

Mozambique

Ethnicity in Mozambique

Group selection

The following groups are politically relevant at the state-level in Mozambique: **Tsonga-Chopi** (28.7%), **Shona-Ndau** (9.8%) and **Makonde-Yao** (6.7%).

Power relations

1975-2014

The leading FRELIMO movement/party wanted to eradicate the political relevance of ethnicity and to unite the whole population under the same socialist ideology (see e.g. ³⁵³⁸). Yet, ethnicity did not disappear as an important issue in the country's politics.

³⁵³⁸ [Shenga & Pereira, 2008]

Although the FRELIMO, which should become the leading movement in Mozambique from its independence up to present date, was founded and operated in its beginning in the 1960ies mainly in the North, its leadership was very quickly dominated by elites from the South (see e.g. ³⁵³⁹). Especially during the liberation struggles, the northern leaders got substituted by southerners, leading to a **Tsonga** dominated movement at the moment of the country's independence. Other ethnicities (except the **Makonde-Yao**) lost most of their influence (³⁵⁴⁰). The result is that FRELIMO has been in charge of the government from 1975 up to now, a fact that has not been changed neither by the civil war from the 1970s to the 1990s nor by the multiple democratic elections held during these years (see e.g. ³⁵⁴¹, ³⁵⁴²).

³⁵³⁹ [Golaszinski, 2005]

³⁵⁴⁰ [Shenga & Pereira, 2008]

³⁵⁴¹ [Ruigrok, 2005]

³⁵⁴² [Shenga & Pereira, 2008]

Yet, although dominated by the ethnic groups from the south, mainly the Tsonga, FRELIMO has never been ethnically exclusive. As already stated, the movement/party was founded by people from the north (namely the Makonde-Yao) which continued to have some influence within the movement after the taking-over of power by the Tsonga. Therefore, they can be coded as junior partners to the senior Tsonga. Opposition to FRELIMO came from the RENAMO. Contrary to the attempts of FRELIMO to eradicate ethnicity from national politics, RENAMO strongly played and plays the ethnic card, forging a "non-southerner" identity (see e.g. ³⁵⁴³, 162). RENAMO's stronghold is mainly among the **Shona-Ndau**, living mainly in the center of the country. Due to FRELIMO political dominance and the resulting exclusion of the RENAMO from access to political power, the Shona-Ndau are coded as politically powerless. It can be

³⁵⁴³ [Manning, 2001]

seen that the political lines, therefore, are not only between ethnic groups but as well (or perhaps even more) between regions. Authors working on the recent elections (e.g. ³⁵⁴⁴, ³⁵⁴⁵, ³⁵⁴⁶) show that voting patterns are becoming more and more regionally than ethnically shaped, as people whose ethnic background would tie them to a certain political party, nevertheless vote for a different party with which they share no ethnic identity. Yet, the ethnic lines are still more prominent.

³⁵⁴⁴ [Shenga & Pereira, 2008]

³⁵⁴⁵ [Carbone, 2003]

³⁵⁴⁶ [Golaszinski, 2005]

The transition from a one-party system to multi-party democracy was certainly a rupture within the country's political history. Yet, in Mozambique, the introduction of democracy and elections did not change considerably ethnic groups' access to political power. FRELIMO and its mainly Tsonga leaders never excluded others due to their ethnic identity. Thus, just one single period is coded since 1975 without any changes of power status of the three relevant ethnic groups. The Tsonga remain "senior partner" with the Makonde-Yao as "junior partner" while the Shona-Ndau are coded as "powerless" throughout since they are represented mainly by the RENAMO opposition within a strongly centralized and binarized political system and therefore with little to no political power.

Group sizes are estimates based on information available from the Joshua Project (³⁵⁴⁷) and the Encyclopedia of Nations (³⁵⁴⁸).

³⁵⁴⁷ [Joshua Project, 2010]

³⁵⁴⁸ [Encyclopedia of Nations]

FRELIMO dominates the political arena and is often accused of favouring the south and, by implication, the Tsonga-Chopi group. The northern Makonde-Yao group is represented within FRELIMO. The FRELIMO candidate for the presidential elections (scheduled for 15 October 2014) is a Makonde and could become the first non-southern leader of the country (³⁵⁴⁹, ³⁵⁵⁰). After its clear defeat in the 2009 elections, the mainly Shona-Ndau movement RENAMO has not confined its activities to peaceful popular appeals. Instead, RENAMO leader Afonso Dhlakama has revoked the peace accord of 1992 and more than once threatened to wage a war against the FRELIMO dominated state (³⁵⁵¹). In this sense, the FRELIMO-RENAMO cleavage and the divide between Tsonga-Chopi and Shona-Ndau is still politically relevant.

³⁵⁴⁹ [Bertelsmann Stiftung, 2010-2014]

³⁵⁵⁰ [Africa Report, 2014]

³⁵⁵¹ [Boisbouvier, 2013]

2015-2021

Mozambique held general elections in October 2014, where the two main contenders were again FRELIMO and RENAMO. The incumbent party won the election with 57% of the votes, and its candidate, Filipe Nyusi, became the fourth President of Mozambique.

The main difference this election has brought about is that the new President, Nyusi, is part of the Makonde ethnic group. This is a novelty as, even though the Makonde group has shared power with the Tsonga group since FRELIMO was founded, it was the Tsonga that had held the top political positions until now. Possibly, this change responds to the recent discoveries of oil reserves in the northern province of Cabo Delgado, the Makonde homeland. Indeed,

the election campaign was full of references to both these natural resources and the origins of the FRELIMO-led armed struggle in Cabo Delgado (e.g. ³⁵⁵²; ³⁵⁵³). More recent accounts suggest that ties between Nyuse and the Makonde group are present in political decisions, and key Makonde actors expect to profit from this new arrangement (³⁵⁵⁴; ³⁵⁵⁵).

Because of this, the Makonde have been upgraded to “senior partner” after Nyusi’s victory in the 2014 elections; a status that comes into effect from 2015 onwards, following the 1st of January rule. Because of the long-held dominance of the south-based Tsonga group in FRELIMO, and the importance of southern Mozambique, they are still considered “senior partners”, extending the coding of previous periods. Same applies to the Shona-Ndau, as no evidence of substantive changes was found. Although RENAMO enjoyed an increase in votes, the Mozambique political system ensures that no political power is enjoyed without a majority victory in the elections.

In October 2019 elections were again held. The electoral campaign was plagued by political violence and accusations of electoral malpractice (³⁵⁵⁶). A few months before the election, in August, president Nyusi and Offuso Momade, the new leader of RENAMO after Dhlakama died in May 2018 of a heart attack, signed a peace deal that put an end to the violent hostilities that took place in the country between 2013 and 2016 (³⁵⁵⁷). Thus, the elections put to the test the new agreement, and probably explain why the campaign was so violent. FRELIMO’s incumbent president Nyusi won the election with more than 70% of the votes, while RENAMO’s Momade received 21% of the votes, decreasing the electoral support that the opposition party received in the previous elections. Thus, the head of the government remains the same. As the Bertelsmann Stiftung still states in the 2020 report, the rejection of ethnic parties by FRELIMO seems to function in their own benefit, blocking any challenge to their power and those voices that ask for a federal scheme to distribute territorial power more evenly, which in practice works “in the interests of a small almost ethnically homogenous elite” (³⁵⁵⁸, 6). Indeed, during the recent peace negotiation process, all proposals that RENAMO made related to decentralization were rejected by Nyusi (³⁵⁵⁹).

Hence, no evidence was found that justifies a change in the coding, at least up to January 1st, 2021. The Tsonga can still be considered a “senior partner” of the government, due to their dominance of state elites and FRELIMO. Similarly, the upgrade of the Makonde to “senior partner” after Nyusi became president is still justified. Actually, Nyusi seems to be consolidating the position in power of the Makonde, appointing General Lagos Henriques Lidimo (a Makonde) as the head of the intelligence service and consolidating a Makonde support group after the 2017 congress of FRELIMO (³⁵⁶⁰). Lastly, the disregard of any decentralization scheme brought up by RENAMO and the fact that they have not been able to increase or attain political power through the elections suggests that the Shona-Ndau

³⁵⁵² [Mail & Guardian, 2014]

³⁵⁵³ [The Herald, 2014]

³⁵⁵⁴ [Africa Report, 2016]

³⁵⁵⁵ [African Intelligence, 2017]

³⁵⁵⁶ [The Guardian, 2019]

³⁵⁵⁷ [Al Jazeera, 2019]

³⁵⁵⁸ [Bertelsmann Stiftung, 2020]

³⁵⁵⁹ [Bertelsmann Stiftung, 2020]

³⁵⁶⁰ [Bertelsmann Stiftung, 2020]

can still be safely coded as “powerless.”

The security situation in Mozambique deteriorated in 2020 largely as a result of the ongoing conflict in the north of the country, where an Islamist armed group with alleged ties to the transnational Islamic State group continued to attack villages, killing and kidnapping civilians and destroying properties (³⁵⁶¹). One report (albeit from 2018) states that the Islamists are “believed to have capitalized on long-standing feelings of marginalization of the predominantly Muslim Mwami ethnic group by the mostly Catholic Makonde” (³⁵⁶², 3). The Makonde are the majority group in the Northern region. So far, this dynamic does not reach importance on the national political level but the status of the Mwami group should be reexamined in the next update.

³⁵⁶¹ [Human Rights Watch, 2021]

³⁵⁶² [Haysom, 2018]

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Political status of ethnic groups in Mozambique

From 1975 until 2014

Group name	Proportional size	Political status
Tsonga-Chopi	0.287	SENIOR PARTNER
Shona-Ndau	0.098	POWERLESS
Makonde-Yao	0.067	JUNIOR PARTNER

From 2015 until 2021

Group name	Proportional size	Political status
Tsonga-Chopi	0.287	SENIOR PARTNER
Shona-Ndau	0.098	POWERLESS
Makonde-Yao	0.067	SENIOR PARTNER



Figure 712: Political status of ethnic groups in Mozambique during 1975-2014.

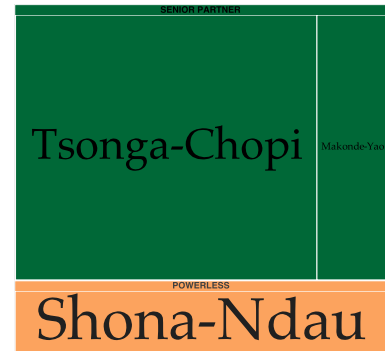


Figure 713: Political status of ethnic groups in Mozambique during 2015-2021.

Geographical coverage of ethnic groups in Mozambique

From 1975 until 1975



Figure 714: Map of ethnic groups in Mozambique during 1975-1975.

Group name	Area in km ²	Type
Tsonga-Chopi	166 149	Regionally based
Shona-Ndau	91 487	Regionally based
Makonde-Yao	10 598	Regionally based

Table 271: List of ethnic groups in Mozambique during 1975-1975.

From 1976 until 2021

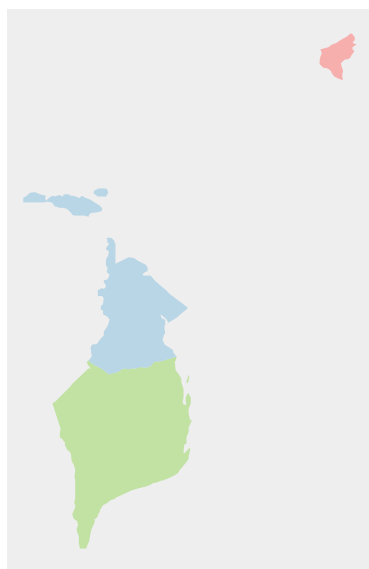


Figure 715: Map of ethnic groups in Mozambique during 1976-2021.

Group name	Area in km ²	Type
■ Tsonga-Chopi	166 149	Regionally based
■ Shona-Ndau	91 487	Regionally based
■ Makonde-Yao	10 598	Regionally based

Table 272: List of ethnic groups in Mozambique during 1976-2021.

Conflicts in Mozambique

Starting on 1964-11-18

Side A	Side B	Group name	Start	Claim	Recruitment	Support
Government of Portugal	Frelimo		1964-11-18			

Starting on 1977-12-30

Side A	Side B	Group name	Start	Claim	Recruitment	Support
Government of Mozambique	Renamo		1977-12-30			
Government of Mozambique	Ansar al-Sunnah		2018-01-13			

Starting on 2019-06-03

Side A	Side B	Group name	Start	Claim	Recruitment	Support
Government of Mozambique	IS		2019-06-03			