Malawi

Ethnicity in Malawi

Group selection

Relevance of ethnicity in politics of Malawi is quite a complicated issue, as the scale of ethnic or tribal affiliation and coalition throughout history was very dynamic (see [1877]). As already mentioned in the comments of further periods of coding, Malawi's society is divided along regional rather than ethnic lines. Contrary to the decisions of coding made by the previous expert, the author would take into consideration these comments on ethno-regionalism or super-ethnic identity ([1878], 152) regarding access to power.

[1877] [Kaspin, 1995]

[1878] [Kalipeni, 1997]

Power relations

The previous expert somehow expressed these regional identities as he identified Chewa and Ngoni (the two dominant ethnic groups in the central region) as the groups in power, while people in the north and south as second to them. Yet, the was no way to verify that Ngoni qua Ngoni stood alongside the Chewa in the government of 1964-1993. Rather the Ngoni in the center aligned with the Chewa while Ngoni as the ethnic group dispersed throughout the country and without a regional stronghold ([1879], 6-7) in other regions aligned with the dominant group in the respective region ([1880]; [1881]: 26). Nor was there enough evidence that the different ethnic groups coded had any political relevance qua ethnic groups. Kaspin shows the logic of the "development" of ethnicity in Malawi (1995; 598 -602; passim): While in 1950 Tew identified 25 ethnic groups, Pike and Rimmington reduced them to nine. The "canceling" of groups from the map was due to cultural visibility (ibid.: 601). During the Banda regime this tendency continued, leading to a enhanced visibility of the Yao in the South, the Chewa in the center and the Tumbuka in the north. All the literature reviewed clearly speaks of a Chewa government under president Banda, a Chewa himself (e.g. [1882]; [1883]; [1884]; [1885]; [1886]). Due to the Chewa dominance or actually monopoly in government which led to privileges for the central region (not only for Chewas but also other people residing there), discriminated people in the north and – to a lesser extent – in the south aligned to form super ethnic groups ([1887]; [1888]). While most of the "disappeared" groups aligned with the dominant group of their region, the Ngoni for example did not align unanimously with one group, but along their settling with the dominant group in the region. Kaspin

[1879] [Ferree and Horowitz, 2007]

[1880] [Ferree and Horowitz, 2007]

[1881] [Erdmann, 2007]

[1882] [Kaspin, 1995]

[1883] [Kalipeni, 1997]

argues that while visible during the colonial era, after independence they lost their visibility and political relevance as a distinct ethnic group after independence ([1889], 601, FN 12; also [1890]; [1891], 7). The period from 1964 to 1993, therefore, was marked by a dualism between being Chewa or not being Chewa, or living in the central Region or not ([1892], 612-615; [1893]; [1894]; [1895]).

Yet, people in the north and people in the south did not form a united opposition to the dominance of the Chewa in the center. Therefore, and taking into consideration as well the development after 1994, the ethnic map is broken down into three regional blocs, representing the super-ethnic identities ([1896]; [1897]; [1898])).

[1896] [Kalipeni, 1997]
[1897] [Kaspin, 1995]
[1898] [Minority Rights Group International, 2005]

Banda's regime was authoritarian and ethnically exclusive. Therefore, the Chewa/centraler are coded as being dominant (not holding the monopoly as there were at least pretended attempts of a more inclusive national agenda). All the other ethnic or regional groups are coded as powerless.

In 1994, the first democratic elections took place. In the elections the partition of the country into three regions became obvious ([1899]; [1900]; [1901]; [1902], autociteFerree2010). Three political parties, each representing one region, dominated the elections: Banda's MCP the center, AFORD the north and UDF the south. Bakili Muluzi's UDF won the elections, yet needed to find allies for a majority in the parliament. The period after the 1994 elections saw countless reconfigurations of the cabinet (even the increase and subsequent decrease of ministries), including northerners as well as centraler into the cabinet (the representation in terms of ethnicity is difficult to assess ([1903], 64)), yet the UDF remained in power from 1994 to 2005 (until its breakup), winning elections in 1999 and 2004. The period from 1994 to 2009 was coded as one single period, as the 1999 elections brought about just some minor changes – people in the north got increasingly unsatisfied with the UDF government. This led for example the AFORD leader Chakufwa Chihana to align in the 1999 elections with his enemies of MCP and not with the UDF anymore, which on the other side led to AFORD's disintegration as not all northerners could stand an alliance with the party of the former dictator Banda ([1904]).

[1899] [Kaspin, 1995]
[1900] [Kalipeni, 1997]
[1901] [Meinhardt and Patel, 2003]
[1902] [Ferree and Horowitz, 2007]
[1903] [Chirwa, Patel and Kanyongolo, 2004]

For the period of 1994 to 2009 the Southerners are coded as Senior Partners and the Northerners and Centralers as Junior Partners. The 1994-2009 period includes the 2004 presidential and parliamentary elections leading to the victory of the UDF presidential candidate Bingu wa Mutharika, while the parliamentary election was won by the MCP – leading somehow to a stalemate. 2004 elections were, therefore, already marked by high fragmentation of the political arena, seeing new parties (and old disintegrate. e.g. AFORD) (see [1905]). Yet voting was still done along regional lines (ibid.). When president Mutharika broke with his party, the UDF, in 2005, he had to look for new alliances within the parliament lacking representation there with his newly founded party DPP. Therefore, the tendency of weakened relevance of super-ethnic (=ethno-regional)

[1905] [Rakner, 2005]

identity increased. This development found formal expression in the 2009 elections when president Mutharika was re-elected with a landslide victory winning support regardless of his southern descent even in the center and the north ([1906]; [1907], 364-365). However, it may be too early to speak of ethnicity as irrelevant; rather a further reconfiguration of the relevance of ethnicity or ethno-regional identity might be the case. Chirambo shows how president Muthiraka had especially in his first term to re-invoke cultural symbols and practices to win support within the population. In doing this he replicated practices "invented" by former president Banda. Yet, while Banda as a Chewa referred somehow authentically to Chewa cultural practices, Muthiraka additionally to his Lowme practices invoked practices from different other tribes (Chewa, Ngoni, Tumbuka). Thereby, on the one hand he won support among the people throughout the country, while at the same time his critics could also challenge his claims to national unity due to the inauthenticity of his cultural populism ([1908]).

[1906] [Ferree and Horowitz, 2010]
[1907] [Hussein, 2009]
[1908] [Chirambo, 2009]

In the literature, group sizes are most often indicated according to (ethno-)linguistic patterns. In those lists for example, Chewas are not distinguished from Nyanja and Mang'anja (see e.g. [1909], 601). Kaspin offers a number regarding the electorate in the respective regions with 49% in the south, 39% in the center and 14% in the north ([1910], 597). The census of 2008 shows similar results with about 42% of the population in the center, 45% in the south and 13% in the north. Therefore, the sizes of the three groups are indicated as follows: Chewa/Central: 40%; Northerner: 14%; Southerner: 46%.

[1909] [Kaspin, 1995]
[1910] [Kaspin, 1995]

2010-2013: In May 2009 national parliamentary and presidential elections were held. Bingu wa Mutharika, a Southerner, was elected president and the DPP won an absolute majority of seats in parliament. The UDF, MCP and AFORD were still running in the elections but had to suffer losses. This indicates that ethno-political mobilization is still relevant in Malawian politics during this period. However, Chinsinga and Kayuni ([1911]) and Bertelsmann ([1912]) point out that the DPP was able to overcome regionalist politics, drawing on popular support in the entire country. Binguwa Mutharika died naturally in 2012 to be succeeded by its Vice-President Joyce Banda, who is coming from the South too. As the Southerners are still Senior Partners and the two other groups are Junior Partners in the government, the previous period is extended to 2013.

[1911] [Chinsinga and Kayuni, 2010]
[1912] [Bertelsmann Country Report, 2008-2014]

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Political status of ethnic groups in Malawi

From 1964 until 1994

Group name	Proportional size	Political status
Southerners (Lomwe, Mang'anja, Nyanja, Yao)	0.46	POWERLESS
Chewa (Central)	0.4	DOMINANT
Northerners (Tumbuka, Tonga, Ngonde)	0.14	POWERLESS

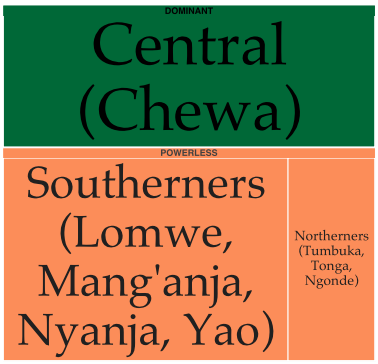

Figure 463: Political status of ethnic groups in Malawi during 1964-1994.

From 1995 until 2013

Group name	Proportional size	Political status
Southerners (Lomwe, Mang'anja, Nyanja, Yao)	0.46	SENIOR PARTNER
Chewa (Central)	0.4	JUNIOR PARTNER
Northerners (Tumbuka, Tonga, Ngonde)	0.14	JUNIOR PARTNER

Figure 464: Political status of ethnic groups in Malawi during 1995-2013.

Geographical coverage of ethnic groups in Malawi

From 1964 until 2013

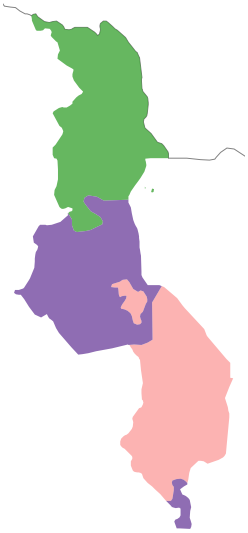

Figure 465: Map of ethnic groups in Malawi during 1995-2013.

	Group name	Area in km^2	Type
	Northerners (Tumbuka, Tonga, Ngonde)	41 008	Regionally based
	Southerners (Lomwe, Mang'anja, Nyanja, Yao)	39 721	Regionally based
	Chewa (Central)	38 205	Regionally based

Table 140: List of ethnic groups in Malawi during 1964-2013.