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**SUPPORT FOR DEMOCRACY IN
MALAWI: DOES SCHOOLING MATTER?**

by Geoffrey Evans and Pauline Rose

**A comparative series of national public
attitude surveys on democracy, markets
and civil society in Africa.**



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SUPPORT FOR DEMOCRACY IN MALAWI: DOES SCHOOLING MATTER?

Abstract

Education is assumed to be an important influence on citizens' understanding and endorsement of democracy, but whether this occurs in newly democratic societies with relatively low levels of educational provision is less clear. This paper explores the effect of education on understandings of and support for democratic government in Malawi - paying particular attention to the consequences of primary schooling, which remains the modal experience of Malawian voters. Analysis of a national survey indicates that primary schooling promotes citizen endorsement of democracy and rejection of non-democratic alternatives even when it has taken place under authoritarian rule, without explicit civic education.

SUPPORT FOR DEMOCRACY IN MALAWI: DOES SCHOOLING MATTER?

Introduction: Schooling and support for democracy in the development context

Evidence on the positive relationship between education and support for democracy in developed countries with considerable experience of democracy is well established. In this literature, emphasis is placed in particular on ‘modernization’ aspects of education, and its impact on individuals’ political attitudes and participation (Lipset, 1959, 1994; Hyman and Wright, 1979; Bobo and Licari, 1989; Nie, Junn and Stehlik-Barry, 1996; Sullivan and Transue, 1999). Evidence of this relationship has also emerged from transition societies in Eastern Europe (Gibson, Duch and Tedin, 1992; Miller et al., 1994, Reisinger et al., 1994; Evans, 1995; Diamond, 1999; Rose, Mishler and Haerpfer, 1999). In both of these contexts, universal secondary education has been, or is close to being, achieved. The focus tends to be on the influence of higher levels of education to which a growing number of children gain access, which is understood to be of fundamental importance for facilitating and consolidating democratic transition.

Inferences derived from these studies are not easily transferable to countries where not only is democracy a relatively recent phenomenon, but also many do not proceed beyond primary schooling. Nevertheless, arguments in favor of the importance of schooling for support for democracy have been reiterated by international agencies in such contexts. For example, the World Bank argues that ‘Broad and equitable access to education is thus essential for sustained progress toward democracy, civic participation, and better governance (World Bank, 2001: 8). However, as yet there has been very little systematic research evidence to support such claims in developing country contexts, particularly in sub-Saharan Africa (Hannum and Buchmann, 2005).¹

One important exception is the work by Bratton and Mattes (2001a) and Bratton, Mattes and Gyimah-Boadi (2005). Their research is broad in its focus, covering 12 African countries, with education just one of many factors considered. Moreover, their study covers many issues relating to political and economic reforms, with the nature of influences on support for democracy only one amongst these. This research highlights the complexity involved in understanding the relationship between education and democracy in African settings. In their earlier work the authors appear to be skeptical of the positive effects of education on support for democracy: ‘Unlike in the West...education does not build support for democracy in Africa...Indeed, the very highly educated in Africa seem to have qualms about democracy precisely because they fear it endows illiterate citizens with political rights that may be exercised unreflectively or irresponsibly’ (Bratton and Mattes, 2001a: 117). More recently, however, Bratton, Mattes and Gyimah-Boadi (2005) find that although educated Africans are more sceptical about the quality of democracy that is delivered, ‘education induces support for democracy, and it does so mainly at the expense of attachment to non-democratic alternatives’ (p. 205). This relationship remains statistically significant in multivariate analysis, but the authors find that ‘awareness of the meaning of democracy and knowledge of leaders have greater impact on democratic commitments than formal education’ (p. 219),² and in their most comprehensive set of analyses based on structural equation models ‘education has no direct effects on any reform attitude’ though it does have ‘hefty indirect effects’ (p. 291). The authors take this to indicate that ‘a person’s general level of schooling is less immediately relevant to learning deep democratic commitments than his or her specific awareness of public affairs.’(p291).

These findings are important and challenging, indicating as they do the uncertainty surrounding knowledge of the relationship between education and democracy in African settings. Moreover, given the rather different focus of their work, Bratton, Mattes and Gyimah-Boadi’s (2005) analysis does not investigate in depth the impact of different *levels* of education on attitudes towards democracy. We therefore take a very different tack and investigate the relationship between education and support for democracy via a narrower but deeper contextual analysis of the impact of stages of schooling in one county that has yet to achieve even universal primary education, Malawi.

In countries such as Malawi where there have been long periods of one-party/man rule and where the introduction of democracy has in part at least been externally driven, support for democracy is likely

to have fragile foundations (Bratton and van de Walle, 1997). Although effective democracy is clearly not just a matter of obtaining popular legitimacy, such broad-based support is likely to be a necessary condition for stable democratic consolidation. Education is also clearly an area where interventions can and have been made and it is important therefore to clarify its putative role in the process of mass endorsement of democratic procedures. Furthermore, when considered in conjunction with Stasavage's (2005a; 2005b) work demonstrating the positive effects of democracy on primary education provision and spending in general³, there is the possibility of a virtuous circle, in which education provides a pillar of support for democracy which in turn increases access to those levels of education which potentially reinforce and consolidate democratic practices.

In the rest of the paper we shall first outline the Malawian context in terms of both its political and economic situation and the nature of the educational system under which most contemporary Malawian adults will have received their formal training. We then present the empirical analysis of a national Afrobarometer survey. In our conclusion we point to evidence on the differences in the impact of primary and higher levels of education on different aspects of democratic reasoning and support. We note, importantly, that these effects occur during a period when Malawi was not a democracy and in the absence of explicit civic education.

Democracy and schooling in Malawi

Following independence from British colonial rule in 1964, Malawi was faced with three decades of one party rule under the 'life presidency' of Dr Hastings Banda, representing the Malawi Congress Party (MCP). Banda's rule is described as being 'marked by human rights abuses and absence of freedoms' (Tsoka, 2002: 2). Under Banda's rule, unlike other sub-Saharan African countries post-independence, Malawi was generally characterized as a free market, capitalist economy (Acharya, 1981; Gulhati, 1989). However, intervention in the economy was clearly evident with policies towards supporting the estate agricultural sector and a handful of non-agricultural private and 'parastatals' (mainly owned by, or under the direct influence of, President Banda) resulting in the development of a small, educated middle-class elite (Harrigan, 2001; Ellis et al., 2003).

As with other countries in the region, Malawi's economy suffered from economic recession in the late 1970s, resulting in acceptance of IMF stabilization packages and World Bank structural adjustment loans. Despite being seen as a relatively compliant reformer (Harrigan, 1991), Malawi's economy did not show signs of improvement and has remained stagnant over the past two decades. The majority (65 percent) of the population is identified as living in poverty (National Economic Council, 2000), with little change in real GDP per capita which remains at just US\$170 - amongst the lowest in the world (World Bank, 2005).

In the context of on-going poor economic conditions, internal and external pressure for democratic elections finally resulted in a referendum in June 1993, influenced in particular by the threat by international agencies to withdraw non-humanitarian aid (Kaspin, 1995; van Donge, 1995). Even though democracy was largely motivated by external influences, the enthusiasm with which democracy was adopted is evident through the overwhelming results of the 1993 referendum with 63 percent voting in favor of a multiparty system (Englund, 2002). The result was accepted by the Banda regime, and so was closely followed by multi-party parliamentary and presidential elections in 1994, with a high voter turnout. The eagerness for democracy was still evident in the subsequent general election held in May 1999, with both official and self-reported figures for voter turnout over 90 percent - higher than any other country in the Afrobarometer survey (Bratton, Mattes and Gyimah-Boadi, 2005). However, as is commonplace following founding elections, there appears to have been some waning of this enthusiasm in the most recent elections, for which estimates indicate a voter turnout of around 60 percent (Dulani, 2004).

Neo-patrimonialism continues to be apparent, indicative of other African countries at a similar stage of transition. Furthermore, party support during these early stages of democracy has had a distinct regional basis with each of the three main parties representing the three regions - United Democratic Front (UDF) in the South, Malawi Congress Party (MCP) in the Central Region, and Alliance for

Democracy (AFORD) in the North. Little difference is evident between the party manifestos, with each aligning themselves to a market reform agenda similar to that of the previous regime, couched within a poverty alleviation strategy which would help guarantee donor funding (Harrigan, 2003; Tsoka, 2002). It is, therefore, not surprising that the party winning the last three presidential elections is the one representing the most populous region (i.e. UDF with its support base in the South).

Education itself has played an important role in the democratic process, with abolition of primary school fees high on the agenda of political parties during the first democratic election campaigns in 1994. Previously, during Banda's authoritarian rule, emphasis was initially placed on improving quality rather than expanding access to schooling. With the introduction of structural adjustment reforms, inadequate human capital was identified as one of the factors contributing to the economic crisis at the end of the 1970s (Gulhati, 1989; Sahn and Arulpragasam, 1994). As a result, emphasis was shifted to expanding access to primary schooling. However, given limitations placed on government spending, World Bank proposals to finance expansion through increasing primary school fees actually resulted in a decline in enrolment, with one-half of school-aged children remaining out of primary school by 1990 (Rose, 2003). As a result, at the time of the transition to democracy, literacy rates remained low.

In 1994, the newly elected government fulfilled its pledge and immediately made primary schooling fee-free for all children, resulting in a massive increase in primary enrolment. Although enrolment increased by approximately 50 percent, slow progress has been made with respect to completion of the eight-year primary cycle - approximately three-quarters of children drop out of primary school, many in the early stages (Kadzamira and Rose, 2003). This raises an important question, which has received limited attention in the literature, but is of crucial importance to countries like Malawi – does primary schooling make a distinctive contribution to mass support for democracy?

Given that democracy is still in its early stages in Malawi, the vast majority of those currently of voting age will have been of school-going age during the previous era of authoritarian rule. Even during this period in Malawi civic education was in principle taught in primary school, although it is reported that teachers were afraid to teach it as 'misrepresentation' could lead to imprisonment without trial (Dzimbiri, 1998 cited in Harber, 2002).⁴ Not only has explicit teaching for democratic knowledge been weak, but the style of teaching has tended not to encourage critical thinking or participation, in ways that might be considered necessary to promote values associated with a democratic political culture (Harber, 2002). Authoritarian approaches to teaching and learning have continued since the introduction of democracy, and have been reinforced under current conditions of schooling in Malawi where the expansion of the system has resulted in over 100 pupils in lower classes in many circumstances with very few learning materials (Kadzamira and Rose, 2003). Under these conditions, support for democracy could occur *despite* formal schooling, rather than because of it. Alternatively, 'the spark of education' could 'induce people to think for themselves at least in part as an unintended consequence of the objectives of schooling' (Bratton Mattes and Gyimah-Boadi, 2005: 204).

In the following analysis we shall examine the relationship between each level of education and citizens' responses to questions concerning their endorsement and understanding of democracy as a desirable practice in Malawi. To do this we use a national survey of Malawi conducted in 1999 as part of the first wave of the Afrobarometer (www.afrobarometer.org).

Data

The Afrobarometer surveys are the most comprehensive undertaken in the African context. The Malawi survey used here is a nationally representative, multi-stage cluster, stratified random sample of households producing interviews with 1208 eligible voters, 18 years and older.⁵ The 1999 survey (undertaken six months after the second elections) has been chosen for two reasons. First, given that democracy had only been experienced over a period of five years by the time of the survey, it allows us to examine whether or not schooling received by those of voting age *under authoritarian rule* leads to greater support for democracy. Second, the survey includes a particularly rich array of measures of

understanding of and attitudes towards democracy. The sets of questions about democracy included in this wave of the Afrobarometer allow us examine support for democracy using not only a question which establishes whether a person considers democracy always to be the best form of government but also further questions identifying those who reject alternative regimes – including one-party ‘democracy’, military control, and presidential autocracy (see Bratton and Mattes, 2001b: 457). The meaning of such stated support for democratic forms of government is further refined by questions probing respondents’ understanding of these notions.

In Bratton, Mattes and Gyimah-Boadi’s (2005) multivariate analyses using the Afrobarometer survey, the effects of education are estimated as a 4-point, scaled variable (no formal, primary, secondary and post-secondary education). Inevitably this obscures non-linear effects and more importantly does not provide information on the effects of different schooling levels, the consequences of the provision of which is of particular concern to national governments and international agencies. For the purposes of our analysis, therefore, the effects of respondents’ education are examined by comparing the effects of five levels of attainment: no formal education (13% of the sample), incomplete primary (35%), completed primary (16%), secondary (32%), and post-secondary (4%). This enables us to focus on the distinctive consequences of these different levels of educational experience.

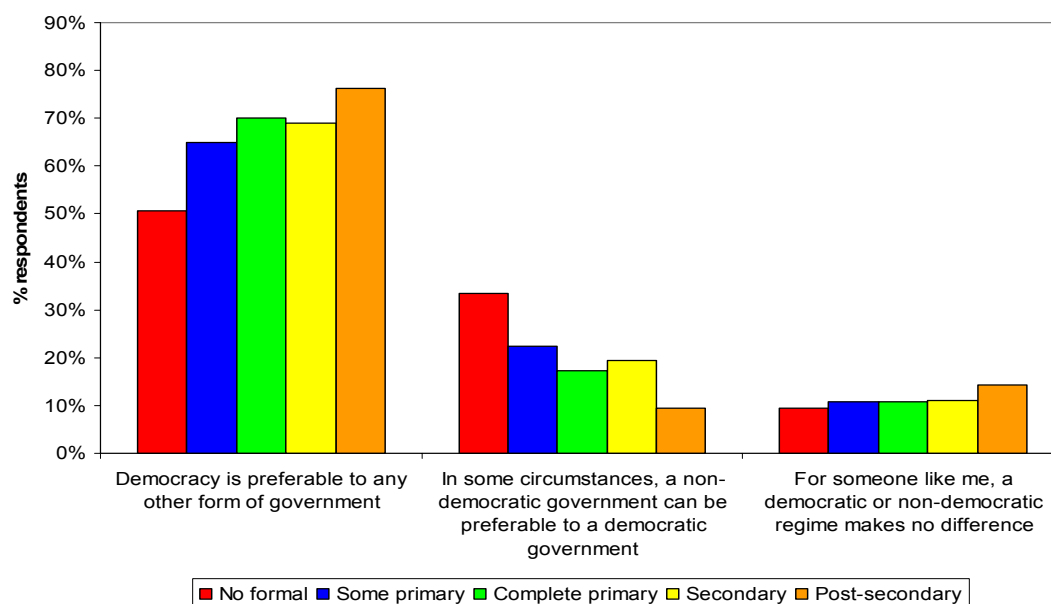
Results

Preference for democracy

Figure 1 shows that although a sizable minority of Malawians considers that in some circumstances a non-democratic government can be preferable, or that it makes no difference, there is substantial agreement with the statement that democracy is preferable to any other form of government. This is found across all levels of education. However, there is also a clear and substantial association between educational level and preference for democracy. This is particularly evident at the lower level – between respondents with no schooling and those with only some primary education – while there is no difference between primary and secondary education in preferences. This on its own suggests that primary schooling is sufficient to promote endorsement of democratic government. However, although the answers to this question address a key issue, their interpretation relies on assumptions that respondents have some understanding of what ‘democracy’ means. If they had no grasp of what such democracy involves then it would be unwise to take these responses at face value. We therefore next examine directly whether respondents possess such understandings.

Figure 1: Who prefers democracy?

With which of the following statements are you in agreement?



Understandings of democracy

The newness of the concept of democracy in Malawi means that a local term for ‘democracy’ is not available. To address this issue the word *demokolase* has been adopted, otherwise the meaning itself is translated, for example as ‘government for the people by the people’ (*boma lobvomerezeka ndi anthu* in the national language, Chichewa), or as ‘freedom’ (*ufulu*).⁶ For the purposes of the survey, the term *demokolase* was used (Bratton, Mattes and Gyimah-Boadi, 2005), and respondents were probed for their interpretations of the term.

Table 1: What does democracy mean?

What, if, anything, do you understand by the word ‘democracy’? What comes to mind when you hear the word?

	No formal	Some primary	Primary	Secondary	Post-secondary	Total
Don’t know	38 23%	52 12%	5 3%	7 2%	0 0%	102
Freedom in general	17 11%	46 11%	25 13%	50 13%	6 14%	144
Freedom of speech	23 14%	64 15%	47 24%	81 21%	10 24%	225
Multi-party elections	17 11%	73 17%	23 12%	40 11%	3 7%	156
Adverse consequences	11 7%	18 4%	9 5%	22 6%	4 10%	54
Other	56 35%	172 41%	88 45%	179 47%	19 45%	514

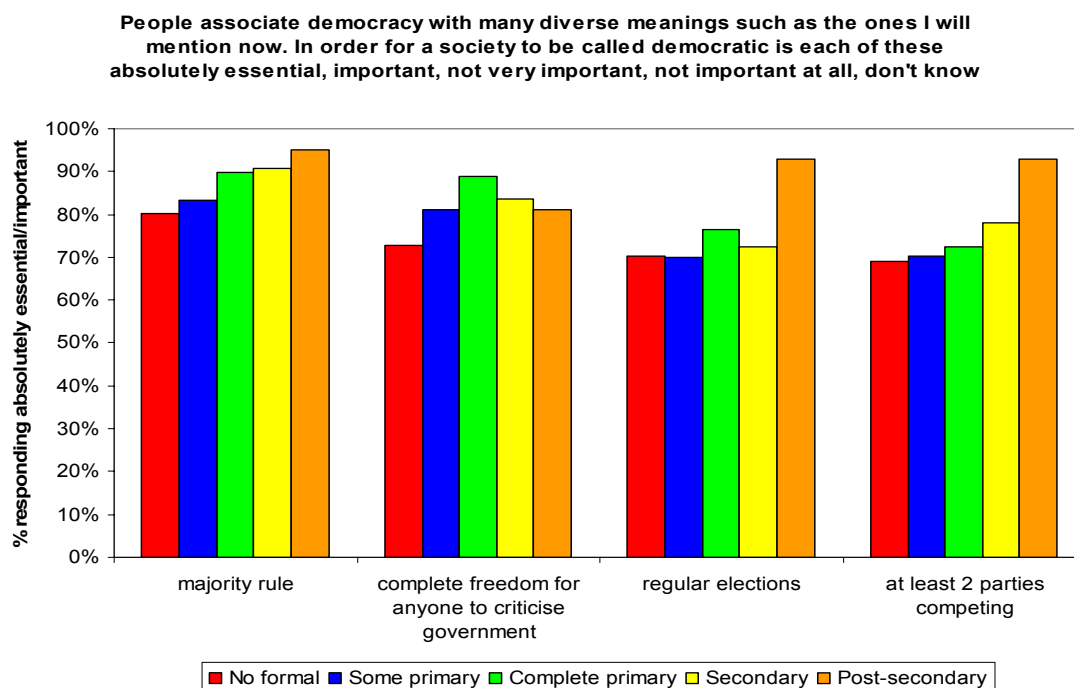
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Bratton, Mattes and Gyimah-Boadi (2005) note that there is a weak but significant relationship between an additional level of schooling and an individual’s ability to attribute a meaning to democracy across the Afrobarometer nations. In these countries, almost all respondents with post-secondary schooling expressed an understanding of the concept, compared with approximately two-thirds of those with no formal schooling. In Malawi it can be seen that one-quarter of those with no formal schooling are unable to provide a meaning for democracy (Table 1). Even so, Malawians are amongst those most able to provide a definition across the Afrobarometer sample of countries (second only to Nigerians). This, the authors suggest, indicates that low literacy levels and predominantly rural populations do not necessarily act as a barrier to basic political consciousness.

In Malawi, the majority of those who do provide a definition, associate democracy primarily with either freedom in general or freedom of expression in particular – again, with a larger proportion of those with at least complete primary schooling most likely to do so. These results therefore indicate a positive relationship between understanding of democracy and schooling, with primary school appearing to make a difference in providing an understanding of democracy related to civil liberties. The importance of civil liberties is not surprising, given the severe restrictions on freedom of speech evident under the Banda regime (Tsoka, 2002). As a result, the transition to democracy was often directly associated with giving people freedoms - including a frequently held view that free primary schooling meant that parents were free to decide whether or not to send children to school (Kadzamira and Rose, 2003).

Having established that most Malawians recognize the term ‘democracy’ and can attribute meaning to it, we also need to confirm whether respondents have an understanding of particular aspects of the term, and how this is influenced by levels of education. Figure 2 displays answers to four questions enquiring as to meanings respondents associate with the notion of democracy.

Figure 2: Who understands ‘democracy’?



Responses to these questions illustrate that, in general, people do have a good understanding of the meaning of democracy when defined in specific ways. Only a small number of people did not consider these attributes important, and very few failed to give a response. As with preference for democracy, education influences understandings - but in diverse ways. Differences in responses to general practices associated with democracy, including majority rule and freedom to criticize the government, are again most noticeable at lower levels of education. Those who have experienced post-secondary education were distinctive in having an almost unanimous understanding of questions relating to the mechanics of how democracies work, in terms of regular elections and multi-party competition, but even at other educational levels around three-quarters answered in the affirmative.

Rejection of non-democratic alternatives

The evidence would thus suggest that respondents do understand what is involved in the democratic process and their expressed support as shown in Figure 1 is meaningful. We can follow-up on this by examining responses to several questions that probe respondents approval of decision-making procedures associated with democracy.⁷ As with the questions on the meaning of democracy, these go beyond simple positive affirmation of democracy and assess whether respondents also endorse key features associated with a democratic system and reject those inconsistent with such a system.

Figure 3: Who rejects non-democratic alternatives?

Question: Our current system of government with regular elections and more than one political party is not the only one Malawi has ever had. Some people say that we would be better off if we had a different system of government.
How much would you disapprove, neither disapprove or approve, or approve of the following alternatives to our current system of government with at least two political parties and regular elections?

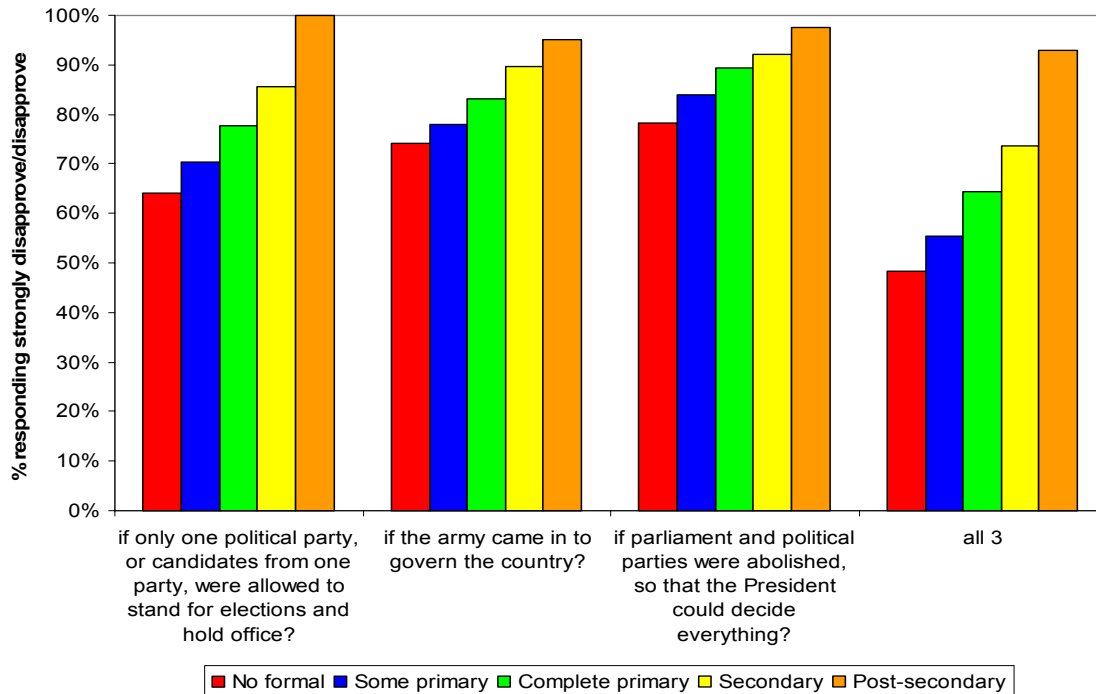


Figure 3 presents the proportions who disapprove of each proposition by educational level. Amongst the post-secondary group, there is unanimity or near unanimity of rejection of all non-democratic options. The strongest rejection amongst all education levels is expressed in relation to Presidential autocracy, which is probably influenced by experience under Banda’s regime. In general, levels of rejection of anti-democratic alternatives are high, but additional levels of education do appear to make a difference. Unlike the question examined in Figure 1, there is an increment in levels of support across the spectrum of educational experience. This increment can be seen most clearly when comparing educational groups with respect to respondents who reject all three non-democratic options.

Alternative explanations of support for democracy

So far we have presented evidence that suggests that educational level is consequential for meaningful support for democracy and the rejection of alternatives to democracy. To be confident that we have identified meaningful effects of education, rather than a spurious association, we need also to examine alternative influences on these democratic attitudes that are likely to be associated with educational level and which may therefore account for the relationships observed between education and support for democracy and the rejection of non-democratic alternatives. As dependent variables in these models we re-code variables included in the analysis above to form two indicators of attitudes to democracy – (i) preference for democratic government versus other responses (that sometimes a non-democratic government may be preferable, and that a democratic or non-democratic government makes no difference) which, as we have seen, was most strongly related to the distinction between no education and some primary education and (ii) the rejection of all three non-democratic alternatives, which as has been shown discriminates most effectively throughout the range of educational levels.

The choice of independent variables is guided by theoretical considerations and the findings of previous research. Our aim is to identify those socio-demographic attributes that could, independently of educational level, cause citizens to have a more or less supportive attitude towards democracy.

These attributes are in part those identified in modernization accounts of democratic development and also those that have been proposed more specifically in the Malawian context. We do not in this analysis include respondent characteristics that are likely to be highly dependent on some level of education, such as literacy or media consumption, and which could be helpfully understood as mediating education's effects – i.e. by providing mechanisms through which education works - so that to include them in our models would inappropriately obscure the influence of education *per se*.

Which socio-demographic attributes can be expected to provide explanations of support for democracy and rejection of non-democratic alternatives in the Malawian context? Firstly, we might expect that there could be a generational and gender influence on the support for democracy. Younger people who have more experience of democracy and exposure to democratic propaganda, and have grown up in an era when democracy is more commonplace, are likely to be more supportive. For the purposes of the analysis, we divide the sample into three age groups – those who were born at around the time of independence or had experience of living under colonial rule (those aged 36 and above at the time of the survey), those who have lived mainly under Banda's authoritarian rule (26-35 year olds), and those who turned 18 during or after the transition to democracy – some of whom might have been educated post-democracy particularly given the prevalence of over-age enrolment in primary schools (18-25 year olds). In addition, given that women in Malawi continue to play traditional roles while men have greater spatial and occupational mobility, it might be expected that males could benefit more from the modernizing influences of democracy and therefore be more supportive.

We can also expect there to be a relationship between age, sex and educational level, which is indeed the case. For example, amongst respondents aged above 35, only 28% have had post-primary education, however amongst those 25 and under, this figure rises to 45%. Conversely, amongst those 25 and under, only 8% report no education at all, although this figure is 14% for those aged over 35. It is also true that males are considerably more likely to have received post-primary education (43% for males, compared with 28% for females).

However, as we can see from Table 2, age is unrelated to preference for democratic versus undemocratic government and, thus, cannot account for education's effect on support for democracy.⁸ By contrast, there is a clear relationship between sex and preference for democratic government and the rejection of non-democratic alternatives which leaves open the possibility that sex differences in part account for the observed relationship between educational level and these indicators of support for democracy.

Table 2: Summary of associations between possible confounding factors, education and support for democracy/rejection of non-democratic alternatives

	Education	Preference for democracy	Rejection of alternatives
Generation and gender			
age	+	x	x
female	-	-	-
Residence			
urban	+	+	+
Region (ref. = South)			
North	+	-	-
Centre	-	-	-
Party support (ref. = UDF)			
AFORD	+	-	+
MCP	x	-	-
Language			
Dominant Chichewa	x	x	x
Occupation (ref. = non-manual)			
manual	-	-	-
farmers	-	-	-
Housing			
non-traditional	+	x	+

+ = positive association @ $p < 0.05$
 - = negative association @ $p < 0.05$
 X = not significant.

The presence of an urban population and a middle class of professional and managerial white-collar workers is a key component of modernization theories of democratic development. These attributes can again be expected to correlate with education and therefore provide possible alternative explanations for the relationship between education and support for democracy. In the sample, urban residence and social class have a particularly strong relationship with education, as would be expected: 60% of those in urban areas have post-primary schooling, compared with just 28% in rural areas, while the figures for those with no education are 6% and 16%, respectively. The vast majority of non-manual workers have post-primary education (83%), compared with 38% of manual workers, and just 11.5% of farmers.

Given that in countries such as Malawi Western-based class distinctions do not necessarily identify inequalities in the distribution of resources, we also adopt an alternative wealth indicator, namely the type of housing in which respondents reside. Of those in formal housing structures, 43% have post-primary schooling, compared with 16% of those in more traditional, lower-cost, structures. Urban, non-manual, formally housed respondents are substantially more likely to support democracy and oppose non-democratic alternatives than are rural areas, manual workers/farmers, and those in informal housing. The extent of the difference between farmers and manual workers also points to a relationship between the effects of rural residence and class position.

For historical reasons, educational attainment also varies by region, with higher levels continuing to be evident in the North, where missionaries initially established formal schooling in the late 19th century (McCracken, 1977; Kadzamira and Rose, 2003). This pattern is confirmed in our sample, with 47% of those in the North possessing post-primary education, compared with 38% in the South and 29% in the Centre. We might also expect that regional differences in support for democracy resulting from entrenched support for regionally-based political parties.⁹ Those in the South, associated with the ruling party (UDF), are likely to be more satisfied their levels of political representation and, therefore, more supportive of democracy as a form of decision-making than those who are excluded

from government. Conversely, those in the Centre who benefited most under an authoritarian regime might be less positive about the current democratic system.

As anticipated, a greater proportion of those in the South (the base of the ruling party) show a preference for democracy. On the other hand, those in the South and North show a similar level of disagreement with one-party rule, while those in the Centre appear to be more accommodating to this. This might well reflect the continuing presence in that area of support for Banda's authoritarian regime, given that the Centre was the area of his hardcore support. In general, these patterns of support by region map closely on to the support bases of the main Malawian parties, both present in terms of current party allegiances, and past in terms of the residues of support for Banda's one party rule. The ruling UDF party is well entrenched in the Southern region, thus helping to explain the relatively positive view towards democracy there. The somewhat less supportive attitudes in the North (despite its higher educational level) and the Centre would seem to reflect the exclusion from power of many voters in those regions. Thus, the pattern observed here indicates that the relationship between regional residence and support for democracy does not reflect education patterns across the regions.¹⁰

Does schooling matter?

The inter-relationship between these potential explanations of attitudes to democracy and education requires that we estimate the effect of education while controlling for their impact. The effects of different levels of education are estimated using 'no formal schooling' as the reference category. As both our dependent variables – support for democracy and rejection of non-democratic alternatives – are dichotomies we use logistic models.

Table 3 presents three models estimating the effects on support for democracy. The first model contains only education as an independent variable. The second model includes socio-demographic factors that might be thought either to have influenced the level of education a respondent obtains, or at least to have been present prior to the respondent's attainment of educational qualifications. Given that education is temporally prior to respondent's current class position and housing status we exclude these variables from this model. The third model also includes class position and housing status. This is clearly an extremely demanding test of the robustness of education's effects, as it includes many factors that are associated with both education and attitudes towards democracy. These all provide different and competing socio-demographic bases of potential support for, or opposition to, democracy. A confident assessment of the consequences of educational level for democratic attitudes requires their inclusion in our models. At the same time some of these factors, such as urban residence and sex, will have influenced the levels of education obtained by respondents while others, such as class position and type of housing, are likely to have resulted at least in part from having attained a certain level of education. The former set of influences may well have an effect on attitudes to democracy in part through their influence upon level of education obtained. By controlling for the relationship between these confounding factors and education, we may well be under-estimating the contribution of education to the explanation of attitudes. Similarly, the latter set of influences will have in part been conditioned by prior education attainment, and may also partly reflect that formative experience. We can be confident, therefore, that should education survive these tests, estimates of its effects are both conservative and robust.

Turning first to column one of table 3 which displays the effect of education on preference for democracy without controlling for other factors, there is a highly significant difference between 'no education' and all other levels of educational experience, from 'some primary schooling' upwards. Further analysis indicates that no other differences are significant between levels of education. This confirms what we saw in Figure 1.

Table 3: Logit models of the effects of education on support for democracy controlling for other characteristics

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3
Education (ref. = no formal)			
Some primary	.592**	.631**	.640**
Primary	.825**	.894**	.917**
Secondary	.769**	.800**	.734**
Post-secondary	1.138**	1.046*	.944**
Generation (ref. = over 35)			
18-25		-.287*	-.276
26-35		-.110	-.094
Gender (ref. = male)			
female		-.316*	-.359**
Residence (ref. = rural)			
urban		.158	.237
Region (ref. = South)			
North		-.102	-.146
Centre		-.278*	-.295*
Party support (ref. = UDF ruling party)			
AFORD opposition		-1.247**	-1.241**
MCP opposition		-1.870**	-1.894**
Other opposition		-1.231**	-1.270**
No party		-1.423**	-1.471**
Language group (ref. = minority languages)			
Chichewa		-.072	-.088
Occupation (ref. = non-manual)			
Manual			-.559*
Farmers			-.186
Other			-.210
Housing (ref. = traditional)			
non-traditional			.023
<i>N.</i>	1205	1137	1135

** Significant at 5% level

* Significant at 10% level

Turning to model 2, which includes all possible explanations of democratic support except occupation and housing, education remains clearly significant. It is worth considering, however, the other significant influences on democratic support in this model. By far the most substantial effects are those of partisanship, specifically contrasting people who support the governing party (UDF) against all others: perhaps unsurprisingly those who support the current governing party are far more likely to support democracy.¹¹ There are also significant positive effects for being male, and coming from the South, although the latter effect is of marginal significance and relates only to comparison to the Central region. In addition, there is a marginal negative effect of support for democracy on the youngest age cohort. However, as we can see in model 3, our fully specified model which includes all the possible explanations of democratic support, this age effect is no longer significant. Instead, non-manual workers are more supportive than manual workers. It is important to note that all of the education parameters remain highly significant and, although in some instances reduced very slightly in magnitude, are very little different from those in model 1. Education has a substantially more significant impact on support for democracy than do other socio-demographic characteristics, only party support appears a stronger predictor. Education thus passes this extremely demanding test of the robustness of its effects with impunity – though clearly, it is only the difference between having no education at all and all other categories of educational experience that is of consequence.

If we consider these findings in terms of the odds of supporting democracy relative to the likelihood of doing so with no formal education, we find that those with even some primary schooling are 1.9 times more likely to support democracy than are respondents with no formal schooling. This increases to 2.5 for those who complete primary education, but remains relatively unchanged among those with higher levels of education.

In Table 4 we present a similar multivariate analysis of respondents' rejection of plausible non-democratic alternatives to electoral democracy. As in Figure 3, we contrast respondents who reject all three alternatives – army, president and one-party – with other responses. The first model again presents the effects of education alone. In this case, as in Figure 3, we see a different pattern to that observed for the support for democracy measure. Each extra level of completed education – primary, secondary, post-secondary – is consequential for respondents' tendency to reject clearly alternative non-democratic forms of government for Malawi when compared with no formal education. Unlike the analysis of support for democracy presented in Table 3, however, the inclusion of background characteristics in models 2 and 3 does have a noticeable effect on the pattern of education's effects in that there is a substantial (approximately one third) reduction in the size of the coefficients for primary, secondary and post-secondary education. Completed primary schooling remains a significant positive influence on the rejection of non-democratic alternative when compared with no formal schooling, but in the fully specified analysis (model 3) the difference between the coefficients for the effects of secondary and primary schooling is effectively removed. The coefficient for secondary schooling is reduced to less than half its original magnitude. Post-secondary education retains its significant positive effect compared with secondary, though it too is reduced in magnitude by one third as a result of the inclusion of the socio-demographic controls. If, again, we consider these findings in terms of the odds of rejecting non-democratic alternatives relative to the likelihood of doing so with no formal education, we find that those with completed primary schooling are 1.6 times more likely to reject non-democratic alternatives than are respondents with no formal schooling. The increase in these odds for respondents with secondary schooling is only slight – they are 1.7 times more likely to reject non-democratic alternative – while for the small number of respondents with post-secondary education the increase is substantial (5.8 times) but with a wide latitude.

Table 4: Logit models of the effects of education on rejection of non-democratic alternatives controlling for other characteristics

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3
Education (ref. = no formal)			
Some primary	.276	.245	.205
Primary	.658**	.568**	.438*
Secondary	1.088**	.893**	.517**
Post-secondary	2.627**	2.296**	1.751**
Generation (ref. = over 35)			
18-25		-.218	-.223
26-35		-.239	-.251
Gender (ref. = male)			
female		-.370**	-.429**
Residence (ref. = rural)			
urban		.814**	.603**
Region (ref. = South)			
North		-.131	-.088
Centre		.069	.089
Party support (ref. = UDF ruling party)			
AFORD opposition		-.135	-.249
MCP opposition		-.997**	-1.053**
Other opposition		-.873**	-.941**
No party		-.600*	-.692**
Language group (ref. = minority languages)			
Chichewa		-.039	-.049
Occupation (ref. = non-manual)			
Manual			-.427
Farmers			-.841**
Other			.288
Housing (ref. = traditional)			
non-traditional			.311**
<i>N.</i>	1202	1135	1133

** Significant at 5% level

* Significant at 10% level

As with the previous analysis there are substantial effects of party – supporters of the governing party are more likely to reject non-democratic alternatives than are those who support all other parties, other than AFORD. Women are again more prone to support non-democratic forms of government than are men, and we also find a strong effect of urban residence – rural dwellers are less likely to reject all non-democratic forms of government. Those in more traditional forms of housing are more likely to reject alternatives to democratic forms of government and, somewhat more strongly, farmers are significantly more likely to reject alternatives than are non-manual workers. Clearly, education is not the only social structural factor to have relevance for this measure of democratic orientation, though it is one in which intervention is more plausible.

Conclusions

In Malawi, education strongly predicts mass endorsement of democratic procedures and rejection of commonplace non-democratic alternatives. This is so even though it has been undertaken in a non-democratic setting and without appropriate civic education. Moreover, the educated have a firmer grasp on meaning: not only do they support democracy but they have a better understanding of why they are supporting it. As a tool of intervention for the promotion of democratic cultures, education *per se*, would thus seem to represent a good investment - especially as it is effective, in part at least, even when provided at only relatively elementary levels: Primary schooling in particular has a strong positive effect on general preferences for democracy and the rejection of non-democratic alternatives.

In the case of the former, this positive effect is found even if primary schooling is only partly completed, but it is accompanied by lower levels of comprehension towards the meaning of democracy (with respect to an understanding of democracy as a system of regular multi-party elections) which suggests that this support could be somewhat shallow. These findings are robust to a plethora of controls for alternative sources of influence on support for democracy.

These findings are not to be taken as indicating that other experiences – such as of the democratic process itself – are irrelevant, nor that these effects will not in part be mediated via mechanisms such as increased literacy and media consumption. It can be argued, however, that on the basis of the analysis here the faith of external agencies such as the World Bank in supporting the expansion of primary education for democracy is not in itself misplaced. This implication is further supported by the lack of any significant further increment in support for democracy from having received a secondary education. Post-secondary education is consequential for a more nuanced rejection of non-democratic alternatives – i.e. when democratic attitudes are examined through a consideration of respondents' consistent rejection of alternative to democracy, without explicit reference to democracy as a goal - though inevitably at the current time only a small proportion of the population are able to receive this benefit. It could be suggested, therefore, that the greatest gains in support for democracy are likely to be obtained by increasing the proportion of the population who complete primary education, which currently is beyond the reach of the majority of Malawian children.

A further benefit of examining the Malawian experience in detail has been to show that education has its effects even when it occurs in a non-democratic system, embodying hierarchical and ostensibly illiberal values – such as was the case in Malawi during the pre-democratic era when the respondents to our survey will, overwhelmingly, have received their education. This suggests that education's impressive effects are derived from its impact on cognitive processes and values without regard to the specific content of what is taught with respect to civic education.¹² The extra benefit that may attain from specific civic education training cannot be evaluated here, but the *necessity* of such programs for the promotion of democratic opinions via the educational process at the expense of allowing more children to gain access to primary or higher education is questioned by our findings. These at least raise the possibility that, given the opportunity costs, investing in specific civic education-related subjects for schoolchildren in countries with already over-crowded curricula might not be the most effective use of limited available time and resources. Our results highlight that ensuring children are able to complete primary education in sub-Saharan Africa should continue to be emphasized by national governments and external agencies for whom democratic consolidation is a stated goal.

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Endnotes

¹ Previous analyses of development contexts have also aimed to assess institutional perspectives (i.e. Benavot 1996), which in contrast to modernization arguments endorsing mass education's role in consolidating democracy through its effects on individuals' political orientations and participation, emphasize the political impact of higher levels of education in the aggregate, anticipating that it will produce trained elites who will become responsible for creating and running political institutions, and so strengthen democracy.

² See also p. 273, which presents a range of other explanatory variables that have more powerful effects on the commitment to democracy than formal education.

³ Stasavage argues that the reciprocal effects of education on democratic attitudes are not substantial. However, given the possibility of intervention in education provision it is an effect that should not be dismissed and requires further investigation.

⁴ Consistent with the assumption that the content of education is consequential for commitment to democratic practices and values there has been considerable research into the promulgation of 'civic education' training (eg Finkel 2003). The aim of this has been, more or less explicitly, to teach people how to support democracy as a political practice to understand what democracy is, and to participate in the democratic process. This can occur through schooling, or adult education programs (see, for example, Bratton et al., 1999).

⁵ See Tsoka (2002) for further details with respect to characteristics of the sample.

⁶ Personal communications – Joseph Chimombo, Esme Kadzamira, and Stanley Khaila (University of Malawi).

⁷ The phrasing of this question deliberately avoids use of word 'democracy' given problems associated with the terminology – see above. We also find a strong negative relationship between educational level and an option for 'decisions to be made by economic experts', but it is not clear that such expert decision-making is necessarily inconsistent with democratic practices so we have not used this question in the analysis reported here.

⁸ Bratton, Mattes and Gyimah-Boadi (2005: 167) find that across African countries in the survey, those in the middle age group are most supportive of democracy. They interpret this as indicating that younger people are more blasé and older people more likely to cling to past models of governance.

⁹ We have also examined the use the dominant language, Chichewa, given that it might be expected that minority language speakers feel less well represented in a democracy compared with majority language speakers. However, we found no relationship either with education levels, or with attitudes towards democracy.

¹⁰ A higher proportion of Malawians (81 percent) identify themselves with a political party compared with other Afrobarometer countries, suggesting that parties have successfully mobilised support in their own region, which has also resulted in respondents being more knowledgeable about their leaders (Bratton, Mattes and Gyimah-Boadi 2005).

¹¹ This is consistent with Bratton, Mattes and Gyimah-Boadi's analysis (2005: 259-60), which also shows that 'winners' are more likely to approve of the performance of incumbents, overlook corruption and support democracy. Moehler (2005) also finds that winners have higher levels of institutional trust and more positive assessments of the fairness of elections. For a more general set of findings and discussion of these commonly found patterns, see Anderson et al. (2005).

¹² Afrobarometer datasets contain various measures, which the authors are using to assess the role of education in developing political cognition (including interest in politics, and knowledge of leaders) and, particularly, political values (including political tolerance).