Madagascar

Ethnicity in Madagascar

Group selection

Experts are divided on weather Madagascar should be considered
an ethnically homogenous or heterogeneous country. Those arguing
that Madagascar is homogenous consider all indigenous residents as
Malagasy, since they all share mixed Southeast Asian and African
ancestry, all speak dialects of the Malagasy language and many share
common costumes with regard to dress, religion, social organization
and other matters. For those that see Madagascar as an ethnically
heterogeneous country suggest that there are as many as 20 different
ethnic groups that view themselves as distinct social groups. The
five most populous groups are the following. The largest of these 20
groups are the Merina (about 27% of the population). While their
original homeland is the central highlands, the spread of the Me-
rina Kingdom from 1810 until 1895 has left Merina people employed
in many occupations across Madagascar. The second largest group
is the Betsimisaraka (about 15% of the population), which live on
the east cost and are mainly farmers. The third largest group is the
Betsileo (about 13% of the population), which live in the southern
central highlands. The fourth largest group is the Sakalava (about
5%), which live in the west and herd cattle. Finally, the fifth largest
group is the Tandroy (about 8%), which live in the south of the is-
land. As we will see below, those groups by themselves do play a
dominant political role. Rather a twofold socially constructed com-
bination of groups (the highlanders and costal people) is politically
salient ([2562]; [2563], 121-129; [2564], 146-147; [2565]) The political history
of Madagascar since independence from France in 1960 can roughly
be categorized in three periods. The first republic lasted from 1960
until 1975 and was coined by the presidency of Tsiranana, which
kept close ties with the former colonial masters. Economic misman-
agement led to an economic crisis, which forced Tsiranana to hand
over his power to the military, which managed the transition to the
second, socialistic oriented republic under president Ratsiraka, a
former navel officer, from 1975 until 1992. Ratsiraka slowly trans-
formed the country, which was until then institutionally based on
a blueprint of the French republic, into a socialist republic with a
centrally planned economy. However, he never established a strong
single party regime as other African nations (e.g. Mozambique, An-
gola), but allowed the existence of multiple parties, as long as they

[2562] [Metz, 1994]
[2563] [Allen, 1995]
[2564] [Levinson, 1998]
[2565] [Allen, 2005]

officially accepted his 'red book', which comprised his socialist plan
for Madagascar. After initial success the economy once again de-
clined (especially after the USSR imploded and foreign aid stopped
flowing) and led to strikes and civil unrest. This forced Ratsiraka to
support a democratic transformation, complete with the formulation
of a new constitution and the holding of free and multiparty elec-
tions. The first free and democratic elections symbolized the start of
the third republic, which lasted from 1993 until today. Zafy replaced
Ratsiraka in the 1992 presidential elections and was impeached 1996
for delaying legislative implementation, violating the separation of
powers, interfering with government services and obstructing exter-
nal relations. In the 1997 elections, however, Zafy was allowed to
run again, since he was not found legally guilty of the charges. Rat-
siraka, however, edged him out by 50.72% of the votes and became
president of the country for the second time. The former mayor of
the capital Ravalomanana finally replaced him in April 2002 after
a period of strikes and accusation of fraud. In 2006 Ravalomanana
won his reelection and remained president of Madagascar ([2566], 29-   [2566] [Covell, 1987]
75; [2567]; [2568], 57-116; [2569]).

Fearon's list is taken as a starting point (2003). The list of the
Soviet Atlas categorizes all indigenous groups as Malagasy, which
results in 96% of the population being clustered in one group.
There is, however, a socially constructed, ethnic divide in two larger
marcogroups: highlanders (consisting primarily of Merina and Bet-
sileo living in the islands highlands) and cotiers (people living along
the east and west coast of the island). The politically relevant high-
land/cotier split is best understood as the historical outcome of the
of the domination of the Merina empire from 1787 to 1896, where
the Merina dominated the island and all other ethnic groups from
Imerina, a city located near today's capital Antananarivo in the cen-
tral highlands. Following Covell ([2570]), Metz ([2571]), Allen ([2572]) and   [2570] [Covell, 1987]
Allen and Covell ([2573]) the indigenous groups in Fearon's list (2003)   [2571] [Metz, 1994]
map as follows in the two macro-groups highlanders and cotiers. The   [2572] [Allen, 1995]
Merina and Betsileo build the group highlander. Since the Merina   [2573] [Allen, 2005]
people dominate the group the literature often refers to the high-
landers simply as Merina. The Betsimisaraha, Antaiska, Antandrov,
Tsimitety, Sakalava and Mahafaly build the cotiers. The remaining
groups (Bara, Sihanaka) are called mixed ethnicities, indicating that
members of these groups belong to both macro-groups. Instead of
adding half their population proportion to each of the two groups
they have been dropped them from the list and are therefore coded
as irrelevant.

Power relations

The role of ethnicity in Madagascar is difficult to answer. Following the two criteria in the coding instructions a qualified yes can be given to the question on the political role of ethnicity. From the literature surveyed there was no evidence that ethnicity is the basis for political discrimination ([2574]; [2575]; [2576]). The second criteria, i.e. if there is at least one interest group claiming to represent the interest of an ethnic group, however, can be answered with a yes for the first and second republic. During the first republic (1960-1975) Covell ([2577], 29-50) argues that the two main political parties (PSD and AKFM) where divided along ethnic lines and represented the interests of either the **Cotiers** or the **Merinas** (highlanders). In the second republic there is still considerable evidence provided by Marcus and Ratsimbaharison ([2578]) that the parties are based on some kind of ethnic clientelism. In the third republic, however, parties are no longer divided along ethnic lines, since candidates need a majority of votes to win office, which is impossible to achieve by relying only on ones own ethnic base. It is true that ethnic tensions have played a major role in each of the major political transitions (1972-1975, 1991- 1992, 2001), however, none of the parties involved could be identified as representing a specific ethnic group. However, as the UN-Committee on elimination of racial discrimination notes the Malagasy government has taken measures against parties, which preached segregation or were based on a tribal or ethnic basis ([2579]).

[2574] [Covell, 1987]
[2575] [Metz, 1994]
[2576] [Freedom House, 2006-2009]

[2577] [Covell, 1987]

[2578] [Marcus Ratsimbaharison, 2005]

1960-1972

The time period enfolds the first republic under president Tsiranana, lasting from Madagascar's independence in 1960 to the beginning of the military transition period to the second republic in 1972. Tsiranana's regime is a classical example of a neocolonial regime in which an elite, selected and prepared by the departing colonial power, moves into government positions, exchanging its protection of the interests of the former colonial power for that's protection of its own position. Tsiranana, a cotier, backed by his social democratic party (PSD) deeply routed in the macro-ethnic group of the cotiers, took over power given to him by France and managed in negotiations to free Madagascar from France in 1960, without loosing close ties to the former colonial masters. Until 1975 he and his cotier-dominated party remained in power ([2580], 29-50, [2581]). This was possible because the Merina-dominated congress party for the independence of Madagascar (AKFM) lost its primary goal after the formal independence of Madagascar from France and continued to experience intra-party rifts between leftist and ultranationalist, more orthodox Marxist fractions. Thus, although the cotiers did not discriminate the highlanders (Merinas), they managed to keep the political power within their ranks, which is the reason they have been coded as having dominant power. The highlanders on the other hand were not discriminated, but did not manage to achieve a significant amount of

[2580] [Covell, 1987]
[2581] [Metz, 1994]

state power, which is why they have been coded as powerless.

1973-1975

The time period matches the military transition period between
the first and second republic. Ramanantsoa's (the provisional mili-
tary leader announced by Tsiranana) institutional reforms aimed at
decentralizing substantial administrative authority to local govern-
ments. At first, cotier groups accepted Ramanantsoa as a compro-
mise a Merina leader but one who was answerable to a professional
military and not to Tsiranana's centrally financed neopatrimonial
system. Over time, however, these groups became more acutely
aware of their alienation from the nexus of power. Most joined with
resistance leaders strengthening the alliances between insurgents and
the MFM, AKFM, and MONIMA parties. Ultimately, Ramanantsoa
failed to stem the growing nationwide unrest and the intensifica-
tion of ethnoregional conflicts, and was forced to hand over power
to Colonel Richard Ratsimandrava. Ratsimandrava was more palat-
able than Ramanantsoa because he was a Merina but of a low caste
origin. Yet his intended reforms were a direct threat to the Merina
bourgeoisie and he was assassinated just five days after assuming
power. He was succeeded by Lieutenant-Commander (later Admiral)
Didier Ratsiraka. Though a cotier belonging to the Betsimisaraka
ethnic group, Ratsiraka came to power with the support of a small
but key group of Merina notables. The second republic began. Since
both military leaders in power were Merina, but most of the bu-
reaucratic routines were in the hands of cotiers the highlanders were
coded as senior partner and the cotiers as junior partner.

1976-2001

The time period matches the second republic under president Rat-
siraka. It seems to me that after the socialist revolution the ethnic
patrimonialism seems to continue. This can best be seen in the com-
position of Ratsiraka's government. Ratsiraka relied heavily on core
military, business, and family networks throughout the provinces for
political survival, leading to a proliferation of Ratsiraka's close allies
and family members in provincial leadership positions. His long time
ally, Pascal Rakotomavo, became minister of finance, his brother,
Etienne Ratsiraka was granted significant access and wealth in the
private sector, as did another brother, Elyse Ratsiraka, a doctor
in their native city of Toamasina. His daughter, Sophie, became a
key player in mineral exploitation, paralleling the work of her own
husband, Christian Ranaivo who headed Fiaro, one of the country's
leading companies. To neutralize Merina opposition, Ratsiraka ap-
pointed his military colleagues, General Desire Rakotoarijaona and
General Victor Ramahatra, both Merina, to the position of prime
minister ([2582]). Since Ratsiraka, himself a cotier, included some Me-
rina at relevant posts in his government to neutralize the Merina the
cotiers are coded as senior and the highlanders as junior partners for

[2582] [Marcus Ratsimbaharison, 2005]

that period.

A special provision of the 1992 constitution ([2583]) explicitly refers to ethnic issues. (The existence of this provision couldn't be verified. Elsewhere it is stated that the division of Presidency and post of prime minister between cotiers and Merinas is based on a non-written consensus ([2584]).) This provision requires that if a cotier is elected president then the prime minister must be a Merina/highlander, and vice versa. Ethnicity is an issue, even if Madagascar became a democracy (see [2585], 6). In the February 1993 runoff elections, Albert Zafy, a cotier, was elected president and replaced Ratsiraka. Zafy was supported by the Merina who expected him to appoint their favorite candidate as prime minister. Yet Zafy appointed a half-Merina not supported by the Merina leaders ([2586]). Cotiers, therefore could be coded as senior partner in government, while Merina as junior partner.

[2583] [Polity IV, 2009]

[2584] [Mongabay, 1994]

[2585] [Marcus, 2004]

[2586] [Minorities at Risk Project, 2003]

2002-2017

Ratsiraka, a cotier explicitly playing the ethnic card, defeated Zafy in the December 1996 runoff vote and returned to the presidency with a narrow majority (50.7%) of the popular vote. Ethnic relevance in politics did not change due to this change within presidency as Ratsiraka was also a cotier, yet including highlanders into the government. The political picture changed in 2002 when Marc Ravalomanana won elections against Ratsiraka. Although a Merina and therefore "on the wrong side of the country's single largest divide in political culture" ([2587], 6; also [2588], 504). His ethnicity was eclipsed by his sense of nationalism and his call for a united Malagasy people. Ravalomanana won the elections because of his ability to overcome the cotier/highlander distinction despite of Ratsiraka's attempts to ethnicize the elections (see the special issue of Politique Africaine No. 86, 2002 on the elections of 2001; [2589], 505). Ravalomanana appointed Jacques Sylla, a cotier, as prime minister, thereby still considering existing ethnic sensitivities, yet it appears reasonable to code ethnicity irrelevant from 2002 on ([2590]; [2591]; [2592]; [2593]). This pattern was reaffirmed in the 2006 elections, won again by Ravalomanana who then appointed a Merina as prime minister. Opposition against Ravalomanana grew – however not because of his ethnic belonging or nepotism but mainly because of his political failures. Therefore, also his successor, Andry Rajoelina, who followed Ravalomanana in 2009 after having him ousted, is a Merina with strong support among the cotiers.

[2587] [Marcus, 2004]
[2588] [Marcus Ratsimbaharison, 2005]

[2589] [Marcus Ratsimbaharison, 2005]

[2590] [Polity IV, 2009]
[2591] [Raison-Jourde Raison, 2002]

As of 2002, we code ethnicity as being irrelevant in Madagascar. "Ethnic equity has long been enshrined in the Malagasy constitution[...]. In practice, equality is more problematic" ([2594]). The nominally 18 "tribes" existing in Madagascar are commonly known as being socially constructed throughout French colonial power. Today, a strong and unifying national identity as being "Malagasy" can be identified (ibid). Even though most people embrace in this state

[2594] [Bertelsmann Stiftung, 2007-2016]

identity, significant regional cleavages on political, economic, resource and identity lines are apparent (ibid). A conflict among Malagasy groups sharing a common Malagasy identity has been the divide between the Merina in the capital region and the cotiers in the coastal regions (ibid). The often not recognizable conflicts occurring on political network lines involve ethnogeographic divides. A formal mechanism for ethnogeographic cohabitation is yet non-existent (ibid).

Merina: The Merina and the cotier dominate Madagascar's political space. The above described historically assigned privileges to the Merina-group resulted in notable power in political and economic decision-making as well as in advantages in access to education and to the market (ibid). Within the distinct Merina group, intra-Merina struggles take place reflecting caste and family differences. A prominent example of this the recent struggle between Presidents Ravalomanana and Rajoelina who are both Merina, but from two different "houses". Due to this particular standing of the Merina in terms of inheriting critical roles in government, businesses and education rather than farming, a division to other ethnic groups engaging in this kind of works was fostered and is contemporarily reinforced.

Migrants: For instance, Frost identifies a trend of distinction between the Malagasy people and immigrant groups with another race or religion such as Arabs, white-skinned and Indian people as well as Hindus and Muslims ([2595]). This trend, namely racial violence towards Indians, has been worryingly captured by the UN report on the elimination of racial discrimination while the CIA Factbook names this particular ethnic group as fourth largest in Madagascar ([2596]; [2597]).

[2595] [Frost, 2007a]

Religion has fueled political difference and ethnographic divides (between the capital region, Antananarivo; the east coast surrounds of Tamatave; and the southern regions of the former Tulear province) are mirrored in Madagascar's political parties landscape. Nevertheless, religious dogma has not significantly permeated politics and no ethnicity is systematically excluded from educational access, employment, legal rights or political participation

[2596] [United Nations, 2004]
[2597] [CIA Factbook, 2007]

2013 elections: Ravalomanana's presidency marked a period of ethnic fluidity and growing tolerance. Since his overthrow and the subsequent installation of Andry Rajoelina as President of the High Authority of the Transition in 2009, Madagascar has been in political crisis. Looking towards the 2013 elections, ethnic difference is unlikely to play a role, except in the case of anti-Merina sentiment stemming from a popular view that the country fell down a rabbit hole due to intra-Merina conflict ([2598]).

[2598] [Bertelsmann Stiftung, 2007-2016]

With the introduction of a requirement to win an absolute majority of votes to win office (a requirement which is impossible to achieve by relying only on the candidate's own ethnic base), the ethnic divide between major parties lost its appeal. According to the Bertelsman Stiftung ([2599], 2016: 25), the Merina-Cotier divide is still observable with the Merina having privileged access to educa-

[2599] [Bertelsmann Stiftung, 2007-2016]

tion, employment and public office. However, these privileges mostly
stem from the high degree of centralization of services and infras-
tructure in the Merina-populated capital and there is no evidence
of systematic exclusion or discrimination of the coastal population.
Furthermore, there has not been any significant developments with
regard to the political organization of ethnic groups either. The
only cleavage that has become more visible in recent years is the one
within Merina elites ([2600], 25).

[2600] [Marcus, 2016]

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Political status of ethnic groups in Madagascar

From 1960 until 1972

Group name	Proportional size	Political status
Côtiers	0.479	DOMINANT
Highlanders	0.395	POWERLESS

From 1973 until 1975

Group name	Proportional size	Political status
Côtiers	0.479	JUNIOR PARTNER
Highlanders	0.395	SENIOR PARTNER

From 1976 until 2001

Group name	Proportional size	Political status
Côtiers	0.479	SENIOR PARTNER
Highlanders	0.395	JUNIOR PARTNER

From 2002 until 2017

Group name	Proportional size	Political status
Côtiers	0.479	IRRELEVANT
Highlanders	0.395	IRRELEVANT

Figure 537: Political status of ethnic groups in Madagascar during 1960-1972.

Figure 538: Political status of ethnic groups in Madagascar during 1973-1975.

Figure 539: Political status of ethnic groups in Madagascar during 1976-2001.
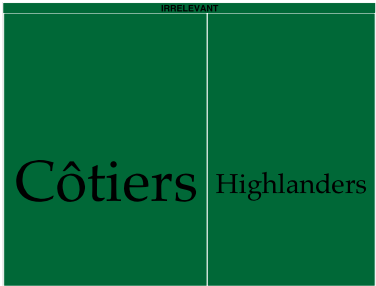
Geographical coverage of ethnic groups in Madagascar

From 1960 until 2001
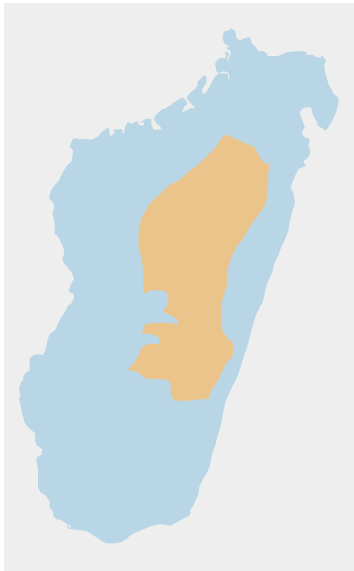
Figure 541: Map of ethnic groups in Madagascar during 1960-2001.

Table 185: List of ethnic groups in Madagascar during 1960-2001.

	Group name	Area in km^2	Type
	Côtiers	565 658	Regionally based
	Highlanders	129 476	Regionally based

Conflicts in Madagascar

Starting on 1947-03-28

Side A	Side B	Group name	Start	Claim	Recruitment	Support
Government of France	MDRM		1947-03-28			

Starting on 1971-04-29

Side A	Side B	Group name	Start	Claim	Recruitment	Support
Government of Madagascar	Monima	Côtiers	1971-04-29	No	Yes, from EGIP	No