



Chaos Quantum Theory as a Metaphor for Political Uncertainty: Insights from Malawian Post-1994 Democratic Party Conventions

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Article info	Abstract
Received: 10 October 2025 Revised: 31 May 2026 Accepted: 5 June 2026 Published online: 20 Aug 2026 Keywords: Political parties; party conventions; chaos quantum theory; intra-party democracy; judicial review; Malawi; party institutionalisation	This paper examines political uncertainty in Malawian post-1994 democratic political party conventions through the analytical lens of chaos quantum theory. Malawi's contemporary multiparty democratic dispensation, which began in 1994, has witnessed repeated episodes of intra-party contestation, factionalism, and judicial intervention surrounding party conventions. Drawing on chaos quantum theory, which posits that non-linear dynamic systems contain underlying patterns of order even amid apparent disorder, the paper argues that Malawian party conventions do not simply descend into chaos; rather, they navigate the edge of chaos and reconstitute institutional order. The paper employs a qualitative case-study methodology, relying on secondary data drawn from documentary analysis of party constitutions, court judgments, secondary literature, and media sources. It critically analyses three party conventions: the Malawi Congress Party (MCP) convention dispute of 2024, the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) convention disputes of 2023-2024, and the broader convention histories of the Alliance for Democracy (AFORD) and the United Democratic Front (UDF). The analysis demonstrates that judicial intervention has served as a stabilising force by compelling parties to adhere to constitutional democratic norms. The paper contributes to scholarship on intra-party democracy, party institutionalisation, and the judicialisation of party disputes in Malawi.

1.0 Introduction

Political party conventions occupy a central place in democratic governance. They are the principal mechanism through which political parties elect their executive bodies, select candidates for public office, debate policy platforms, and renew their internal legitimacy (Government of Malawi [GoM], 2000). Convention delegates drawn from across a country collectively exercise a form of intra-party democracy that is essential to the broader democratic project. Yet conventions are also sites of intense contestation: competing candidates, factional alliances, eligibility disputes, and procedural conflicts can transform what ought to be an orderly democratic exercise into a disorderly arena of uncertainty.

This tension between procedural order and political disorder is the animating problem of this paper. In Malawi, political party conventions have periodically descended into public controversy, with disputes escalating to the

courts and generating significant uncertainty about party leadership and institutional stability (Nyirongo, 2024). These episodes raise important analytical questions: How should the dynamics of disorder and reconstituted order within party conventions be understood? What theoretical framework captures the interplay among conflict, institutional rules, and the restoration of stability?

This paper proposes that chaos quantum theory offers a productive metaphorical and analytical framework for understanding these dynamics. Chaos quantum theory, rooted in the study of nonlinear dynamic systems, holds that systems that appear chaotic often contain underlying patterns of order and that disorder, far from being terminal, can generate new and more stable configurations (Biswas et al., 2018; Prigogine & Stengers, 1984). Applied to political party conventions, this framework illuminates how intra-party conflict can generate new rules, stronger institutions, and renewed cohesion.

This paper addresses a specific gap in the existing scholarship. Although considerable attention has been given to national electoral politics in Malawi, systematic analysis of intra-party convention dynamics, particularly the role of judicial review in managing convention disputes, remains underdeveloped (Chasukwa, Chiweza, & Jamali, 2013; Chinsinga, 2007). This paper begins to fill that gap by offering a theoretically informed, case-based analysis of Malawian party conventions from the 1990s to 2024.

The paper proceeds as follows. Section 2 reviews the relevant literature on party conventions, intra-party democracy, and party institutionalisation. Section 3 sets out the theoretical framework of chaos quantum theory and explains how it is applied to the political context. Section 4 outlines the methodology. Section 5 provides a contextual overview of political party conventions in Malawi, covering the first and second decades of multiparty democracy. Section 6 presents the case analysis of the third decade of conventions, focusing on the Malawi Congress Party (MCP) and the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP). Section 7 discusses the findings. Section 8 concludes.

2.0 Literature Review

2.1 Party Conventions and Intra-Party Democracy

Political party conventions are among the most studied institutions in comparative politics, yet scholarship has concentrated heavily on major Western democracies. In the United States, national party conventions are significant events at which delegates from all states formally nominate presidential candidates and adopt party platforms (Davis, 2020). In Europe, convention formats differ considerably: some parties elect leaders through delegate conferences with strict procedural rules, whereas others use membership ballots or involve grassroots actors in informal processes (Desai, 2020; Prosser, 2018). Despite these structural differences, the core purpose of conventions remains consistent across contexts: to establish legitimate leadership, shape party platforms, and mobilise party members around shared goals (Bonotti, 2021).

The concept of intra-party democracy has attracted growing scholarly attention. Intra-party democracy refers to the extent to which party members participate in and exercise influence over internal party decision making, including the selection of candidates and leaders (Scarrow, Webb, & Farrell, 2000). Scholars have argued that intra-party democracy is not merely an internal organisational matter but is integral to the quality of democracy in the wider polity (Prosser, 2021). Where parties are undemocratic in their internal operations, they may undermine public trust and reproduce exclusionary practices in governance. Chasukwa (2007) suggests that conventions are one of the primary institutional expressions of intra-party democracy, and their conduct has implications beyond the internal life of the party.

In the African context, party conventions have received comparatively less systematic scholarly attention, although the existing literature acknowledges their significance. Tambulasi, Kayuni, and Mhango (2004) noted that conventions in African states provide arenas for intra-party dialogue, coalition building, and the articulation of governance visions. However, African conventions also face distinctive challenges, including the

personalisation of party leadership, the weakness of formal institutional rules, and recourse to external legal processes to resolve internal disputes.

The composition of the convention electorate is equally significant. Rahat (2010) distinguishes between inclusive and exclusive selectorates, arguing that the breadth of participation within a party shapes the character and legitimacy of its internal democracy. Where the selectorate is narrow, restricted to central executive members or appointed delegates, the convention is more susceptible to elite capture and factional manipulation. Where it is broader, drawing in branch representatives, local party officials, and grassroots members, outcomes are more likely to command widespread acceptance and compliance (Rahat & Hazan, 2001). In Malawi, party constitutions have differed considerably in how they specify delegate composition for conventions. Some parties have drawn delegates from district committees, branch structures, and ex officio national executive members. In contrast, others have left selection to the discretion of the incumbent leadership, concentrating effective power in the hands of those already in authority. The participation of local party officials in convention processes is therefore not incidental but constitutive: It determines whose interests are represented in leadership selection and directly shapes the legitimacy and potential contestation of convention outcomes (GoM, 2000; Patel, 2000).

2.2 Party Institutionalisation and Convention Disputes

The concept of party institutionalisation is particularly relevant to understanding convention disputes. Institutionalisation refers to the process through which parties develop stable, valued, and recurring patterns of behaviour and acquire organisational solidity (Huntington, 1968). A well-institutionalised party maintains clear rules for internal contestation, enforces those rules consistently, and resolves internal disputes through established procedures rather than through external intervention or informal power plays.

Malawi's political parties, like many post-authoritarian parties in Africa, have struggled with institutionalisation. The rapid proliferation of parties after 1994, the personalisation of party leadership, the fragmentation of party blocs through factional splits, and the weakness of internal enforcement mechanisms have all limited the extent to which parties have become reliably institutionalised. Chasukwa et al. (2013) observed that party structures in Malawi often operate as vehicles for personal political ambition rather than as stable organisations with coherent policy identities. This weak institutionalisation makes party conventions particularly vulnerable to disorder and conflict.

2.3 Judicialisation of Party Disputes

A notable feature of Malawian party politics has been the increasing recourse to judicial review as a mechanism for resolving intra-party disputes. The judicialisation of politics, understood as the expansion of courts' roles in managing political disputes, is a global phenomenon (Hirschl, 2009). In the context of party conventions, judicialisation typically occurs when internal party procedures break down or are perceived as unfair, prompting aggrieved actors to seek external adjudication.

In Malawi, courts have been called upon to interpret party constitutions, adjudicate eligibility disputes, and determine whether party decisions conform to constitutional democratic norms (Chauluka, 2024). This pattern raises important questions about the relationship between intra-party governance and state judicial institutions, as well as the extent to which courts can serve as genuine stabilising forces in the face of party disorder. This paper contributes to this debate through its analysis of the MCP and DPP cases.

3.0 Theoretical Framework

3.1 Chaos Quantum Theory: Origins and Core Principles

Chaos quantum theory emerged as a significant intellectual movement in the mid-twentieth century, drawing on developments in mathematics, physics, and systems science (Kayuni, 2010). Its central insight is that nonlinear

dynamic systems that appear random or disordered contain underlying deterministic patterns that can, under certain conditions, generate new and coherent structures (Biswas, 2018; Hobson, 2015). As Prigogine and Stengers (1984) articulated in their foundational work, the theory demonstrates that disorder and order are not opposites but are dynamically interconnected: Systems at the edge of chaos are capable of producing emergent order.

The theory gained prominence through Edward Lorenz's discovery, while working on weather prediction models in 1960, that small changes in initial conditions could produce dramatically different long-term outcomes (Overman, 1996). This insight, widely known as the butterfly effect, established that in complex systems, small changes can cascade into large and unpredictable consequences. Bloch (2005) extended this insight to public policy, arguing that a small change in the initial conditions of a policy system can drastically alter its long-term behaviour. Similarly, True et al. (2019) drew on complexity thinking in developing punctuated-equilibrium theory, which posits that policy systems experience long periods of stability interrupted by sudden, dramatic change.

Chaos quantum theory has been applied across a range of social science disciplines, including public administration, policy studies, and organisational theory (Kayuni, 2010). Its core concepts include nonlinearity, sensitivity to initial conditions, self-organisation, and the emergence of order at the edge of chaos (Overman, 1996). True (2019) argued that chaos theory invites appreciation rather than a fear of uncertainty because genuine structural change and innovation are found precisely in the chaotic moments that conventional analysis treats as pathological.

3.2 Application to Political Party Conventions

This paper uses chaos quantum theory as both a metaphor and an analytical framework for understanding Malawian party convention disputes. The metaphorical dimension draws on the parallel between chaotic physical systems and the dynamics of intra-party contestation. Before a convention, established rules and predictable patterns exist; however, as the convention approaches, factional competition, alliance formation, and eligibility disputes can disrupt these patterns. This process generates uncertainty and disorder. Eventually, through some combination of institutional enforcement, judicial intervention, and political negotiation, a new order emerges.

The analytical dimension is more demanding. Chaos quantum theory directs analytical attention to the mechanisms through which order emerges from disorder. In the party convention context, these mechanisms include the enforcement of party constitutional rules, the intervention of courts as external adjudicators, the capacity of party leadership to manage competing factions, and the willingness of party members to accept the outcomes of contested processes. The framework also cautions against the assumption that judicial intervention automatically produces stability: The DPP case analysed below illustrates that judicial rulings can themselves generate new rounds of uncertainty before eventually contributing to resolution.

4.0 Methodology

This paper employs a qualitative research design. It is conceptual and case study in nature, and it draws on secondary data through documentary analysis as the primary research method. The documentary sources consulted include party constitutions and internal party regulations; court judgments from Malawian courts at first instance and appellate levels; reports and statements from the Government of Malawi and political parties; secondary academic literature on Malawian politics, intra-party democracy, chaos quantum theory, and related fields; and media sources, primarily *Malawi News* and *The Nation*, which have provided contemporaneous reporting on party convention disputes.

The cases selected for detailed analysis are the MCP convention dispute of 2024 and the DPP convention disputes of 2023–2024. These cases were selected for three reasons. First, they represent the most fully documented and publicly contested convention disputes in Malawi's third decade of multiparty democracy. Second, both cases involved judicial intervention, allowing for analysis of the role of courts in managing convention-related disorder.

Third, the two cases differ in instructive ways. For example, the MCP dispute centred on eligibility criteria and was resolved through a single court ruling, while the DPP dispute was more protracted and involved multiple judicial interventions at different levels, offering a richer basis for comparative analysis.

For contextual and comparative purposes, the paper also draws on the broader history of party conventions in Malawi from 1994 to 2024, including the conventions of AFORD, UDF, Malawi Democratic Union (MDU), United Front for Multi-Party Democracy (UFMD) and other parties. Contextual data from this longer period are drawn from secondary literature and media archives. The paper does not claim to provide exhaustive empirical coverage of all conventions; rather, uses selected cases and contextual material to develop and illustrate its analytical argument.

This study acknowledges several limitations. It does not include primary data from interviews with party officials, convention delegates, or legal practitioners, which would have enriched the analysis. Future research should complement the documentary approach adopted here with interview-based fieldwork, including with rank-and-file party members and with officials from United Transformation Movement (UTM), MCP, DPP, UDF, and other parties, to produce a fuller empirical account of convention dynamics.

5.0 Political Party Conventions in Malawi: Historical Context

5.1 The Transition to Multiparty Democracy

Malawi's contemporary multiparty democratic dispensation began in 1994, following a referendum in which citizens rejected the one-party rule of the MCP and the government of President Hastings Kamuzu Banda (GoM, 2000). The 1995 Constitution established the legal framework for multiparty democracy, replacing the 1966 Constitution, which had provided for one-party rule. This transition was a watershed moment, ushering in a new era of political pluralism and party competition (Khembo, 2003).

The transition also gave rise to a complex pattern of party formation, fragmentation, and realignment, which provides a critical context for understanding subsequent convention disputes. The first multiparty elections in 1994 were contested by several parties, including, beyond the reconstituted MCP, the UDF (led by Bakili Muluzi), the AFORD (led by Chakufwa Chihana), the Congress for the Second Republic (CSR), the MDU, and the UFMD (Patel, 2000). Far from being peripheral, the MDU and UFMD were part of the electoral coalition through which Muluzi secured the presidency. The UDF victory rested partly on a formal alliance with these parties, making the coalition dimension of Malawian politics a feature of its founding democratic moment rather than a later development (Chirwa, 1995).

The Malawi Democratic Party (MDP), led by Kamlepo Kalua, declined to participate in this alliance and contested the elections independently, demonstrating that even then, party proliferation and the limits of coalition discipline were already shaping electoral politics (Lembani, 2006). These founding alliances were coalitions of electoral convenience rather than expressions of programmatic coherence, and it was precisely this structural weakness that generated the institutional fault lines, factional loyalties, personal networks, and competing succession claims that would periodically erupt in subsequent convention disputes.

Subsequent decades saw further fragmentation. The DPP emerged in 2005 as a breakaway from the UDF, following the controversy in 2003 when President Muluzi nominated Bingu wa Mutharika as his successor rather than allowing an open convention (Chirwa, 2003). This episode exemplifies the chaos quantum dynamic: the decision, which appeared to resolve a succession question, instead triggered a cascade of unpredictable consequences, including the resignation of senior UDF officials such as Aleke Banda, the formation of the DPP, and a fundamental realignment of Malawian party politics (Khembo, 2003). The People's Party (PP) and the UTM later emerged as further factions of the DPP, continuing the pattern of party fragmentation rooted in convention and succession disputes (Dulani, Patel, & Chunga, 2018; Dulani, 2019).

5.2 Conventions in the First and Second Decades of Multiparty Democracy

In the early years of multiparty democracy, party conventions were primarily instruments for establishing the dominance of major parties and consolidating leadership (Chirwa, 1995). Patel (2000) notes that the MCP held conventions to select its party president, transitioning from Dr Kamuzu Banda to Gwanda Chakuamba in 1999. AFORD, under Chakufwa Chihana, and the UDF, under Bakili Muluzi, held conventions in 1999 and 1994, respectively. The DPP held its inaugural convention in 2009, at which Bingu wa Mutharika was confirmed as party president; the party proceeded to win the presidential election with a large majority in the same year (Harawa, 2009).

Of particular significance in this period was the UDF's decision to proceed to the 1999 general elections without holding a party convention (Fumulani, 2003). This omission deprived the party of the internal deliberative process through which leadership structures, candidate mandates, and factional tensions are ordinarily managed and contained. The absence of a convention left questions of internal authority unresolved and concentrated succession decisions in the hands of the incumbent leadership rather than the broader party membership. Against this background of unresolved internal legitimacy, President Muluzi nominated Bingu wa Mutharika as the UDF presidential candidate in 2003, rather than subjecting the succession to an open convention. This decision triggered a wave of defections, disciplinary proceedings, and, eventually, the formation of the DPP, reshaping Malawian party politics for the following two decades (Chirwa, 2003). In chaos quantum terms, the failure to hold a convention in 1999 was the sensitive initial condition whose consequences cascaded far beyond what any actor at the time could have anticipated. This confirms Kayuni's (2010) argument that institutional omissions in party governance carry long-term destabilising effects. Viewed in this light, conventions are not merely formalities but mechanisms through which intra-party disorder is periodically absorbed and reconstituted as legitimate order (Overman, 1996).

A notable feature of the electoral landscape in this period was the significance of coalition politics. Chinsinga (2007) argues that the 2004 elections were contested by the *Gwirizano* coalition, led by Gwanda Chakuamba, which offered a strong electoral challenge to the UDF. The 2009 elections saw further shifts in party alliances. These coalitional dynamics added another layer of complexity to convention politics, as alliance formation and dissolution intersected with internal party processes.

The coalition dynamics of this period were also expressed through vice-presidential selection, a dimension of electoral competition directly shaped by the convention failures described above. In 2004, the UDF ticket was headed by Bingu wa Mutharika, with Cassim Chilumpha as his running mate, a pairing that reflected factional bargaining within the UDF rather than any mandate from a party convention (Patel, 2000). The Mugwirizano coalition, led by Gwanda Chakuamba, mounted a serious challenge to this ticket, drawing together the MCP, AFORD, and allied parties in an electoral alliance that demonstrated the continued significance of coalition arithmetic in Malawian presidential politics (Hussein, 2005). Because neither the presidential nor the vice-presidential nomination within UDF had been subjected to open convention scrutiny, the legitimacy of the ticket remained internally contested, contributing to the subsequent rupture between Mutharika and Chilumpha that defined much of the 2004—2009 political period (The Nation, 2003; Dulani, Patel, & Chunga, 2018).

By 2009, Mutharika was contesting under the DPP, having broken entirely from the UDF, and won with a substantially increased majority. However, this again followed a process of leadership and running-mate selection driven by elite negotiation rather than democratic convention processes (Harawa, 2009). Taken together, the 2004 and 2009 electoral cycles illustrate how the absence of robust convention processes in the preceding years distorted not only internal party governance but also the construction of electoral coalitions and the selection of national leadership tickets.

During this period, conventions began to evolve from relatively closed elite exercises into more structured and transparent processes. The adoption of clearer candidate nomination procedures, voting arrangements, and

delegate representation rules reflected the gradual institutionalisation of convention practice. Parties also began to use conventions as platforms for articulating policy positions, engaging with grassroots concerns, and aligning with national development agendas such as the Malawi 2020 vision (Democracy Consolidation Programme, 2004).

However, institutionalisation remained incomplete and uneven. Leadership positions continued to be intensely contested, and convention disputes remained a recurring feature of party politics across the first two decades. The recurrence of these disputes, and their periodic escalation to the courts, reflects the structural vulnerability of Malawian parties to the type of factional disorder described by chaos quantum theory.

6.0 The Third Decade of Conventions: Case Analysis

6.1 The MCP Convention Dispute of 2024

The 2024 MCP convention provides one of the most instructive cases of chaos quantum dynamics in Malawian party politics. In the lead-up to the convention, the party's National Executive Committee (NEC) resolved to restrict eligibility for party positions by requiring candidates to have served on the executive committee and to have been party members for at least two and a half years (Kasalika, 2024). This resolution immediately introduced a new element of uncertainty and discord within the party, disrupting what had appeared to be a predictable convention landscape

The NEC resolution displaced prior expectations about who could contest party leadership positions. Senior party members who did not meet the new criteria found themselves barred from contesting positions, including the office of first vice-president (Nyirongo, 2024). This generated frustration and dissent, creating the factional dynamics and conflicting power alignments that chaos quantum theory identifies as characteristic of systems in disorder. Party members who had previously understood themselves to be eligible candidates became opponents of the NEC resolution, whereas others who benefited from the restrictions supported it.

The conflict escalated when Eddie Banda, who was seeking the position of Second Deputy Director of Social Services, challenged the NEC resolution in court. In *Eddie Banda v. Malawi Congress Party* (Civil Case No. 86 of 2024), the court found in favour of the applicant and quashed the NEC resolution on the grounds that it violated the constitutional right to participate in party processes and the principles of fairness, accountability, and adherence to democratic norms. The court's ruling required the party to allow all eligible members to contest without the additional restrictions imposed by the NEC.

The MCP's decision to comply with the court ruling and proceed with an open convention represents, in the language of chaos quantum theory, the emergence of order from disorder. The chaos generated by the NEC restriction, the legal challenge, and the factional conflict was ultimately resolved through judicial intervention, which restored the pre-existing democratic framework. The party was able to complete its convention with broader participation, and the episode, although disruptive, may have strengthened the institutional norm that party rules must conform to democratic constitutional principles.

However, it would be an overstatement to assert that the court ruling automatically and comprehensively stabilised the party. The judicial intervention resolved the specific procedural dispute, but it did not address the underlying factional tensions that had generated the NEC resolution in the first place. Whether the party genuinely emerged stronger and more united from the episode, or merely deferred deeper conflicts to a future occasion, requires ongoing empirical observation.

6.2 The DPP Convention Disputes of 2023–2024

The DPP case offers a more complex illustration of chaos quantum dynamics, involving multiple rounds of judicial intervention at different court levels. The disputes arose from the party's constitutional requirement to hold a

convention within four years of a national general election (Nyirongo, 2024). Not all party members accepted this interpretation of the constitutional requirement, and internal disagreements over the timing of the convention escalated into open conflict involving senior party officials, including the party's secretary general, publicity secretary, and vice-president for the Southern Region.

The first legal intervention occurred when dissatisfied party members brought the dispute before the Magistrate's Court, seeking a judicial interpretation of the party's constitutional obligation to hold a convention (Chauluka, 2024). The court ruled that the party was required to hold a convention within 90 days of the judgment. This ruling appeared to provide clarity and a path towards resolution. However, in a development that illustrates how judicial intervention can itself generate new disorder, the ruling was appealed by other party officials. The Malawi Supreme Court of Appeal (MSCA) subsequently ruled in their favour, overturning the Magistrate's Court decision. The Supreme Court's ruling threw the party into renewed disarray, adding another layer of uncertainty about both the timing and legitimacy of the convention process.

The MSCA, however, did more than simply overturn the lower court's decision. It urged party members to engage in dialogue, resolve their differences, and agree on an appropriate convention date, thereby directing the party back towards an internally negotiated resolution rather than continued litigation. This intervention reflects a more nuanced judicial role than simple adjudication: the MSCA attempted to channel the disorder into a self-regulating process of political negotiation.

The DPP disputes also involved internal disciplinary action. While the legal processes were unfolding, senior party officials who had challenged the convention schedule were summoned before a disciplinary hearing committee and subsequently expelled from the party. Their expulsion was later challenged in court in *Jeffrey and Others v. Professor Mutharika and Others* (MSCA Miscellaneous Civil Application No. 65 of 2023). The overlapping legal proceedings, disciplinary processes, and political disputes created a dense and multilayered pattern of disorder that tested the party's institutional resilience.

Ultimately, the party resolved to hold its convention on 18 August 2024, representing a return to institutional order after a prolonged period of turbulence. The DPP case illustrates both the generative and destabilising potential of judicial intervention: courts can impose clarity and channel conflict towards resolution, but they can also introduce new uncertainty through contradictory rulings at different levels of the judicial hierarchy. The eventual achievement of order in the DPP case was not the product of a single stabilising intervention; rather, it was the cumulative outcome of multiple rounds of conflict, litigation, and negotiation.

6.3 Comparative Observations

Comparing the MCP and DPP cases reveals both common patterns and instructive differences. In both cases, convention disputes originated in disagreements about internal party rules, escalated through factional conflict, and were ultimately channelled through judicial processes. In both cases, judicial intervention played a role in restoring some form of procedural order. However, the MCP dispute was resolved through a single judicial intervention that upheld democratic norms against an NEC restriction; in contrast, the DPP dispute involved a longer and more complex sequence of court rulings, disciplinary proceedings, and political negotiations before resolution was achieved.

These differences reflect, in part, the different institutional characteristics of the two parties. The MCP, as a party with a longer history of organisation and a clearer constitutional framework, was able to respond more rapidly to judicial direction. The DPP, whose convention disputes were intertwined with deeper factional conflicts over party direction and leadership succession, required a more extended process of conflict and resolution before institutional order was restored. These case-specific differences underscore the importance of party institutionalisation as a variable in determining how conventions navigate the edge of chaos.

7.0 Discussion

The analysis above supports three substantive conclusions about the dynamics of Malawian party conventions in the third decade of multiparty democracy.

First, party conventions in Malawi exhibit the nonlinear dynamics described by chaos quantum theory. The conflicts analysed are not merely isolated incidents of disorder' rather, they reflect the structural vulnerability of parties operating at the edge of chaos. These are rule-governed systems characterised by incomplete institutionalisation, competing factional interests, and limited internal enforcement capacity. In this environment, small changes in eligibility criteria or constitutional interpretations can cascade into significant disorder, consistent with the butterfly-effect logic of chaos theory (Overman, 1996).

Second, the analysis demonstrates that judicial intervention has been a significant, though not uniformly stabilising, force in managing convention disputes. Courts have served as external regulators, imposing constitutional and democratic norms on internal party processes and compelling compliance with democratic principles. The MCP case provides the clearest example of a judicial ruling restoring procedural order by upholding the right to participate. The DPP case, however, demonstrates that judicial intervention can also introduce new disorder when contradictory rulings at different court levels generate fresh uncertainty. The relationship between judicial review and party stability is therefore complex and context-dependent.

Finally, the paper's findings contribute to the broader literature on party institutionalisation in Malawi and Africa. The recurrence of convention disputes, and the need for judicial intervention to resolve them, reflects the incomplete institutionalisation of Malawian political parties. However, the eventual resolution of these disputes and the parties' return to conventional order also demonstrate a degree of institutional resilience: parties are capable of navigating the edge of chaos and reconstituting order, even when this process is protracted and costly. This finding is consistent with Prigogine and Stengers' (1984) insight that disorder is not necessarily terminal but can be productive of new and more stable configurations.

8.0 Conclusion

This paper has examined the dynamics of political uncertainty in Malawian party conventions through the lens of chaos quantum theory. Drawing on case analysis of the MCP and DPP convention disputes of 2023–2024, as well as a contextual analysis of party convention history from 1994 onwards, the paper has argued that Malawian party conventions exhibit the non-linear, edge-of-chaos dynamics described by chaos quantum theory. Periods of apparent stability give way to episodes of disorder as factional conflict, eligibility disputes, and procedural controversies disrupt established patterns. New configurations of order eventually emerge through judicial intervention, political negotiation, and institutional compliance.

The paper's principal theoretical contribution is to demonstrate the analytical utility of chaos quantum theory as a framework for understanding intra-party convention dynamics in a post-authoritarian African democracy. This framework moves beyond simple narratives of party dysfunction or judicial heroism by capturing the complex, iterative process through which disorder and order interact in convention politics. Its application to the Malawian context reveals that convention disputes, although disruptive, are not necessarily terminal: they can generate stronger norms, more resilient institutions, and renewed party cohesion, particularly where judicial institutions are willing and able to enforce democratic constitutional principles.

The paper also identifies important limitations and directions for future research. The documentary methodology adopted here should be complemented by interview-based fieldwork with party officials, convention delegates, and judicial officers. A systematic analysis of conventions across all major parties, including the UTM, MCP, DPP, and UDF, from the 1990s to the present would provide a more comprehensive empirical foundation. Future research should also address the micro-level dynamics of convention politics, including how delegates experience

and navigate factional conflict, how eligibility rules are negotiated and enforced, and what factors determine the success or failure of internal-dispute resolution before cases reach the courts.

The broader significance of this analysis lies in what it reveals about the relationship between intra-party democracy and democratic consolidation in Malawi. Well-conducted party conventions are essential to the legitimacy of political parties and the quality of representation in democratic governance. When conventions descend into disorder, they risk eroding public trust, entrenching factional exclusion, and weakening the democratic project. The cases analysed here suggest that judicial review can play a constructive role in upholding democratic norms within parties. However, the ultimate guarantee of convention integrity lies in stronger party institutionalisation: clearer rules, more consistent enforcement, and a political culture of genuine democratic participation within parties.

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