



Popular Attitudes toward Democracy in Malawi: A Summary of Afrobarometer Indicators, 1999-2008

4 May 2009

Malawi secured independence from Britain in 1964. After three decades of single-party rule under “President-for-Life” Hastings Kamuzu Banda and his Malawi Congress Party (MCP), a 1993 referendum paved the way for the introduction of a multiparty system with 65 percent support. Bakili Muluzi of the United Democratic Front (UDF) defeated Banda in the subsequent 1994 elections, and was re-elected in 1999. Unable to amend the constitution to stay in office for a third term, Muluzi’s hand-picked successor, Bingu wa Mutharika, replaced him as president in 2004, although the UDF lost control of the National Assembly. In 2005, however, Mutharika resigned from the UDF and started his own political party, the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP), due to a conflict with former President Muluzi, creating some evident turmoil within the Malawi political system. Mutharika is running for re-election under the DPP banner in the May 2009 polls. In 2008, Malawi had a Freedom House ranking of “partly-free”, with scores for both political rights and civil liberties of 4.

This document provides a summary of popular attitudes regarding the demand for and supply of democracy in Malawi as revealed over the course of four Afrobarometer surveys conducted between 1999 and 2008 (Nov.-Dec. 1999, N=1208; Apr.-May 2003, N=1200; June-July 2005, N=1200; October 2008, N=1200). Samples of this size yield a margin of error of +/- 3 percent at a confidence level of 95 percent. The charts that follow capture perceptions of:

- The meaning of democracy;
- The demand for democracy (including individual support for democracy, patience with democracy and rejection of military rule, one-party rule, and one-man rule);
- Support for democratic institutions (including attitudes towards elections, term limits, multi-party rule, and checks on presidential powers); and
- The supply of democracy (including satisfaction with democracy and the perceived extent of democracy, quality of elections and the protection of key freedoms).

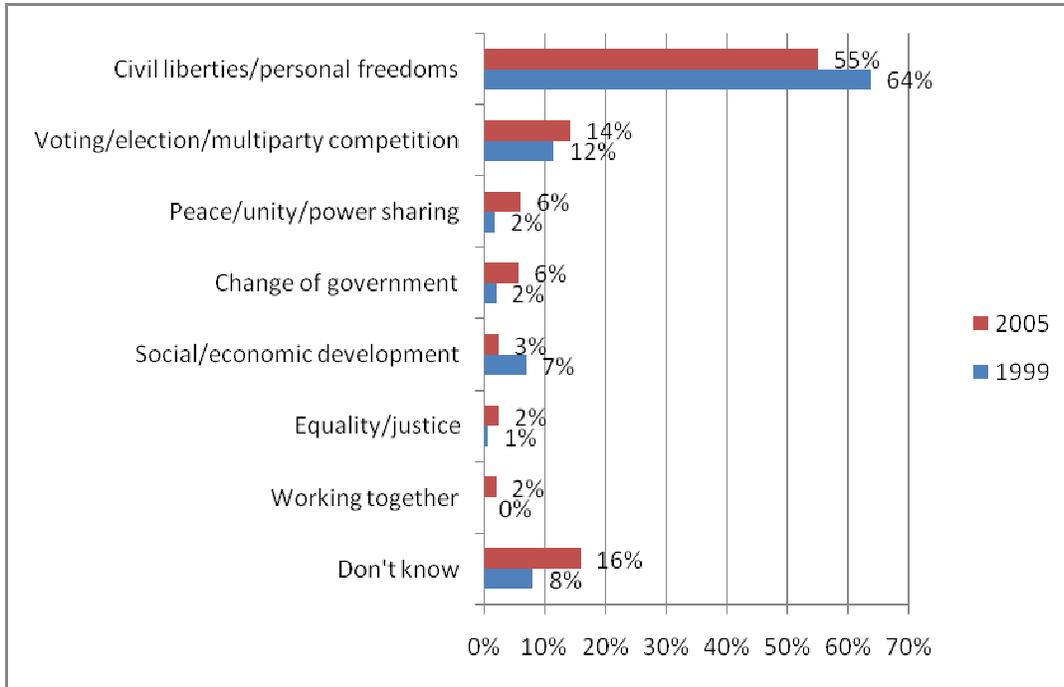
Points of Interest

- On many indicators of both demand for and supply of democracy, Malawi saw serious declines between 1999 and 2005, but has sharply rebounded in 2008.
- Support for democracy has jumped from its lowest point in 2005 to its highest in 2008 (2.1)
- Similarly, rejection of all authoritarian alternatives has rebounded from surprisingly low levels witnessed in 2005, but rejection of one-party rule and strongman rule is still well below the highs recorded in 1999 (2.2-2.4)
- Patience with democracy climbed steeply and steadily between 2003 and 2008 (2.5)
- Support for term limits has dropped sharply between 2003 and 2008 (3.2)
- Like demand for democracy, evaluations of the supply of democracy have also rebounded markedly from deep lows recorded in 2005 (4.1 and 4.2)

MEANING OF DEMOCRACY

1.1 Variable: Meaning of democracy

Question: What if anything does democracy mean to you?



* In 2005 respondents could offer up to three meanings. In 1999, they could offer two. Figures shown are the percentage of all substantive responses offered.

DEMAND FOR DEMOCRACY

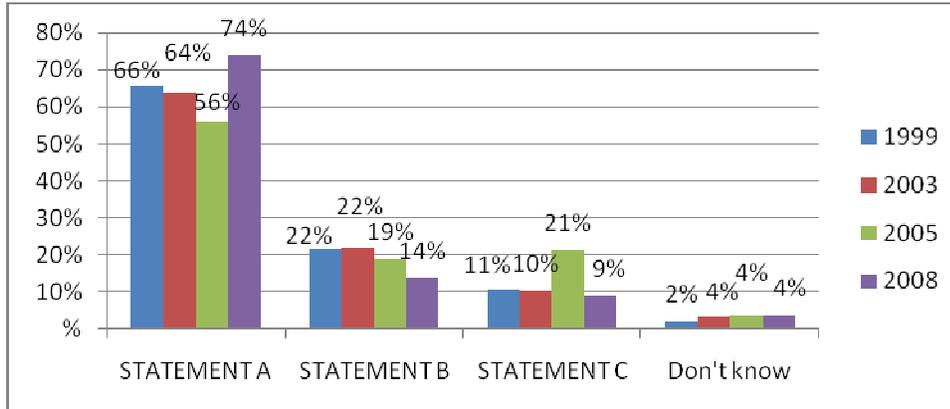
2.1 Variable: Support for democracy

Question: Which of these three statements is closest to your own opinion?

A: Democracy is preferable to any other kind of government.

B: In some circumstances, a non-democratic government can be preferable.

C: For someone like me, it doesn't matter what kind of government we have.



2.2 Variable: Reject military rule

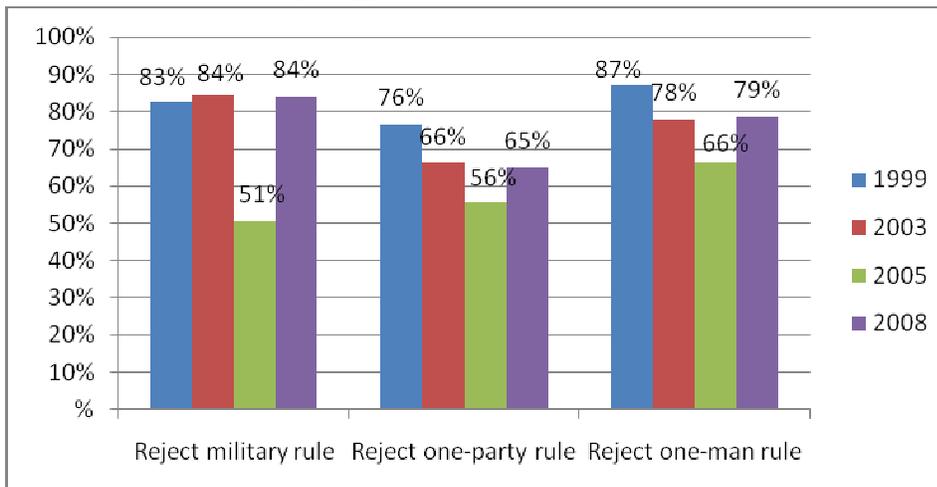
Question: There are many ways to govern a country. Would you disapprove or approve of the following alternatives: The army comes in to govern the country?

2.3 Variable: Reject one-party rule

Question: There are many ways to govern a country. Would you disapprove or approve of the following alternatives: Only one political party is allowed to stand for election and hold office?

2.4 Variable: Reject one-man rule

Question: There are many ways to govern a country. Would you disapprove or approve of the following alternatives: Elections and Parliament/National Assembly are abolished so that the President/Prime Minister can decide everything?



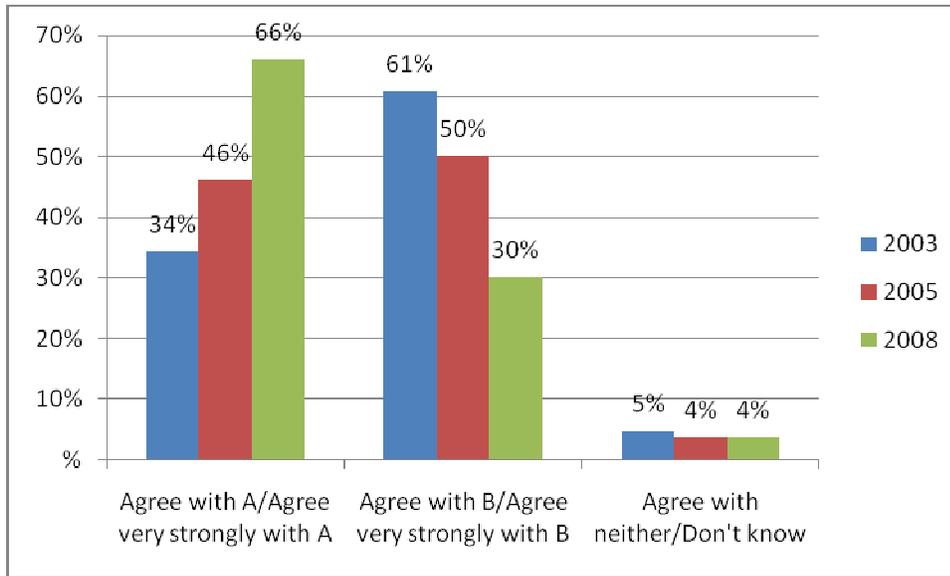
(Percent who disapprove/strongly disapprove of military rule, one-party rule and one-man rule)

2.5 Variable: Patience with democracy

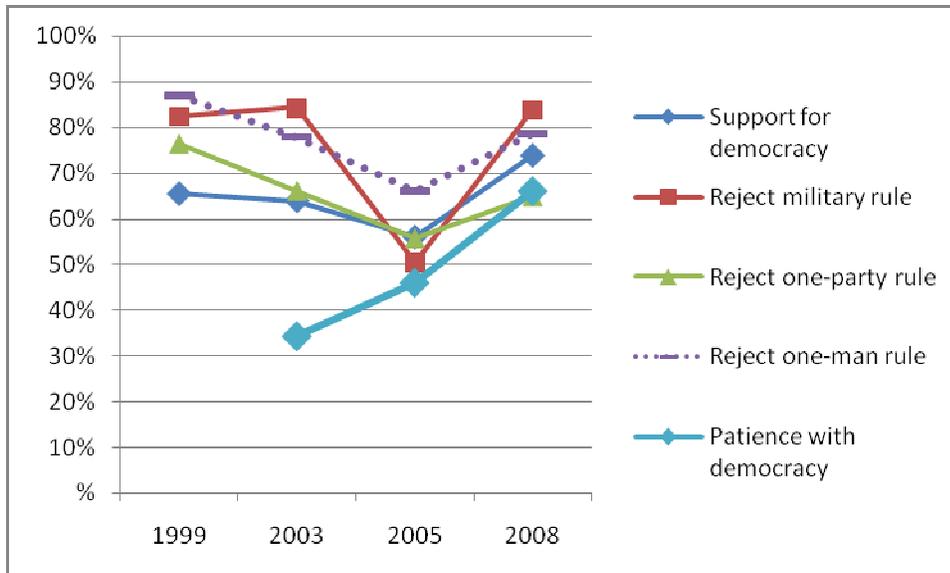
Question: Which of the following statements is closest to your view? Statement A or Statement B.

A: Our present system of elected government should be given more time to deal with inherited problems.

B: If our present system cannot produce results soon, we should try another form of government.



Summary of Demand for democracy



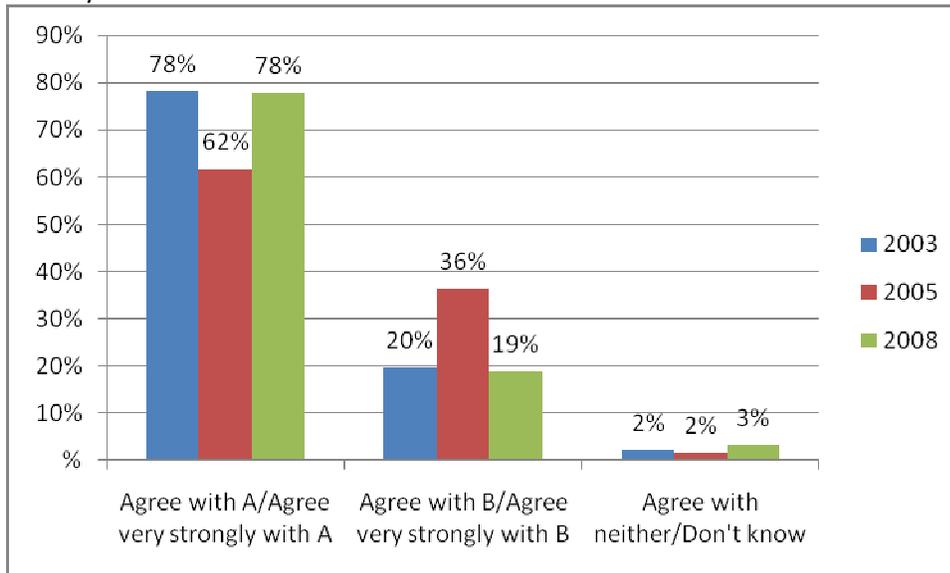
DEMOCRATIC INSTITUTIONS

3.1 Variable: Choose leaders through elections vs. try another form

Question: Which of the following statements is closest to your view? Statement A or Statement B.

A: We should choose our leaders in this country through regular, open and honest elections.

B: Since elections sometimes produce bad results, we should adopt other methods for choosing this country's leaders.

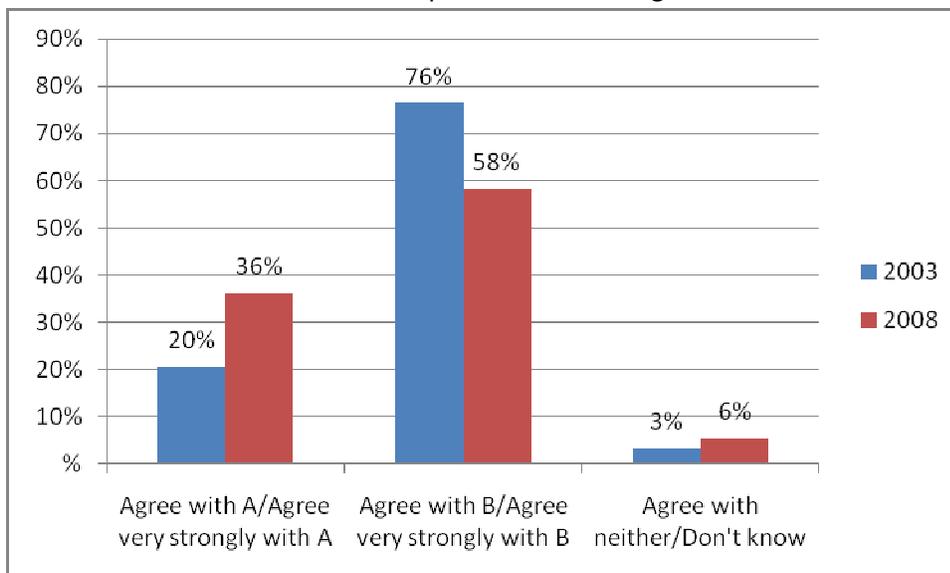


3.2 Variable: No term limits for the president vs. two terms only

Question: Which of the following statements is closest to your view? Statement A or Statement B.

A: There should be no constitutional limit on how long the president can serve.

B: The constitution should limit the president to serving a maximum of two terms in office.

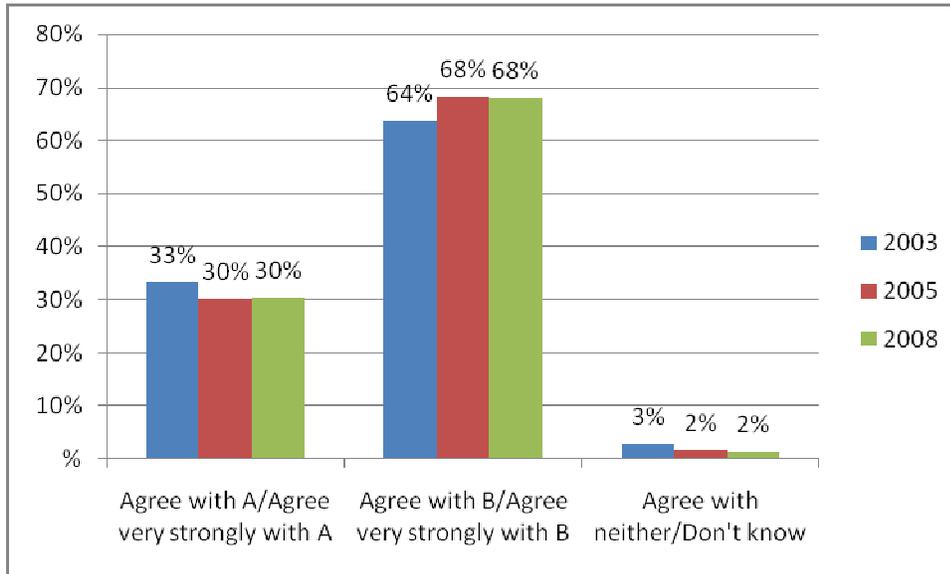


3.3 Variable: Political parties divisive vs. many parties needed

Question: Which of the following statements is closest to your view? Statement A or Statement B.

A: Political parties create division and confusion; it is therefore unnecessary to have many political parties in Malawi.

B: Many political parties are needed to make sure that Malawians have real choices in who governs them.

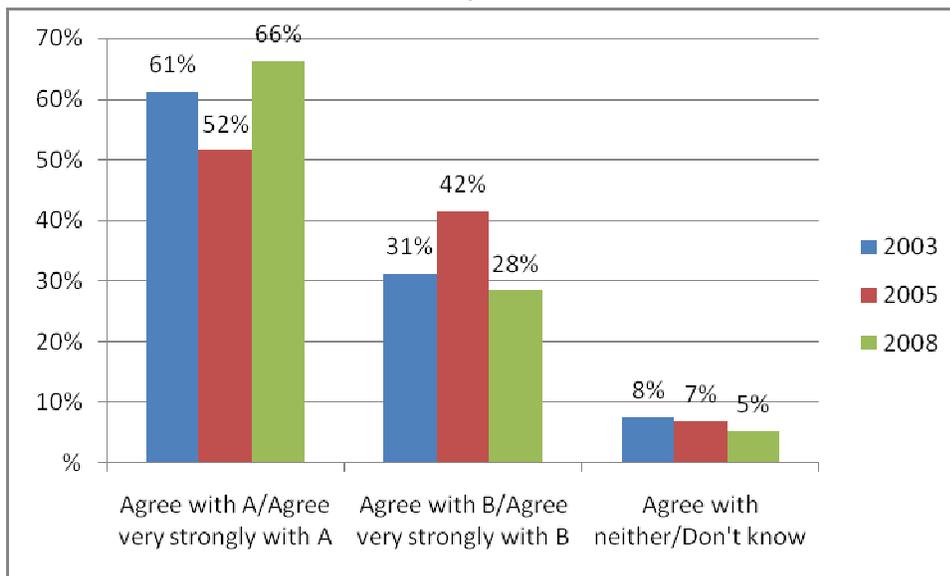


3.4 Variable: Parliament makes laws vs. President does

Question: Which of the following statements is closest to your view? Statement A or Statement B.

A: The members of Parliament/National Assembly represent the people; therefore they should make laws for this country, even if the President/Prime Minister does not agree.

B: Since the President/Prime Minister represents all of us, he should pass laws without worrying about what the Parliament/National Assembly thinks.

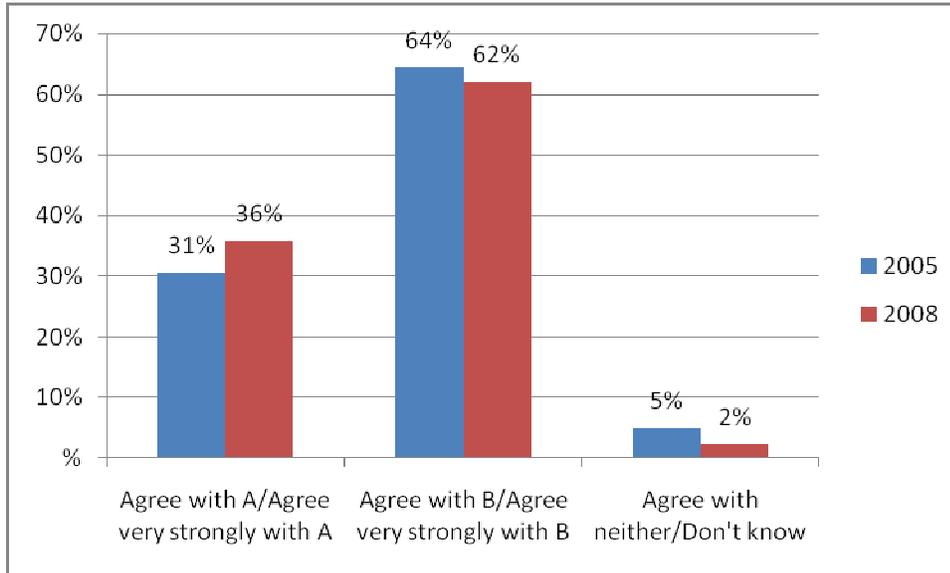


3.5 Variable: President free to act vs. obey the laws and courts

Question: Which of the following statements is closest to your view? Statement A or Statement B.

A: Since the President/Prime Minister was elected to lead the country, he should not be bound by laws or court decisions that he thinks are wrong.

B: The President/Prime Minister must always obey the laws and the courts, even if he thinks they are wrong.

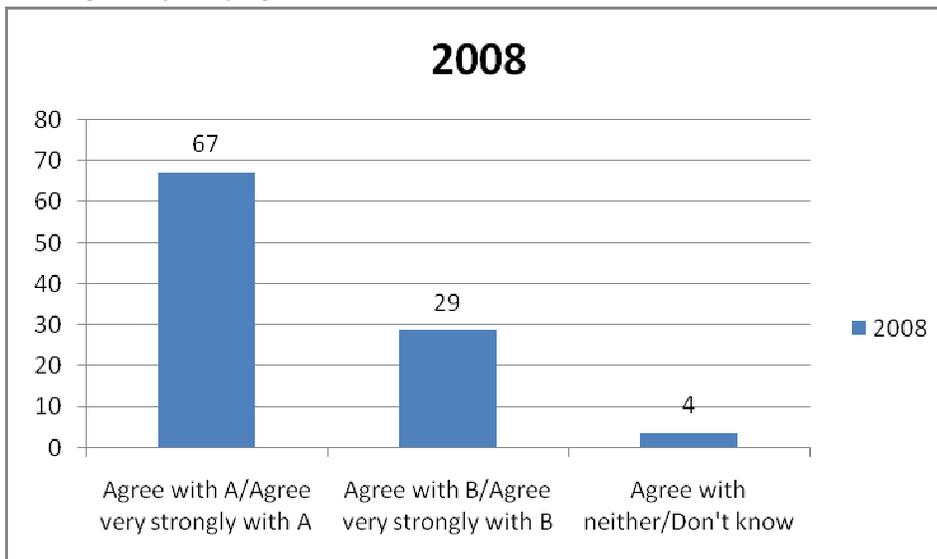


3.6 Variable: Parliament monitors President vs. cooperate

Question: Which of the following statements is closest to your view? Statement A or Statement B.

A: Parliament should ensure that the president explains to it on a regular basis how his government spends the taxpayers' money.

B: The President should be able to devote his full attention to developing the country rather than wasting time justifying his actions.

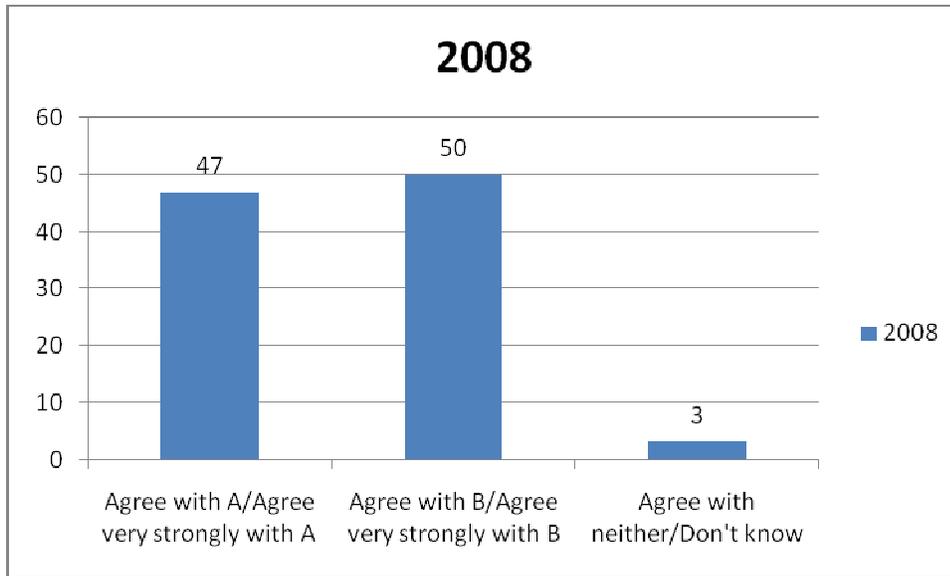


3.7 Variable: Opposition parties examine government vs. cooperate

Question: Which of the following statements is closest to your view? Statement A or Statement B.

A: Opposition parties should regularly examine and criticize government policies and actions.

B: Opposition parties should concentrate on cooperating with government and helping it develop the country.

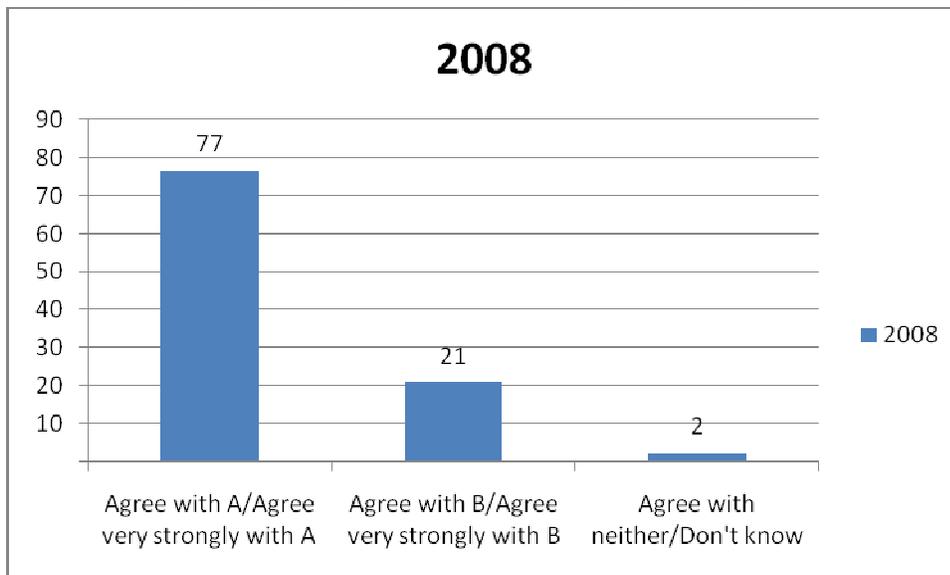


3.8 Variable: Media examines government vs. cooperate

Question: Which of the following statements is closest to your view? Statement A or Statement B.

A: The news media should constantly investigate and report on corruption and the mistakes made by the government.

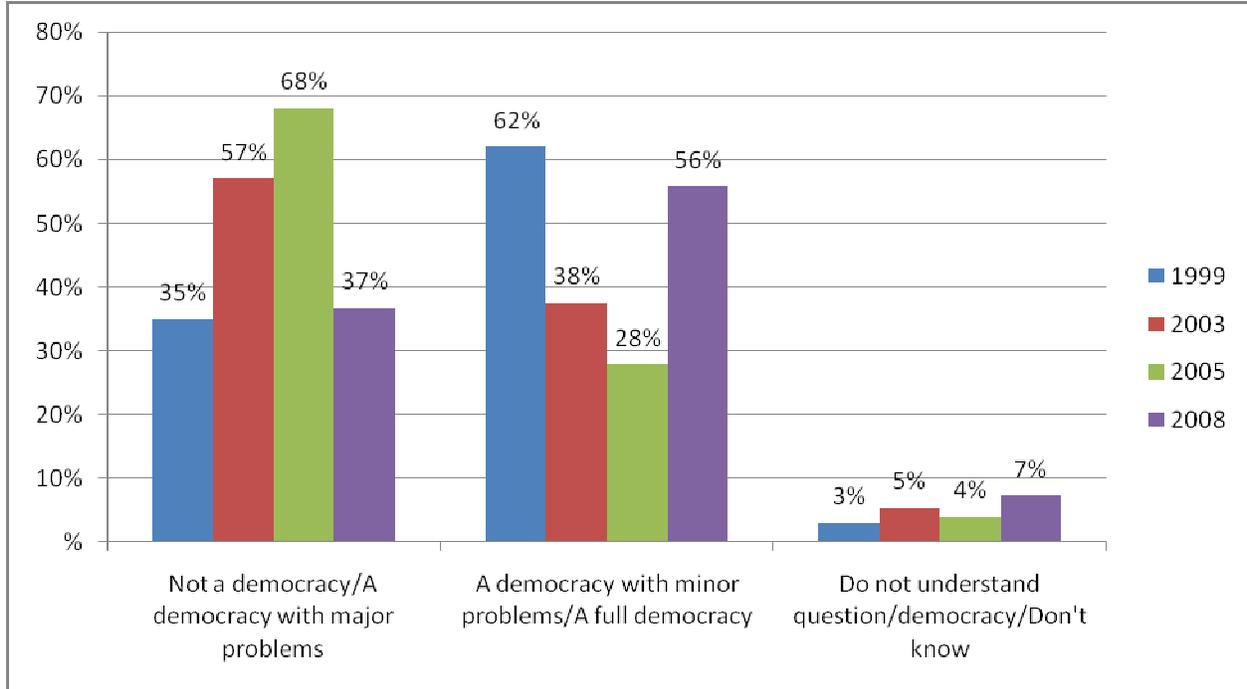
B: Too much reporting on negative events, like corruption, only harms the country.



SUPPLY OF DEMOCRACY

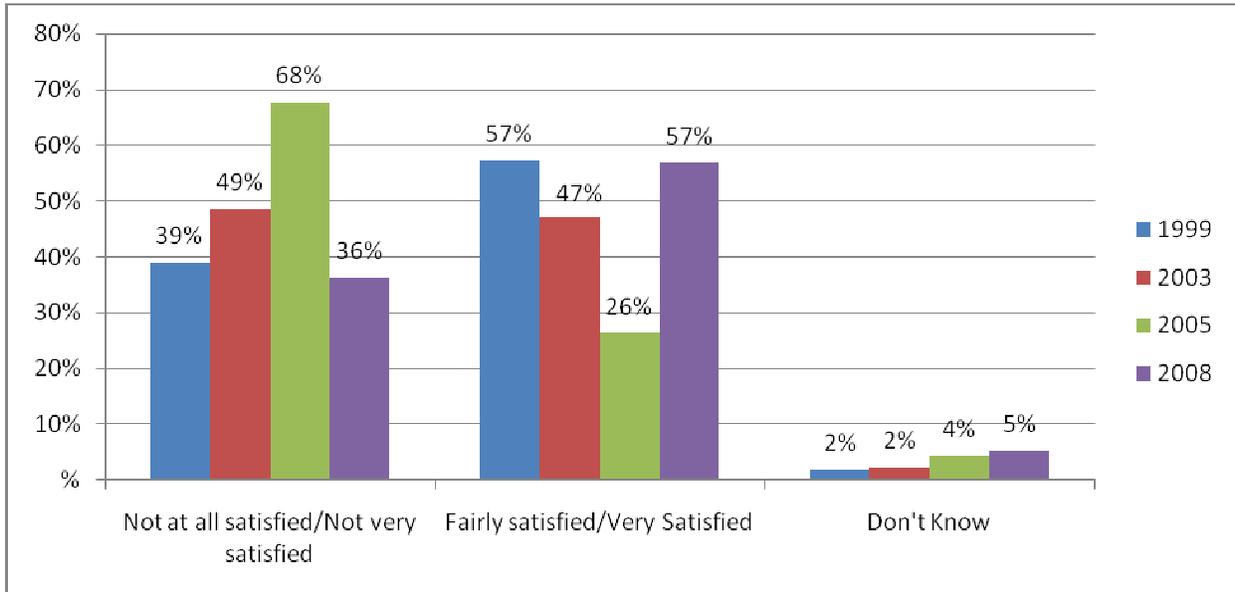
4.1 Variable: Extent of Democracy

Questions: In your opinion how much of a democracy is Malawi today?



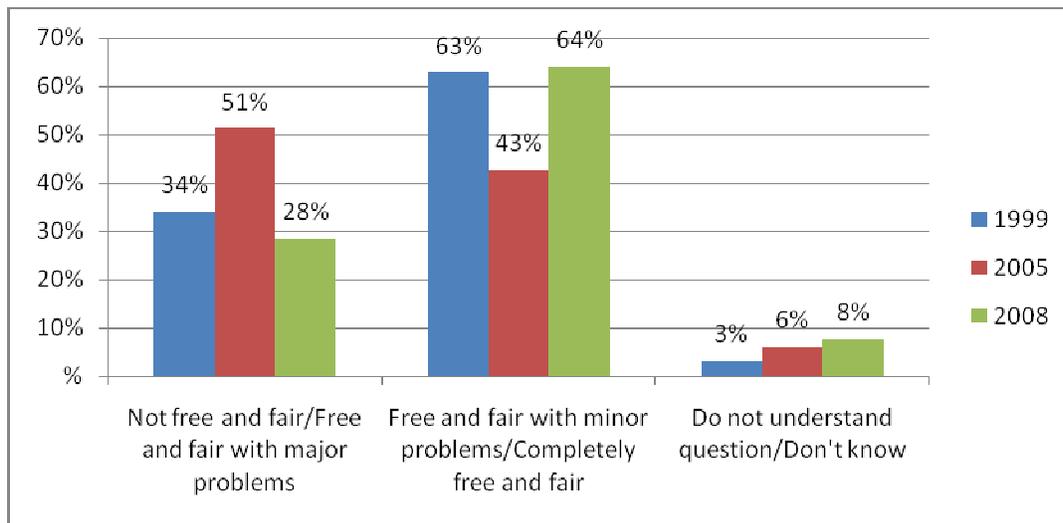
4.2 Variable: Satisfaction with democracy

Question: Overall, how satisfied are you with the way democracy works in Malawi?



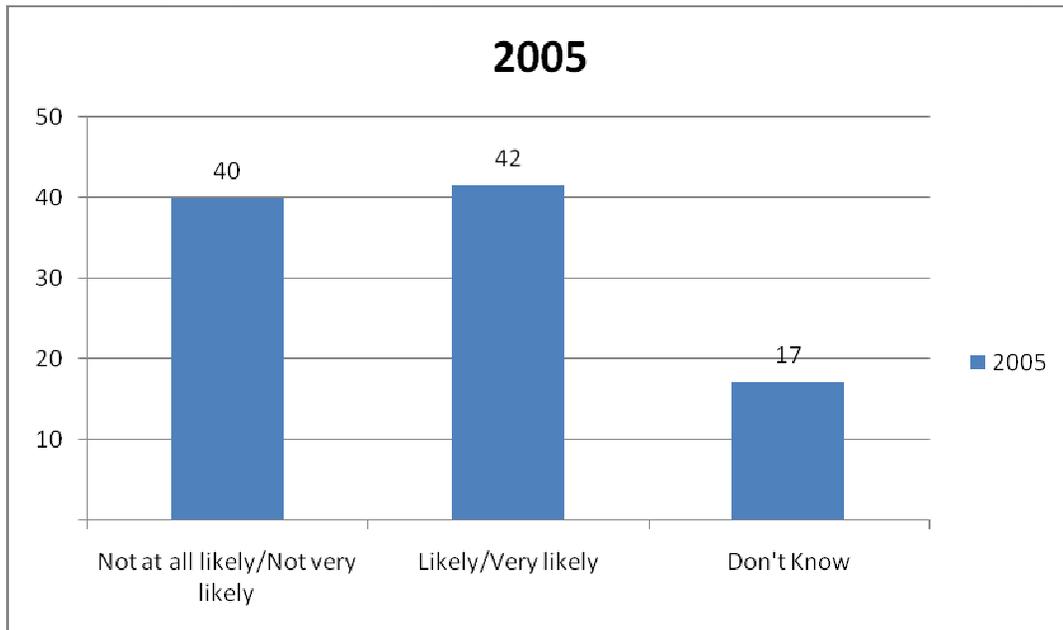
4.3 Variable: Elections free and fair

Question: On the whole, how would you rate the freeness and fairness of the last national election, held in [20xx]. Was it:



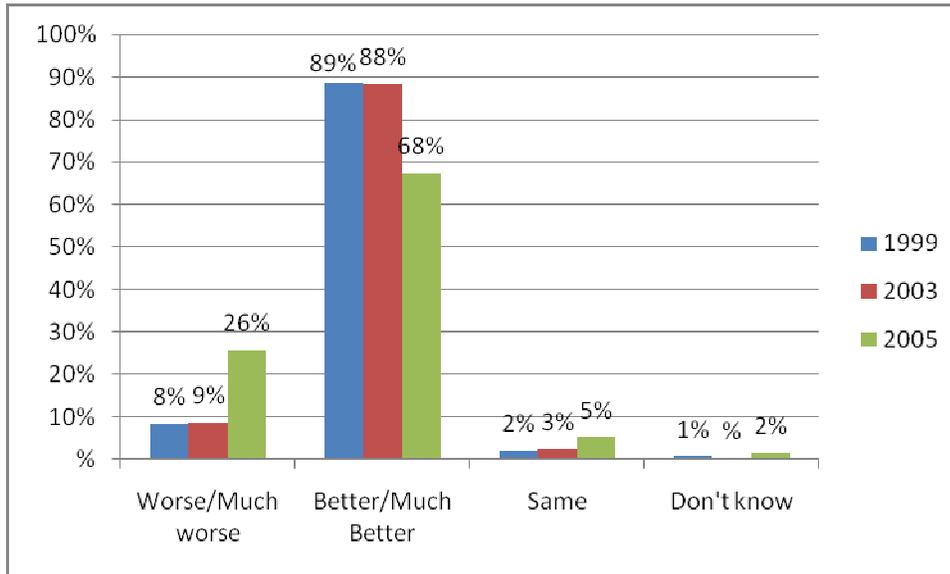
4.4 Variable: Future of democracy

Question: In your opinion, how likely is it that Malawi will remain a democratic country?



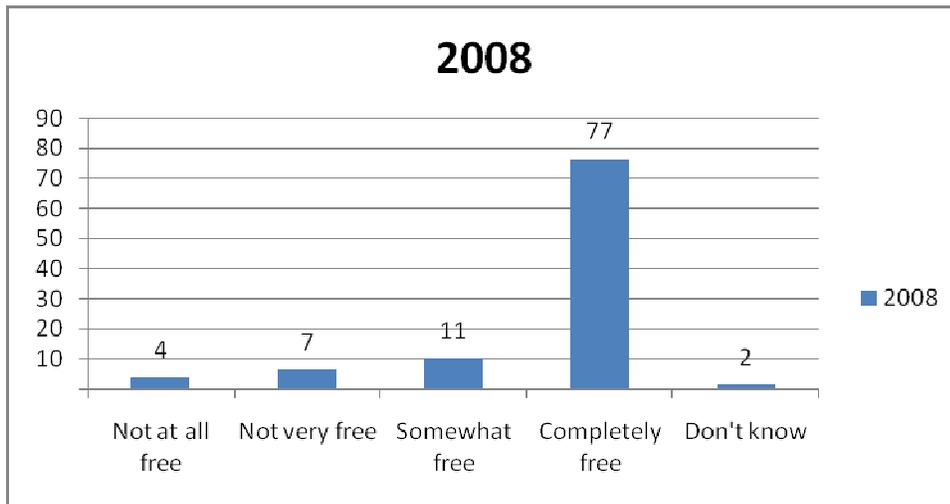
4.5 Variable: Freedom of speech (1999-2005)

Question: Please tell me if the following things are worse or better now than they were a few years ago, or are they about the same: Freedom to say what you think?



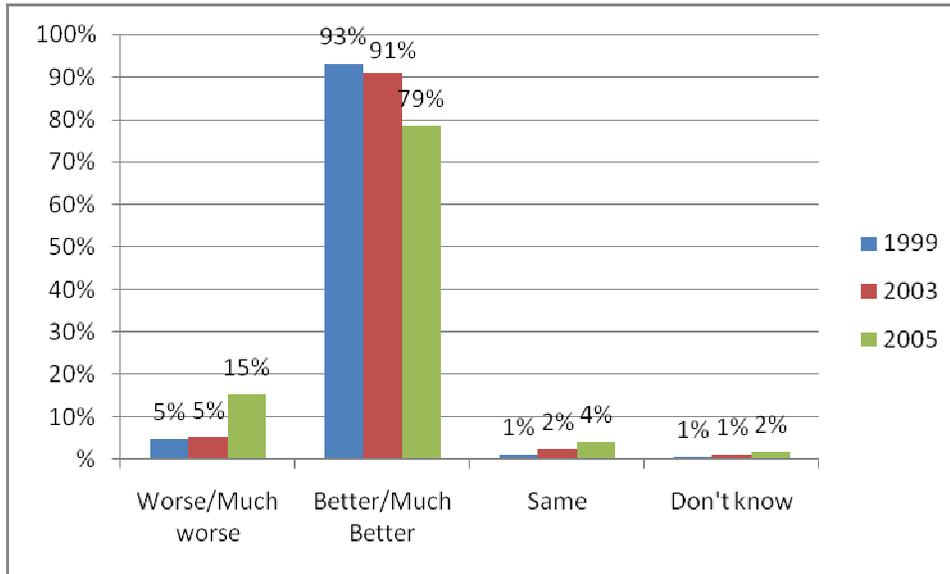
4.6 Variable: Freedom of speech (2008)

Question: In this country, how free are you: to say what you think?



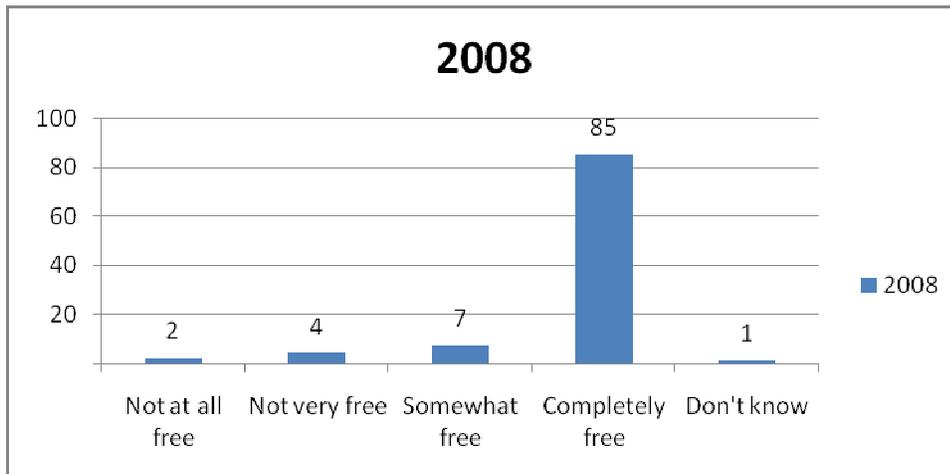
4.7 Variable: Freedom of association (1999-2005)

Question: Please tell me if the following things are worse or better now than they were a few years ago, or are they about the same: Freedom to join any political organization you want?



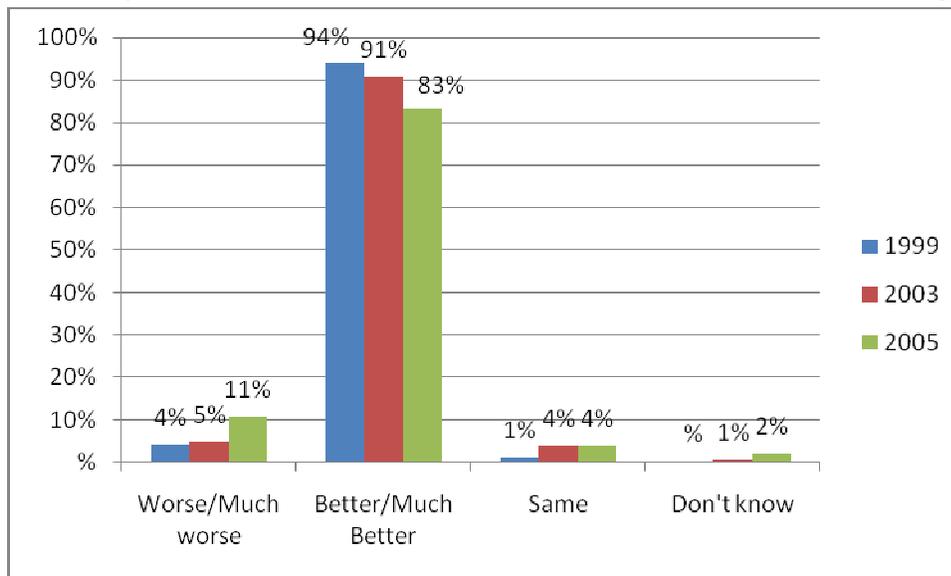
4.8 Variable: Freedom of association (2008)

Question: In this country, how free are you: to join any political organization you want?



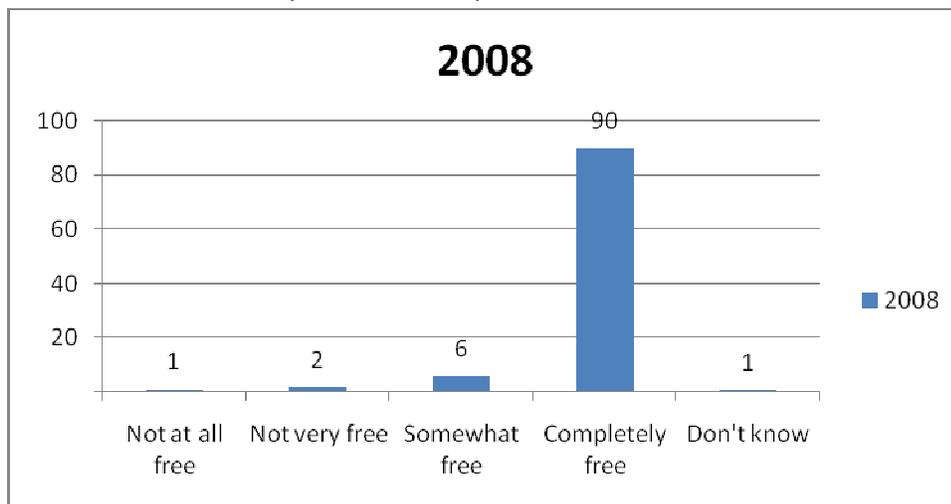
4.9 Variable: Voting freedom (1999-2005)

Question: Please tell me if the following things are worse or better now than they were a few years ago, or are they about the same: Freedom to choose who to vote for without feeling pressured?



4.10 Variable: Voting freedom (2008)

Question: In this country, how free are you: to choose who to vote for without feeling pressured?



The Afrobarometer, a cross-national survey research project, is conducted collaboratively by social scientists from 20 African countries. Coordination is provided by three Core Partners: the Center for Democratic Development (CDD-Ghana), the Institute for Democracy in South Africa (IDASA), and the Institute for Research in Empirical Political Economy (IREEP, Benin). Michigan State University and the University of Cape Town serve as Support Units to the project. In addition, National Partners in each country directly manage survey fieldwork and data management.

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For more information, see: www.afrobarometer.org