

ZIMBABWE

Ndebele

Activity: 1981-2020

General notes

NA

Movement start and end dates

- Nationalism first began in 1914 with the Matabele National Home Society, but eventually petered out (Minahan, 2002:1343; Moyo, 2011:166; Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2008). It was revived from 1957-1962, when Zimbabwe was still a colony, but once again subsided.
- The first evidence for separatist mobilization after Zimbabwe's independence we found is in 1981, when "Ndebele national leaders demanded autonomy for Matabeleland" amid rising tensions between the Ndebele and the Shona (Minahan 2002: 1344). In 1982, Mugabe accused the Ndebele of striving for separatism and dismissed Nkomo and other Ndebele government officials (Minahan, 2002:1344).
- The early 1990s saw an upsurge in Ndebele national sentiment (Minahan 2002: 1344). In 2000, a group of young Ndebele professionals revived ZAPU, calling it ZAPU 2000. They called for a federal system that would allow the Ndebele autonomy, proposing to divide the country into a federation of five provinces, each with greater autonomy and equality. They accused the Mugabe government of marginalising the Ndebele while the Shona political elite were enriched by government corruption and cronyism (Minahan, 2002:1342; Roth 2015: 287).
- In 2006, in exile in South Africa, a group of Ndebele founded the Matabeleland Freedom Party (MFP), with the aim of restoring the Mthwakazi monarchy (Roth 2015: 287). At the same time, militants in exile in South Africa proposed secession from Zimbabwe and the unification of traditional Ndebele lands in South Africa and Zimbabwe, creating a new state (Minahan, 2002:1342). Other parties and groupings in favor of increased self-determination include the Matabeleland Liberation Organisation (MLO), the Patriotic Union of Matabeleland (PUMA), and the Mthwakazi Republic Party (MRP) which was formed in early 2014 (Roth 2015: 287). Moyo (2011:170) also mentions the Mthwakazi People's Convention (MPC), and argues that both PUMA and MPC were borne from discontent, the marginalisation of the Ndebele, the legacy of state violations of this group's rights, and fear of assimilation. Both groups 'require territorial autonomy – but differ in the sense that MPC is much more radical as its quest is for secession'. They also demand that the region be administered by local civil servants rather than Shona administrators (Moyo, 2011:170).
- The movement was ongoing as of 2020. For instance, Moyo (2018) reports persistent claims for both secession and devolution, put forward by parties including the People's Democratic Party and the aforementioned MRP.
- Based on this information, we code 1981 as the start date, and code the movement as ongoing.
[start date: 1981; end date: ongoing]

Dominant claim

- The Ndebele movement has made claims for both autonomy and secession, but autonomy appears to be the dominant claim. We code the start date in 1981, when Ndebele leaders started to demand autonomy for Matabeteland according to Minahan (2002: 1344). An important organization associated with the movement is ZAPU 2000, which was formed in 2000 and

advocates a federal Zimbabwe (Minahan 2002: 1342). Similarly, ZAPU-Federal Party, which was established in 2002, calls for a federal Zimbabwe (MAR).

- Several organizations have also demanded outright secession (Moyo 2011: 170; Roth 2015: 287). Moyo (2018), for example, reports persistent claims for both secession and devolution, put forward by parties including the People's Democratic Party and the aforementioned MRP.
- The demand for regional autonomy seems to be dominant, especially during the movement's earlier phases. According to an older MAR entry from 2003, secessionism "seems limited to an old guard minority" (MAR 2003). On this basis, we code autonomy as the dominant claim throughout. We note, however, that the recent rise in secessionist organizations could signal a radicalization of the dominant claim towards outright secession. [1981-2020: autonomy claim]

Independence claims

- According to an older MAR entry, claims for outright secession had been present before the 2000s but had limited political significance. Yet, in more recent years, several organizations emerged which make claims for outright secession. According to Roth (2015: 287), this includes Mthwakazi Liberation Front (MLF), Mthwakazi Free State (MFS), and the Mthwakazi Republic Party (MRP), which respectively were formed in 2010 (<https://www.refworld.org/docid/5b3cd27a4.html>), 2014 (Wikipedia), and 2014 (Roth). Moyo (2011: 170) cites another organization called the Mthwakazi People's Convention (MPC), which appears to have been formed in 2009 and, according to Moyo, has some level of popularity. Roth and Minahan (2002: 1342) also cite earlier claims for secession, but these appear to come from groups based in South Africa, which are not considered here (see above). [start date: 2009; end date: ongoing]

Irredentist claims

NA

Claimed territory

- The territory claimed by the Ndebele is the so-called Mthwakazi Republic. Definitions of this territory vary within the movement. We code this territory based on a map published by the Mthwakazi Free State organization, which also matches the territory claimed by the Mthwakazi Liberation Front (Newsday 2016) and the territory mapped in Roth (2015).

Sovereignty declarations

- Roth (2015: 287) suggests that the Mthwakazi Free State (MFS) 'has been declared and has what it calls a "government-in-waiting"'. We do not code this as a declaration because Roth does not provide sufficient detail including, most importantly, a date/year. We also were not able to find supporting evidence in other sources.

Separatist armed conflict

- The quinquennial MAR rebellion score is four ("small-scale guerilla activity") in 1980-1984; however, we found no indications in our qualitative sources of separatist violence during those years. It is possible that this coding is due to the Rhodesian Bush War/Liberation War (though strictly speaking the war ended in December 1979). We do not code LVIOLSD.
- The MAR rebellion score is three ("local rebellion") in 1987. However, this does not relate to violence over self-determination but to the Matabeleland massacres, which are coded as a civil

war over government in Sambanis & Schulhofer-Wohl (2019) and Fearon & Laitin (2003), among others. Moreover, according to Doyle & Sambanis' (2006) coding notes, "[a]fter 1984, depending on the degree of effective resistance, this case may be less of a civil war and more of a case of government repression and politicide, also including inter-communal killing." As the conflict was over government and mainly involved one-sided violence, we do not code violence over self-determination in 1987. We found no indications of separatist violence in other years, thus the entire movement is coded as NVIOLSD. [NVIOLSD]

Historical context

- The Ndebele are Zimbabwe's largest minority, comprising c. 17% of the population (World Directory of Minorities and Indigenous Peoples, 2018). The Ndebele are sometimes also referred to as the Matabele, and their language is isiNdebele (Minahan, 2002:1341).
- The Ndebele people held their own Kingdom in the 1800s. In 1823, Zulu military leader Mzilikazi, having clashed with the Zulu King, fled with his followers, eventually settling in the South-West of present-day Zimbabwe. Here, they established a 'formidable' nation in Matabeleland, conquering the pastoral Shona people of the area (Minahan, 2002:1341-2; World Directory of Minorities and Indigenous Peoples, 2018). This conquest provoked an 'ethnic enmity' which persists today (Minahan, 2002:1342; Moyo, 2011:166).
- In 1880, a descendant of Mzilikazi signed a treaty with the British which awarded Cecil Rhodes and the British South Africa Company exclusive rights to all minerals in Matabeleland (Minahan, 2002:1342; see also: Shoup, 2011:209). In 1891, the British declared Protectorates over Matabeleland, Mashonaland, and Bechuanaland while the British South Africa Company offered 3,000-acre farms to European colonists. War broke out in 1893; Ndebele warriors joined the Shona to attack the British. In 1893, the Ndebele regiments surrendered; in 1894, the British troops occupied Bulawayo (the regional capital of Matabeleland); and, later that year, the Ndebele leader Lobengula died, the Kingdom collapsed, and the British seized complete control of the region (Minahan, 2002:1342).
- In 1914, the Matabele National Home Society was created to work for an autonomous Ndebele homeland (Minahan, 2002:1343; Moyo, 2011:166). Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2008) contends that the existence of associations such as the Matabele National Home Society demonstrate that 'the Ndebele still aspired to be a nation', 'were conscious of their identity', and 'still looked to the sons of Lobengula as leaders of the Ndebele nation'.
- In 1923, the British joined Matabeleland with Mashonaland to create the colony of Southern Rhodesia (Minahan, 2002:1343).
- In the late 1950s, Joshua Nkomo, a young Ndebele trade unionist, and his nationalist followers joined the Shona-dominated Zimbabwe African National Union (ZANU). However, due to differences between the Ndebele and the Shona, the Ndebele withdrew from ZANU in 1963 and formed the rival Zimbabwe African people's Union (ZAPU). ZAPU became the focus of Ndebele nationalism (Minahan, 2002:1343; see also: Roth, 2015:287).
- The independent state of Rhodesia was unilaterally declared in 1965 (Minorities At Risk, 2006; Minahan, 2002:1342; Roth, 2015:286). A 'long and vicious' anti-colonial war broke out as ZAPU and ZANU launched attacks on Rhodesia (Minahan, 2002:1343). The conflict came to a negotiated end in 1980 with the establishment of the new African state of Zimbabwe (Minahan, 2002:1342).
- Following the establishment of Zimbabwe, elections were held. The Zimbabweans largely voted along ethnic lines (Hewitt and Cheetham, 2000). The new Zimbabwean government was thus dominated by the more numerous Shona, and 'rapidly alienated the Ndebele minority' (Minahan, 2002:1342; see also: Moyo, 2011:168; Roth, 2015:287).
- In 1981, 'amid rising tensions between Shona and Ndebele, Ndebele national leaders demanded autonomy for Matabeleland'. However, Mugabe rejected their calls for autonomy and fighting broke out between Ndebele nationalists and Shona military units (Minahan, 2002:1344).
- No concessions or restrictions were found in the ten years before the first year we cover in the dataset.

Concessions and restrictions

- In 1982, Mugabe accused the Ndebele of striving for separatism and dismissed Nkomo and other Ndebele government officials (Minahan, 2002:1344). This did not impact the level of self-rule of the Ndebele and, therefore, we do not code an autonomy restriction.
- A 'low-level but bitter civil war' erupted in 1983, persisting until 1987 (World Directory of Minorities and Indigenous Peoples, 2018). The violence broke out in Matabeleland, and the central government deployed army units to 'stamp out armed dissidents' affiliated with ZAPU; these units acted with 'extreme brutality'. Thousands were killed or disappeared (World Directory of Minorities and Indigenous Peoples, 2018; see also: Hewitt and Cheetham, 2000; Moyo, 2011; Minorities At Risk, 2006). This outbreak of violence is not considered a restriction; according to the Coding Instructions, government crack-downs are not considered to be restrictions.
- The government established new health centres in Matabeleland between 1980 and 1985, bringing the region 'up to par with the rest of Zimbabwe' (World Directory of Minorities and Indigenous Peoples, 2018). We do not code a concession because the establishment of health centers does not affect the Ndebele's level of self-determination and ethnic rights.
- Throughout the 1980s and 1990s, 'persistent allegations were made that the central government favoured Matabeleland less than other regions'. It was alleged that the government blocked investments in the water supply and in the development of the regional capital, Bulawayo (World Directory of Minorities and Indigenous Peoples, 2018). This does not constitute a restriction on the Ndebele people's level of autonomy or the status of their cultural rights and is therefore not coded as a restriction.
- In 2001, ZANU-PF activists in Bulawayo attacked Ndebele cultural and political sites. The violence spread throughout the city, with fighting between the Ndebele and ZANU-PF militants (who were largely Shona) (Minahan, 2002:1346). As has already been noted, one-sided, government-sponsored violence – which is how this period of violence began – does not constitute a restriction.
- In recent years, there have been 'high levels of unemployment and general social destitution' in Matabeleland (World Directory of Minorities and Indigenous Peoples, 2018; Minorities At Risk, 2006). This indicates discrimination but does not constitute a restriction on the autonomy of the Ndebele people.
- Civil servants in Matabeleland are disproportionately Shona and many do not speak Ndebele, 'raising questions of political representation' (World Directory of Minorities and Indigenous Peoples, 2018; Minorities At Risk, 2006). While the imposition of Shona civil servants in the traditional homeland of the Ndebele could be perceived to be a restriction on the autonomy of the Ndebele, there is no known start-date for this policy, and it is therefore challenging to code.
- In 2013, a new Constitution which permits devolution was adopted in Zimbabwe (Moyo 2018; Zimbabwe Constitution, 2013; Moyo and Ncube, 2014). We did not find evidence for meaningful implementation of devolution in Matabeleland and do not, therefore, code a concession.
- Mugabe was ousted by a military coup in 2017 and replaced by Emmerson Mnangagwa. His appointment is regarded with suspicion by the Ndebele 'due to his alleged complicity in the massacres of Ndebele in the Matabeleland in the 1980s' (World Directory of Minorities and Indigenous Peoples, 2018). Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2008) suggests that 'there is a pervasive fear in Matabeleland that without a state of their own the Ndebele remain in danger of a repetition of' the atrocities of the 1980s (see above). Once more, however, the ascension of Mnangagwa does not constitute a restriction on the autonomy of the Ndebele.

Regional autonomy

NA

De facto independence

NA

Major territorial changes

NA

EPR2SDM

<i>Movement</i>	Ndebele
<i>Scenario</i>	n:1
<i>EPR group(s)</i>	Ndebele-Kalanga-(Tonga)
<i>Gwgroupid(s)</i>	55201100

Power access

- EPR codes the Ndebele but combines them with a related group, the Kalanga, and the Tonga. According to Minahan (2002: 1341), the Kalanga are rapidly assimilating into Ndebele culture, but they speak a separate language and are not strictly part of the Ndebele group. The Tonga are a very small group, numbering only about 140,000, and also speak a separate group. Thus, this is best seen as an n:1 scenario.
- EPR's power access codes can directly be adapted. The Ndebele make up a dominant part of the combined Ndebele-Kalanga-Tonga group, and the EPR coding notes always refer to the Ndebele when discussing the power access codes. Note: the 1981-1982 junior partner-discriminated transition is consistent with Minahan (2002: 1344), who states that Mugabe accused the Ndebele of striving for separatism and dismissed Nkomo and other Ndebele government officials in 1982 (Minahan 2002:1344). The dismissal was followed by a massacre/one-sided violence, which is why retain EPR's decision not to apply the January 1 rule in this case (higher consistency with case history). [1981: junior partner; 1982-1987: discriminated; 1988-1999: junior partner; 2000-2008: discriminated; 2009-2020: junior partner]

Group size

- According to Minahan (2002:1340), there were 2.61 mio. Ndebeles in Zimbabwe in 2002, which in combination with the World Bank's estimate of Zimbabwe's total population in 2002 (12.64 mio.) yields an estimate of 20.65%. MRGI suggests a group size of 17% (World Directory of Minorities and Indigenous Peoples, 2018). We draw on the latter estimate as it is closer to other sources. [0.17]

Regional concentration

- EPR codes regional concentration, but EPR applies a lower bar. MAR also codes regional concentration while noting that >75% of Ndebeles live in their regional base. Minahan (2002: 1340) suggests that the Ndebele make up 83% of the population of their regional base, Matabeteland; and that almost all Ndebeles in Zimbabwe live there (>98%). [regional concentration]

Kin

- There are Ndebeles also in South Africa. According to EPR, they make up 1.5% of South Africa's population, so the numeric threshold (>100,000) is met. According to MAR, there are also Ndebele in Botswana, but their population is much smaller (20,000 according to Joshua Project). EPR in addition codes kinship ties to the Tonga-Ila-Lenje (Southerners) in Zambia and the Northerners in Malawi. [kin in neighboring country]

Sources

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