

**Zambia**

# *Ethnicity in Zambia*

## *Group selection*

Administered by the British South African Company in 1894 (later absorbed into the British Colonial Office in 1924), Zambia (formerly known as Northern Rhodesia) became independent in 1964, as a result of the collapse of the short-lived Federation of Rhodesia and Nyasaland. Presided over by Kenneth Kaunda until 1991, the country experienced multi-party election until 1972, when its system was changed into a one-party state. In 1991, the country returned to a multi-party political system.

Electoral politics has been the predominant form of Ethno-political competition in Zambia since independence. Voters commonly expect politicians elected to office to redistribute private and public goods (development, job, business contracts... ) along ethnic lines, even if in fact these perception are not necessarily reflected by actual policies at the central level (<sup>5532</sup>, 104, 95, see also <sup>5533</sup>). In turn, elites being aware of these perceptions are incentivized to “couch their electoral appeal and frame their coalition building strategies in ethnic terms” (<sup>5534</sup>, 104).

<sup>5532</sup> [Posner, 2005]

<sup>5533</sup> [Dresang, 1974]

<sup>5534</sup> [Posner, 2005]

Ethnic identities in Zambia are structured around two principal dimensions: a so-called ‘tribal’ dimension (nominally 73, in practice less) and a linguistic dimensions (four: Bemba, Nyanja Lozi and Tonga, as well as three minor languages in the Northwestern province: Kaonde, Luvale and Lunda). The relevance of both identities has emerged as a direct consequence of British policies during the colonial period and labor migration to the Copperbelt and towns along the railways (<sup>5535</sup>). It is important to understand that ethnic dimensions are not orthogonal to each other, but rather nested, with each language grouping several distinct ‘tribes’ (<sup>5536</sup>, 116-7). In addition, because major regional ‘tribes’ in Zambia has given its name to a regional linguistic group, considerable confusion may emerge when it comes to assess around which dimensions ethnic claims are made. In fact, it is often the cases that members of the same ethno-linguistic group may assess differently the power status of their group, depending on which dimensions of ethnicity they are basing their claims on: ‘tribal’ or linguistic (I.e. If the Bemba people claims to be sub-represented at the central level, they may either refer to members of the Bemba-speaking people or to the Bemba tribe) (<sup>5537</sup>, 119, see also <sup>5538</sup>).

<sup>5535</sup> [Posner, 2005]

<sup>5536</sup> [Posner, 2005]

<sup>5537</sup> [Posner, 2005]

<sup>5538</sup> [Cottier, 2016]

*Politically relevant ethnic groups:* While ethno-linguistic groups are organized around one of the four regional languages, ethnic or ‘tribal’ identities are generally linked to family allegiance to traditional authorities (<sup>5539</sup> 89, 1). Nevertheless, each ‘tribe’ possessed historically its own local language (<sup>5540</sup>, 57), however as a consequence of labor migration and colonial education policies, the language of each major regional ethnic group became progressively dominant within each province. Generally, ethno-linguistic cleavages are relevant at the national level, while ‘tribal’ identities take predominance at the regional level, even in national elections. (<sup>5541</sup>, 116). Because of this, only ethno-linguistic identities are considered in coding politically relevant groups in Zambia.

<sup>5539</sup> [Posner, 2005]

<sup>5540</sup> [Posner, 2005]

<sup>5541</sup> [Posner, 2005]

When one considers language as a source of ethnic affiliation, one should keep in mind that these languages are heavily regionalized and in practice regional origins (easterners, southerners, etc.) are used to refer to each ethno-linguistic group. While the Bemba dominate the three provinces in the northeastern part of the country (Muchinga, Northern and Luapula), as well as the Copperbelt, the Lozi are to be found in the Western Province (formerly known as Barotseland), the Tonga in the Southern province and the Nyanga group in the Eastern provinces (<sup>5542</sup>: 1606). Due to historical reasons and sparse population, the North-Western province never experienced the rise of a single language, as is the case in the other provinces. Within this province, three main languages co-exist and are often considered ethnic groups: the Kaonde, Luvale and Lunda. This is however disputed as for Posner states that the North-Western Province often acts as the fifth ethnic group (<sup>5543</sup>), known as the Northwesters. However, since coding instructions do not refer to regional origin as a basis for ethnic allegiance, the traditional view of listing all three main groups in the Northwestern province has been favored here.

<sup>5542</sup> [Dresang, 1974]

<sup>5543</sup> [Posner, 2005]

### *Power relations*

As a consequence of the prevalence of ethnic politics in Zambia, all ethno-linguistic groups shown above are relevant during the entire post-independence period. The main vectors for ethnic politics are parties, which are generally identified with one or a few ethnic groups. Although ‘tribal’ interest groups do exist, these are of little importance (e.g. Bemba Ilamfya Council of the Bemba ethnic group, see <sup>5544</sup>: 122). In addition, the Zambian politics is heavily personalized, which results in party identity often being associated with the ethnic identity of the party president, despite the fact that deputies are from distinct ethno-linguistic groups. As a corollary, change in the leadership quite often results in a change of perceived ethnic affiliation (<sup>5545</sup>: 109).

<sup>5544</sup> [Posner, 2005]

<sup>5545</sup> [Posner, 2005]

As such, ethnicity plays a significant role. Although there have been changes in group power over time, ruling parties have constantly attempted —usually with considerable success— to create oversized if not all-inclusive multiethnic coalitions. In particular,

this is reflected by the fact that the leaders of Zambian parties have always attempted to appoint to significant position, members of diverse ethnic group, in the hope of increasing their share of national votes (see <sup>5546</sup>, 430-1). In addition, it is worth remarking that long-time President Kenneth Kaunda took great care to distribute cabinet positions among members of all the politically relevant ethno-linguistic groups in Zambia, often in relation to their demographic sizes (<sup>5547</sup>: 127). As a strategy to induce support, the ethno-linguistic groups that support opposition parties almost always receive approximately proportional representation in senior government positions, partially in the hope that they will vote for the ruling party in the next election (correspondence with James Scarrit; see also <sup>5548</sup>; <sup>5549</sup>). It should nevertheless be remarked that Bemba-speaking control of top cabinet positions has generally been above Bemba demographic share (<sup>5550</sup>: 127; see also <sup>5551</sup>; <sup>5552</sup>). Thus, we code all three largest ethno-linguistic groups (**Bemba**, **Nyanja** and **Tonga**) as senior partners throughout the period and the other four smaller groups (**Kaonde**, **Lozi**, **Luanda**, **Luvale**) as junior partners.

*2017-2021:* The power-sharing constellation as described above continued and there were no major power shifts in Zambia. However, one notable change happened, when the Tonga lost representation in the cabinet in 2016 (see <sup>5553</sup>; <sup>5554</sup> for the distribution of cabinets' position). Indeed, the Tonga can be effectively perceived as excluded from the cabinet after the 2016 general elections, in which they supported and voted as a bloc for the opposition party, United Party for National Development (UPND) and its candidate, Haakainde Hichilema, a Tonga. Since 2016, the group has also remained unrepresented at the highest level of the Zambia Defense Force (Army Commander, Air Force Commander, and National Service Commandant). Moreover, the group had, during the same period, no representation in the Zambia Police Service at Inspector General and Deputy's levels (see <sup>5555</sup>; <sup>5556</sup>). Thus, if representation in the cabinet, defense force and the police hold as an important indicator of the political power in Zambia, then, the Tonga can be considered as powerless from the Zambian government for the period starting after the 2016 national elections.

General elections of 2016 were followed by a lot of controversy and criticism by both local opposition leaders and international observers. The Patriotic Front, currently in power won the elections by a slight margin to the UNPD candidate, Hakainde Hichilema, a Tonga by ethnicity. Prior and after the elections, press freedom was restricted and there was a widespread political party intolerance which lead to violence across the country. In addition, the government continues to apply law selectively and intentionally targeting individuals and groups who opposed the PF (<sup>5557</sup>. A great illustration in this regard is the suspension of 48 MPs from the opposition party UPND following their boycott during President Lungu's state

<sup>5546</sup> [Horowitz, 1985]

<sup>5547</sup> [Posner, 2005]

<sup>5548</sup> [Kapesa, Sichone & Bwalya (forthcoming (a))]

<sup>5549</sup> [Kapesa, Sichone & Bwalya (forthcoming (b))]

<sup>5550</sup> [Posner, 2005]

<sup>5551</sup> [Kapesa, Sichone & Bwalya (forthcoming (a))]

<sup>5552</sup> [Kapesa, Sichone & Bwalya (forthcoming (b))]

<sup>5553</sup> [Republic of Zambia, 2016]

<sup>5554</sup> [Republic of Zambia, 2017]

<sup>5555</sup> [Kapesa, Sichone & Bwalya (forthcoming (a))]

<sup>5556</sup> [Kapesa, Sichone & Bwalya (forthcoming (b))]

<sup>5557</sup> [U.S. State Department, 2019]

of the nation address <sup>5558</sup>). Owing to other similar incidents, Zambia has been considered as a country at crossroads, while its democracy is backsliding <sup>5559</sup>). Whereas tribalism seems to gain relevance in Zambia's governance, UNPD's representatives have raised their voice against tribal divisions, which according to them are being promoted by the Patriotic Front (<sup>5560</sup>).

<sup>5558</sup> [BBC, 2017]

<sup>5559</sup> [BBC, 2017]

<sup>5560</sup> [Lukasa Times, 2020]

While the country's constitution grants the freedom of peaceful assembly, this right was restricted several times when the government used government resources and policemen to disrupt any kind of activities organized by opposition parties or civil society organizations criticizing the ruling party. For example, on August 6, 2019, 27 UPND members were arrested by the police on claims of unlawful assembly. Under these conditions, the group is here coded as "powerless" until 2021.

Moreover, as part of the 2017 update, the demographic size of ethnic groups in Zambia were adjusted to correct for errors, especially with regards to the Tonga's (overestimated) and the Nyanja's (underestimated) group size. The data for the demographic size of ethnic group is provided by the Central Statistical Office (CSO) (<sup>5561</sup>; <sup>5562</sup>) and UNDP (<sup>5563</sup>).

<sup>5561</sup> [Central Statistical Office, 2011]

<sup>5562</sup> [Central Statistical Office, 2014]

<sup>5563</sup> [UNDP, 2016]

*Regional autonomy:* The issue of regional autonomy revolves exclusively around the Western province and the Lozi-speaking people (see <sup>5564</sup>; <sup>5565</sup>). During the colonial era, the western province, known at the time as Barotseland, had the unusual status of a protectorate within the protectorate of Northern Rhodesia. This status gave the Barotse Royal Establishment extensive autonomy in exchange for mineral rights for the British South African Company (<sup>5566</sup>, 239). During the period leading up to the independence of Northern Rhodesia, the status of Barotseland in the soon to become independent Northern Rhodesia was heavily debated with demand for secession from the Lozi people and the Barotse Royal Establishment (<sup>5567</sup>, 240). The United Kingdom rejected the call for secession, but gave reassurances that the current status of Northern Rhodesia will be kept intact in a newly independent Rhodesia. Shortly before the independence, an agreement was found between the nationalist of the UNIP (United National Independence Party) and the Barotse-land Royal Establishment in April 1964, with the approval of the United Kingdom. The 1964 Barotseland Agreement guaranteed significant autonomy to the Barotse Royal Establishment and the Lozi People in areas of local administrations and judicial activity, as well as local spending and taxation upon Zambia independence on October 24 (<sup>5568</sup>, 241-2). Crucially though despite the fact that mineral rights were not explicitly mentioned, land redistribution autonomy was also guaranteed.

<sup>5564</sup> [Kapesa, Sichone & Bwalya (forthcoming (a))]

<sup>5565</sup> [Kapesa, Sichone & Bwalya (forthcoming (b))]

<sup>5566</sup> [Hall, 1967]

<sup>5567</sup> [Hall, 1967]

<sup>5568</sup> [Hall, 1967]

Yet, this autonomy status was quickly rescinded the year after, when the Zambian government under Kenneth Kaunda scraped the Lozi autonomous administrations and court under the Local Government Act of 1965. The Barotseland agreement was finally

abrogated in the constitutional reform of 1969, which changed the name of the province into Western Province (<sup>5569</sup>; <sup>5570</sup>).

Subsequently calls for outright secession or reinstating the regional autonomy status were made over time, however without much echoes. The issue did only come to the fore again following the reintroduction of multi-party elections in 1991. President Chiluba won the election with the support of the Lozi, but later refused to negotiate on the issue of autonomy. Further on, in 2011, the opposition leader Mr. Michael Sata, during his election campaign, promised to reinstate the regional autonomy of Barotseland, once elected into office (<sup>5571</sup>; <sup>5572</sup>). However, this promise was neglected. As a result, some Lozi interest groups declared the secession of the Western Province in 2013, with the government reacting by arresting around 70 people under charge of treason (<sup>5573</sup>). In view of the preceding account, the Lozi are here coded as regionally autonomous group only from 1964 to 1965, and from 1966 onwards as not regionally autonomous. To this day, there is an ongoing debate on the official recognition of the Barotseland Agreement, while some even demand independence from the rest of the country(<sup>5574</sup>).

<sup>5569</sup> [The *Zambian Post*, 2012]

<sup>5570</sup> [Kelly, 2014]

<sup>5571</sup> [The *Zambian Post*, 2012]

<sup>5572</sup> [Kelly, 2014]

<sup>5573</sup> [Agence France Press, 2013]

<sup>5574</sup> [U.S. State Department, 2019]

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# Political status of ethnic groups in Zambia

*From 1964 until 1965*

Group name	Proportional size	Political status
Bemba speakers	0.43	SENIOR PARTNER
Nyanja speakers (Easterners)	0.3	SENIOR PARTNER
Tonga-Ila-Lenje (Southerners)	0.12	SENIOR PARTNER
Lozi (Barotse)	0.08	JUNIOR PARTNER
Luanda (NW Province)	0.03	JUNIOR PARTNER
Kaonde (NW Province)	0.02	JUNIOR PARTNER
Luvale (NW Province)	0.02	JUNIOR PARTNER

*From 1966 until 2016*

Group name	Proportional size	Political status
Bemba speakers	0.43	SENIOR PARTNER
Nyanja speakers (Easterners)	0.3	SENIOR PARTNER
Tonga-Ila-Lenje (Southerners)	0.12	SENIOR PARTNER
Lozi (Barotse)	0.08	JUNIOR PARTNER
Luanda (NW Province)	0.03	JUNIOR PARTNER
Kaonde (NW Province)	0.02	JUNIOR PARTNER
Luvale (NW Province)	0.02	JUNIOR PARTNER

*From 2017 until 2021*

Group name	Proportional size	Political status
Bemba speakers	0.43	SENIOR PARTNER
Nyanja speakers (Easterners)	0.3	SENIOR PARTNER
Tonga-Ila-Lenje (Southerners)	0.12	POWERLESS
Lozi (Barotse)	0.08	JUNIOR PARTNER
Luanda (NW Province)	0.03	JUNIOR PARTNER
Luvale (NW Province)	0.02	JUNIOR PARTNER
Kaonde (NW Province)	0.02	JUNIOR PARTNER

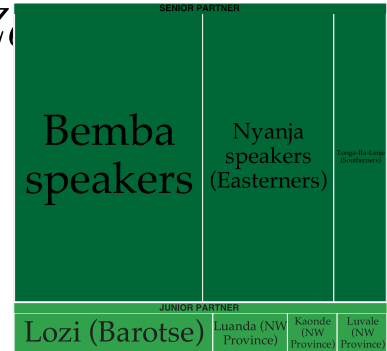


Figure 1145: Political status of ethnic groups in Zambia during 1964-1965.

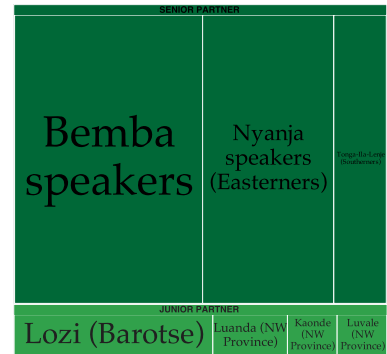


Figure 1146: Political status of ethnic groups in Zambia during 1966-2016.

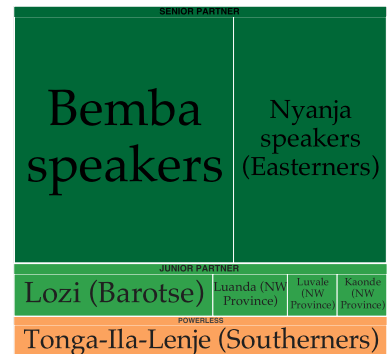


Figure 1147: Political status of ethnic groups in Zambia during 2017-2021.

## Geographical coverage of ethnic groups in Zambia

From 1964 until 2021

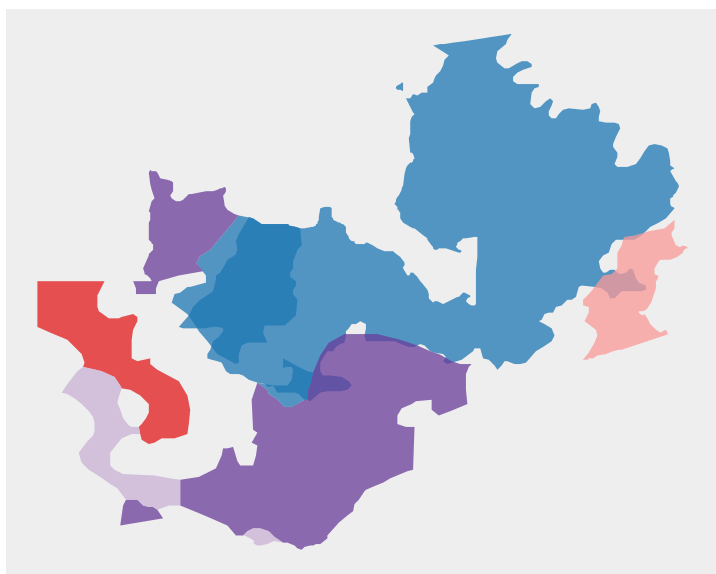


Figure 1148: Map of ethnic groups in Zambia during 1964-2021.

Group name	Area in km <sup>2</sup>	Type
Bemba speakers	329 382	Regional & urban
Tonga-Ila-Lenje (Southerners)	126 594	Regionally based
Kaonde (NW Province)	51 213	Regionally based
Luvale (NW Province)	37 832	Regionally based
Nyanja speakers (Easterners)	27 785	Regionally based
Luanda (NW Province)	25 728	Regionally based
Lozi (Barotse)	24 239	Regionally based

Table 421: List of ethnic groups in Zambia during 1964-2021.