocations. Similarly, in March 2019, South Korea's Constitutional Court removed President Park

Geunhye for her use of office to enrich a childhood friend and solicit donations from companies in exchange for political favors. The recent corruption scandals facing female presidents in Latin America and Asia, as well as the Cashgate corruption scandal in Malawi, have occurred in countries that have long histories of corruption and where male presidents have been associated with incidents of corruption at similar and even grander scales. Can it be argued that women leaders—once implicated in acts of corruption—are judged more harshly by voters than their male counterparts? This being the case, can it be argued that the consequences of corruption fall disproportionately on female politicians?

The influence of candidate gender on voter perceptions of corruption and voting behavior has been discussed extensively in the literature. Research suggests that voters employ gender stereotypes when evaluating female politicians (Benstead, Jamal, and Lust, 2015). Women are typically viewed as being more ethical, honest, and compassionate, and concerned with peoples' welfare (Eagly and Karau, 2002), whilst men are viewed as strong, assertive, and self-confident leaders. These stereotypes are believed to inform voters' evaluations of female candidates (Alexander and Andersen, 1993; Shames, 2003; Barnes and Beaulieu, 2014). Studies drawing on experimental surveys find that women candidates are often evaluated differently from (and often, more negatively than) men on dimensions such as character traits, perceived policy specializations, qualification for office, and electoral viability (Bauer, 2015; Ditonto et al. 2014).

Findings showing that women politicians face major obstacles when seeking elected office are nested within the context of the Social Relations Approach. This highlights how social relationships create and reproduce systemic differences in the positioning of different groups of people. According to Kabeer and Subrahmanian (1996), social relationships determine who we are, what our roles and responsibilities are, and what claims we can make; they determine our rights, and the control that we have over our own lives and those of others. Ultimately, these social relations produce cross-cutting inequalities, which ascribe to each individual a position in the structure and hierarchy of their society. Gender relations are one type of social relations, along with class, race, ethnicity, and many others. Ditonto et al. (2014) conclude that voters apply different evaluation standards to women applying for office, searching for cues about whether she has the qualifications to serve in office, how she has done in the past, and how she is expected to do if elected into office. This level of scrutiny is missing for men, resulting in relatively more positive evaluations of the performance of male political officeholders. As McDermott (1997) notes, gender operates as a social information cue, leading to

more intense scrutiny of female political leaders. In the long run, this translates into better re-election prospects for male officeholders compared to women.

Characterizing women as more risk-averse, Esarey and Chirillo (2013) find that when being monitored, women are substantially less willing to take bribes than men. However, this may also be linked to the fact that women are punished more harshly for corruption than men because of different social expectations for their behavior. This finding is documented both for US Senators (Stolberg, 2011) and traffic officers in Peru (Karim, 2011). It may be argued that the performance of a particular representative has a tendency of shaping public opinion and future attitudes. Thus, it is suggested that the failure of a woman president may bring down popularity of other women candidates.

### **3. Contextualizing Cashgate in the Wider Corruption Discourse in Malawi**

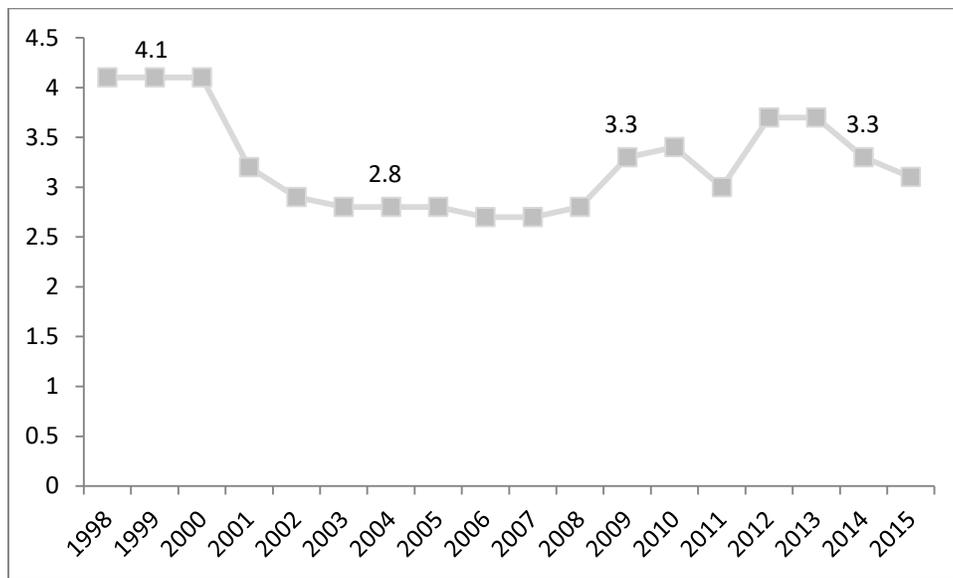
While Cashgate has received widespread media attention, both within and outside Malawi, corruption has been a major challenge in Malawi for a long time. Kainja (2016), for example, notes that in the two decades since Malawi ushered in democratic rule, “corruption has become almost completely normalized...it is expected that when a president is in power, his or her family and home region will benefit...this has been the case under all four presidents since multi-party democracy was established in 1994.”

During the years of authoritarian rule of then Life President, Hastings Kamuzu Banda (1964-1994), corruption was perceived to be highly centralized and limited to a handful of the president’s closest confidants (Anders, 2002; Cammack, 2012; Phiri, 2013). While Banda himself was accused of using the state machinery to cement his own political and economic position, he adopted a strict policy against corruption in the wider civil service, so much that, as Cammack (2012) notes, he was able to maintain “an efficient, honest and incorruptible administration.” The ushering in of democracy in 1994, and the coming to power of a new government led by Bakili Muluzi of the United Democratic Front (UDF) resulted in a new mode of governance, but also led to the flourishing of a culture of corruption (Phiri, 2013; Global Integrity Report, 2007). Muluzi, who became Malawi’s first democratically elected president in 1994, was not only accused of indulging in corruption, but also in presiding over a government that made corruption a common and widespread vice (Khembo, 2004).

During the ten years of the Muluzi presidency (1994-2004), corruption flourished, leading commentators to characterize his tenure as “a period of unprecedented illicit accumulation...politicians, entrepreneurs and ordinary public servants engaged in fiscal indiscipline [and] maladministration” (Phiri, 2013:8-9). This view is echoed by Cammack (2012:91), who points out that the Muluzi government “...oversaw the siphoning of funds from government coffers by senior party people for political and personal ends [and] corruption spiraled out of control.”

The worsening corruption trend during the Muluzi years is reflected in corruption perception data on Malawi. Transparency International’s Corruption Perception Index (CPI) shows that, while the Muluzi administration started off well during his first term in office (1994-1999), in his second term (1999-2004) corruption escalated (Figure 1).

*Figure 1: Corruption trends in Malawi, 1998-2015*



**Source:** Transparency International Corruption Perception Index.

The Malawi CPI data suggest that corruption remained high after Muluzi left office in 2004. Although Muluzi’s successor, Bingu wa Mutharika, pledged to adopt a “zero tolerance of corruption” (Butty, 2014), corruption continued to flourish, with Malawi recording its lowest CPI score of 2.7 in 2006 and 2007. This was also reflected in a Governance and Corruption baseline survey in 2006, which found that nearly 9 out of 10 citizens believed corruption to be a serious problem in Malawi, while approximately 70 percent held the view that corruption had gotten much worse in the preceding ten

years (GOM, 2006). A second Governance and Corruption Survey in 2010 found that citizens felt that corruption had become even worse, and that it had become a major constraint to Malawi's development prospects (Chinsinga et al., 2010).

The Cashgate scandal broke out in September 2013, eight months before the general elections on May 20, 2014. The scandal first came to light when an Accounts Assistant in the Ministry of Energy and Mining, Victor Sithole, was found with large sums of money stashed in the trunk of his car as he exited the gates of the government central offices in the capital, Lilongwe. As the police investigated the Sithole case, the then Budget Director, Paul Mphwiyo, was shot at the gates of his house on September 13, 2013. This led to further Cashgate discoveries and arrests (Dulani, 2016). In the ensuing days, more evidence came to light revealing systematic plunder of public resources on a grand scale (Baker Tilly, 2014:1). President Banda responded first by reshuffling her Cabinet and dropping the Finance and Justice Ministers, Ken Lipenga and Raphael Kasambara respectively (Banda, 2013b). Her government then engaged the British Government, through the Department for International Development (DFID), to commission and fund a forensic audit of suspected misappropriations for April-September 2013, the period within which the Cashgate misappropriations were said to have taken place. A British firm, Baker Tilly Business Services Limited, was hired by DFID and given the responsibility of undertaking the forensic audit. Their report, issued on February 21, 2014, stated that MK13.7 billion could not be sufficiently accounted for. Table 1 summarizes the Baker Tilly Report findings.

*Table 1: Breakdown of Cashgate transactions*

<b>TYPE</b>	<b>AMOUNT</b>	<b>PROPORTION</b>
Cashgate Transactions	K6.1bn	45%
Payments with no supporting documents	K3.96bn	29%
Inflated procurement prices	K3.6bn	26%
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>K13.7bn</b>	

**Source:** Baker Tilly Business Services, 2014: 6.

The unraveling of Cashgate led to the arrest of several individuals, including government officials and businesspeople implicated in the scandal. Those arrested included several senior officials of Joyce Banda’s People’s Party, including the former Minister of Justice, Raphael Kasambara, who was also implicated in the shooting of then Budget Director, Paul Mphwiyo. Other Cashgate suspects linked to the PP included Oswald Lutepo, the PP’s Deputy Director of Recruitment and Sensitization. Lutepo was convicted, and sentenced to serve 11 years imprisonment for his role in Cashgate. Lutepo was charged with money laundering and defrauding government of K4.2 billion. He was sentenced on September 4, 2015 to serve 11 years after pleading guilty to defrauding government.

Following the May 2014 elections, additional Cashgate suspects continued to be arrested and taken to court. Media estimates suggest that nearly 70 people had been arrested on Cashgate charges by the end of 2014, with several convictions secured (Mapondera, 2014). Not surprisingly, Cashgate became a central theme of the 2014 election campaigns. The four main political parties in the elections each focused on ending corruption and prosecuting perpetrators of the vice (Table 2). Of the four main political parties contesting the 2014 elections, both the Democratic Progressive Party and the United Democratic Front specifically referenced Cashgate in their anti-corruption platforms.

*Table 2: Anti-corruption platforms in the election manifestoes in the 2014 elections*

Name of Party	2014 Anti-corruption election pledge
Democratic Progressive Party (DPP)	“Zero tolerance to corruption, fraud, theft and other economic crimes...There shall not be Cashgate scandal under DPP...” DPP (2014:9)
Malawi Congress Party	“MCP government will pursue a policy of zero tolerance to corruption”, MCP (2014:10)
People’s Party	The PP government will establish “a Corruption Court at High Court level”, PP, 2014:71

United Democratic Front	The UDF attributed Cashgate to “massive capacity constraints in financial management, auditing, procurement”, and pledged to review and strengthen, among others “...financial management and accounting systems”, UDF (2014:32)
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**Source:** 2014 Election Manifestoes.

In light of Malawi’s persistent accounts of corruption, how can Banda’s electoral performance be attributed to Cashgate against the advantages of incumbency? As an alternative explanation, how did gender considerations, especially stereotypes, account for her electoral defeat? In other words, did Malawian voters punish Banda over Cashgate by virtue of the fact that she is a woman?

In order to understand the gendered effect of corruption on the 2014 Malawi elections, we draw from several data sources to build our argument. First, we use data from Transparency International’s Corruption Perception Index (CPI), which measures the perceived levels of public sector corruption worldwide based on expert opinion. While the CPI data goes back to 1996, scores on Malawi only became available from 1998. Second, we draw from public opinion survey data from the Afrobarometer, a pan-African Network of survey research measuring opinion and attitude on a range of issues including governance and livelihoods; Afrobarometer surveys in Malawi were conducted in 1999, 2003, 2005, 2008, 2012, and 2014. The first four surveys (1999-2008) were based on nationally representative samples of 1,200 respondents, giving a margin of error of +/- 3 percent. The 2012 and 2014 surveys had a sample sizes of 2,400 respondents, giving a margin of error of +/- 2 percent at the 95 percent confidence interval.

Third, complimentary data are drawn from a study conducted by the Political and Administrative Studies (PAS) and Chr. Michelsen Institute (CMI) in 2015 in the three districts of Mangochi, Salima, and Rumphi. The sample was randomly drawn, with a sample size of 597.

Fourth, 18 focus group discussions were conducted across Malawi’s three geographical regions, as part of the Local Government Performance Index (LGPI) carried out in Malawi in April 2016. The groups ranged in size from 9-12 and were divided into male, female, and youth groups in urban and rural areas. Finally, data on elections in Malawi are drawn from the African Elections Database and the Malawi Electoral Commission (MEC).

## 4. Corruption and Election Performance in Malawi

The widespread view that Cashgate made Banda unelectable would suggest that corruption under her government was so egregious that voters punished her at the ballot box. If true, this would indicate a coming of age of Malawian democracy, signaling that the Malawi electorate is learning to sanction leaders who are tainted by corruption. Yet, while Cashgate has certainly been one of the most highly publicized corruption scandals in recent Malawian history, evidence from survey data and corruption indices do not support the view that corruption was at its worst during Joyce Banda’s two years in power. The immediate two presidents before Banda, Bakili Muluzi and Bingu wa Mutharika, presided over just as much corruption and encountered their own corruption scandals but were not similarly punished at the ballot box (Table 3).

*Table 3: Presidential elections and perceptions of corruption*

Election Year	Incumbent President	Winning Presidential candidate	Share of the Vote of winner (%)	Mean CPI scores prior to elections
1994	Kamuzu Banda (MCP)	Bakili Muluzi (UDF)	47	-
1999	Bakili Muluzi (UDF)	Bakili Muluzi (UDF)	52	4.1
2004	Bakili Muluzi (UDF)	Bingu wa Mutharika (UDF)	36	3.25
2009	Bingu wa Mutharika (DPP)	Bingu wa Mutharika (DPP)	66	2.76
2014	Banda (PP)	PeterMutharika (DPP)	36	3.7

**Source:** Malawi Electoral Commission; Transparency International Corruption Perception Index (CPI). The CPI score ranges from 0 to 10, with zero reflecting very high corruption and 10 reflecting very clean and no corruption. After 2012, the scale was changed to a 0-100 range. To maintain consistency, our calculations have rescaled the scores after 2012 to the original 0-10 scale.

The case of Bakili Muluzi provides the best example of an incumbent that was not penalized for corruption scandals. As early as 1994, Muluzi’s opponents cited his previous arrest and imprisonment for public theft in 1968 as a leadership disqualification. The reaction from the Malawian public, however, was to embrace Muluzi with the words, “Bola wakuba yemweyo!” (Better the thief!)

(Lwanda, 1996; Sharra, 2013). Once elected President, Muluzi's government was dogged by corruption allegations, with several corruption scandals coming to light almost immediately after he came to power (Kayuni and Jamu, 2015). Despite the numerous accusations leveled against him, Muluzi won re-election in the 1999 elections with an increased share of the vote, while his UDF party increased its share of seats in the 1999-2004 Parliament (Dulani and van Donge, 2005).

The limited effect of corruption on presidential elections prior to the 2014 elections is further reflected in Bingu wa Mutharika's election to the Malawi presidency in 2004 and his re-election in 2009. The CPI data shows that Malawi's overall corruption levels had been worsening in the five years before Mutharika won the 2004 elections on a UDF ticket. Yet, Mutharika won the 2014 elections and succeeded Muluzi as president. Malawi's CPI score was lowest during Mutharika's first term in office (2004-2009), averaging 2.76 to suggest that corruption was at its worst during this period. Despite this worsening corruption, however, Mutharika won the 2009 elections with the largest share of the vote (66 percent) of any president since the re-introduction of democratic politics in 1994.

The average CPI score during Banda's brief presidency was 3.7. Although the period was shorter, Malawi's average CPI score between 2012 and 2014 when Banda was in office was the second best of any president seeking re-election. Where Muluzi and Mutharika were rewarded before her, Banda was voted out of power. This suggests that Malawian voters are not always equally influenced by corruption in their voting decisions, at least not in the elections prior to 2014.

## **5. Corruption and Voting Behavior in Malawi**

In order to understand the extent to which Malawian voters turn their backs on presidents they perceive to be corrupt, we examine data from the Afrobarometer. Specifically, we assess findings from three questions that ask respondents about their perceptions of: corruption by the president and officials in his/her office; government's perceived performance in handling corruption; and whether this leads to lower likelihood of voting for the incumbent. A preliminary analysis of the Afrobarometer survey data appears to reinforce the belief that Malawians consider corruption to be pervasive and spanning across different governments (Table 4):

*Table 4: Perceptions of corruption by Malawian citizens 1999-2014*

Survey Year	Party in Power	Percentage of Malawians holding the view that the President and some officials in his/her office are involved in corruption	Percentage of Malawians holding the view that government is doing a bad job in handling corruption
1999	UDF (Muluzi)	73	-
2003	UDF(Muluzi)	65	68
2005	DPP (wa Mutharika)	47	39
2008	DPP (wa Mutharika)	55	31
2012	PP (Banda)	35	28
2014	PP (Banda)	79	69

**Source:** Afrobarometer

It is worth noting that the 2012 Afrobarometer survey, which was conducted two months after Banda became president, shows that a majority of Malawians considered Banda and officials in her office to be less corrupt. Similarly, a large proportion of Malawians held the view that Banda's government was doing a good job in fighting corruption, with slightly fewer than 3 in 10 Malawians (28 percent) saying her government was doing a bad job. However, since the survey was conducted only two months into Banda's presidency, it is likely that these views reflected people's expectations of the new government, rather than being informed by actual fact. These figures reinforce the general arguments advanced by Swamy et al. (2001), Dollar et al. (2001), and Rothstein (2016) that suggest that people expect lower levels of corruption with female political leaders in charge. Consistent with the literature once again, however, the table shows that Banda took a heavy hit once her government was accused of corruption, particularly after the Cashgate scandal broke. After Cashgate, the number of Malawians holding the view that Banda and officials were involved in corruption doubled from 35 percent in 2012 to 79 percent in 2014. Similarly, the proportion of Malawians that considered that the Banda government was doing a bad job in fighting corruption more than doubled from 28 percent in 2012 to 69 percent in 2014.

A closer analysis of the Afrobarometer survey data suggests that Banda paid a high penalty for corruption while her two immediate male predecessors were not similarly punished. In 1999, 73 percent of Malawians considered Muluzi and senior UDF government officials to be corrupt, a figure that is almost identical to the 79 percent who held the same view about Banda and officials in her office in 2014. Yet, despite the fact that both leaders were considered to be almost equally corrupt, Muluzi was reelected with a 52 percent vote share in the 1999 elections, while Banda was voted out in 2014. The same contrasting pattern was repeated in the 2003 and 2014 surveys. The 69 percent of Malawians who said Banda's government was doing a poor job in fighting corruption in 2014 was almost identical to the 68 percent of those who held a similar view about the UDF government in 2003. Yet, despite more than two thirds of Malawians blaming the UDF government of doing a poor job in fighting corruption, the party's presidential candidate Bingu wa Mutharika, won the 2004 elections. The pattern of Banda paying a heavier price in elections is also reflected yet again in the 2008 and 2014 Afrobarometer surveys. In 2008, over half of Malawians (55 percent) said they considered wa Mutharika and officials in his office to be corrupt, yet 66 percent voted for him in the May 2009 elections.

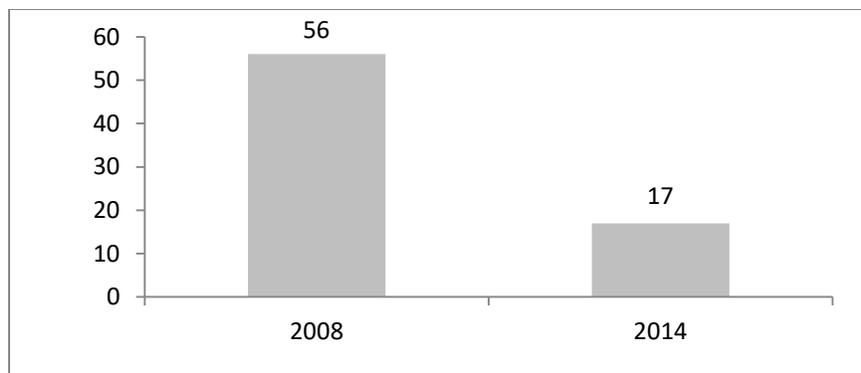
## **6. Additional Evidence**

The evidence presented here suggests that if corruption impacts voting behavior the same way among men and women political leaders, Muluzi and wa Mutharika and their parties should have been penalized in 1999, 2004, and again in 2009. Yet, Banda's case in 2014 appears to have been an exception, as her predecessors both managed to ride out the corruption scandals that broke on their watch.

While this suggests that Banda was judged by a different corruption yardstick, we cannot conclude that the observed difference is attributed to the gender of the leaders alone. To better understand the gendered effects of corruption on voting behavior, we examine the voting intentions of those Malawians who said that the president and officials in the presidency are involved in corruption and those who held the view that government was doing a bad job in fighting corruption. To what extent are the same people willing to vote for an incumbent president and party or opt to vote for the opposition? To answer this question, we draw from Afrobarometer survey data from pre-election years. Only three Afrobarometer surveys fit this criterion, namely the 2003, 2008 and 2014 surveys.

The question on voting intentions was not asked in the 2003 survey leaving the comparison to the 2008 and 2014 surveys. In 2008, the president was a man, Bingu wa Mutharika, while in 2014, the president was a woman, Banda. The results are presented in Figure 2.

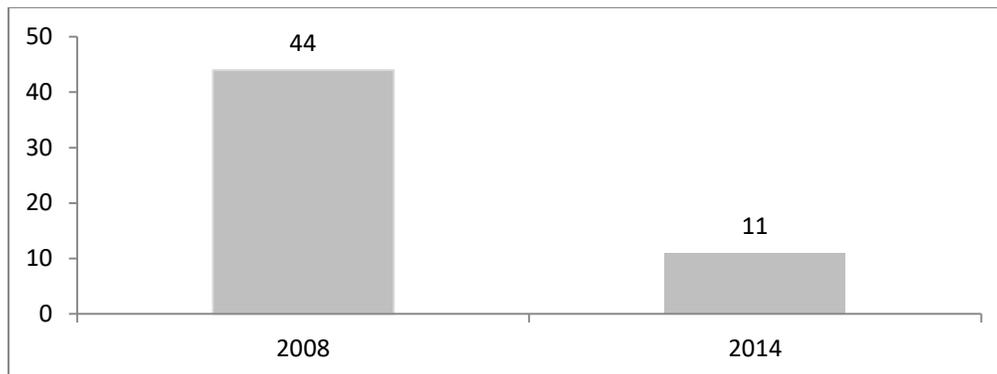
*Figure 2: Proportion of Malawians that said the president and officials in his/ her office were corrupt but expressing willingness to vote for the incumbent party*



**Source:** Afrobarometer

Perceptions of corruption in the presidency influenced voter choice markedly differently between 2008, when Bingu wa Mutharika ran, and 2014 when Banda was in office. A majority (56 percent) of Malawians who considered Mutharika and officials in his office to be corrupt were still willing to vote for him if elections were held in 2008. By contrast, only 17 percent of Malawians who considered Banda and officials in her government to be corrupt were willing to vote for her in 2014. This picture is repeated when comparing the willingness of those who thought the government was doing a bad job in fighting corruption during the Mutharika and Banda presidencies (Figure 3). Just under half (44 percent) of Malawians who felt Mutharika’s government was doing a bad job in fighting corruption were still willing to vote for his party in 2008. Only 11 percent of those who felt Banda’s government was doing a bad job in fighting corruption expressed a willingness to vote for the PP in 2014.

*Figure 3: Incumbent government support among Malawians who said government was doing a bad job in fighting corruption*

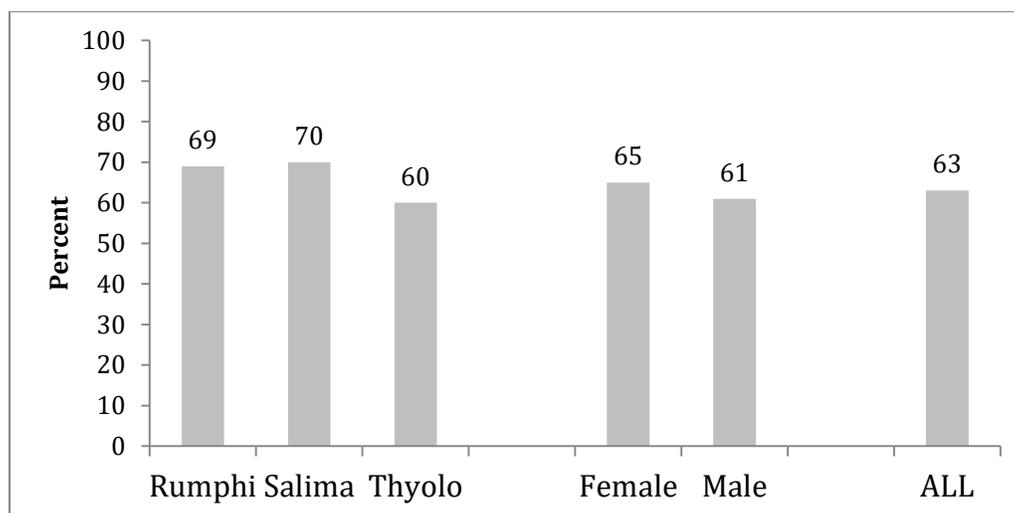


**Source:** Afrobarometer

The comparison of how voters responded to corruption in the Mutharika and Banda governments supports the argument that women leaders are judged differently from men when their governments are embroiled in corruption. In the Malawi case, the male president, Mutharika, paid a relatively small price for perceptions of corruption and his government’s failure to fight the vice. By contrast, Banda, a woman, paid by losing public support for exactly the same corruption allegations, including Cashgate, whose origins date back to the Mutharika presidency. The different treatment meant that Mutharika could ride through corruption scandals and win re-election in 2009 while Banda’s path to a full presidential term was blocked by the cloud of corruption hanging over her.

The Afrobarometer findings suggest that women political leaders, at least in Malawi, are treated differently compared to men when it comes to corruption. Supporting this finding, the PAS/CMI survey conducted in three districts of Malawi in 2015 addressed this question by asking, “In your opinion, how often do the following things occur in this country’s politics: Female political leaders are judged more negatively than their male counterparts?” Across all three districts, a majority of respondents agreed that women holding political office are indeed judged more negatively compared to men in similar positions (Figure 4).

Figure 4: Proportion of Malawians who agree that women political leaders are judged more negatively, 2015



Source: PAS/CMI Survey, 2015

The PAS/CMI survey reinforces the argument that Malawian women political leaders are often judged more harshly than men in a similar situation. While a corruption scandal like Cashgate might still have negatively impacted the re-election prospects of a male candidate, the PAS/CMI study suggests that voters themselves acknowledge that they would judge women leaders more negatively than men. Cashgate might simply have contributed to arousing latent hostility towards women in leadership positions rather than being the causal factor for Banda's loss.

Studies carried out after the 2014 elections further reinforced the argument that Cashgate may not have been the sole or main factor explaining Banda's electoral loss. As part of focus groups conducted in conjunction with the Local Governance Performance Index (LGPI) survey, participants were asked, "If we were to talk of a former Malawi president accused of being corrupt, who is the first person that comes to mind?" The respondents either mentioned Bakili Muluzi (1994-2004) or Banda (2012-2014). A majority of the male respondents mentioned Banda, while the women mentioned Banda and Bakili Muluzi equally. 75 percent of the youth mentioned Banda, the remaining 25 percent Bakili Muluzi. Interestingly, no one mentioned the late Bingu wa Mutharika. One reason given by respondents was that one should not speak ill of the dead. Participants were also asked to rate the performance of the current president (Peter Mutharika, since 2014) and the one preceding him (Joyce Banda). The focus groups were divided on this issue and approximately half the respondents rated Banda's performance

in office more favorably than the administration of her successor, Peter Mutharika. Considering the diverging views on performance in office and perceptions of corruption levels attached to previous presidents, somewhat surprisingly, in all focus groups the respondents argued that Banda's poor performance would affect their willingness to vote for female leaders in the future. Some respondents argued that they still would consider voting for female candidates, but not for a female presidential candidate. As argued by one respondent: "Women should not be presidents. They could maybe become vice-presidents, but they cannot be trusted to become presidents" ("Youth" Focus Group, Southern Region, January 19, 2016).

## **7. Concluding Remarks**

Until recently, researchers and policymakers alike have worked on the assumption that women are less corrupt than men. This assumption is attributed to cross-national research first presented by the World Bank, which found governments with more female representation are less likely to be corrupt. The research of gender and corruption has evolved markedly from these early studies, suggesting that the number of women in the legislature was positively correlated with reduced levels of corruption. Later works have refined the findings and suggested that the link between gender and corruption is contextual, and linked to opportunity, structure, culture, and institutions. It has been noted that women's exclusion from tightly-knit, corrupt networks account for the link and that, as a result, democracy is needed to address both corruption as well as gender inequality.

Yet, the intersection of gender and corruption is complex. The research on gender and corruption is still inconclusive, especially with regard to weakly institutionalized polities in the global south. Arguably, including women in politics as an attempt to curb corruption cannot be considered a definite success. Above all, we have scant empirical evidence on how voters regard male and female politicians when linked to acts of corruption. Comparing levels of corruption in Malawi during the presidencies of Bakili Muluzi, Bingu wa Mutharika, and Banda we have drawn from several national public opinion surveys conducted prior to, and after the Cashgate scandal.

Based on our analysis we find that Banda may have paid a heavier price for her association with a major corruption scandal than male incumbents before her. Our findings further suggest that, in a political context where people expect female leaders to be less corrupt than male leaders, corruption scandals might have a more significant effect on re-election prospects of women incumbents than

men who are in similar positions. This finding is consistent with studies demonstrating that women in elected political office are often judged using a higher standard than men and, consequently, tend to be penalized more than men in a similar position.

We emphasize that our findings are tentative and that more qualitative and experimental analyses are needed to substantiate the claim that women are judged more harshly by voters when linked to acts of corruption. But, we also need to think carefully about the policy implications of our findings. The debate regarding women's relative propensities to engage in corruption is far from being resolved and we need further research to understand women's contributions towards curbing corruption. If it is due to structural marginalization, then it follows that promoting all types of minorities in office would help improve transparency. Our discussion suggests there is likely very little to be gained from assuming that women's gender generates higher morality. Effective accountability and oversight systems appear to be more important than the gender of public-sector officials to provide responsive and non-corrupt service delivery. Though increasing women's political participation remains an important goal on its own, the implication of the gender and corruption debate is that policies that increase women's roles in organizations and public decision-making, while simultaneously addressing other determinants of good governance (e.g., transparency, political accountability, separation of powers or rule of law), might be better able to reduce corruption.

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