

## **Topic: Politicised Ethnicity and Security in Malawi Since 1964**

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### **Abstract**

This study investigated persistent claims by politicians from Northern Malawi regarding ethnic favouritism and discriminatory practices by the Malawian state against the Tumbuka ethnic community of the Region. It set out to analyse the historical and political contexts that have shaped the foundation and development of these claims; assessed their basis; and evaluated their impact on ethnic relations between the people of Tumbuka ethnic identity and those of other ethnic identities in Central and Southern Malawi. Recognising that the claims were often framed within the broader context of ethnicity, their impact on inter-ethnic relations could not be undermined. This historically designed study employed a qualitative approach to draw on in-depth interviews, focus group discussions, archival analysis of newspaper and speech sources and secondary data to assess the motivations behind these claims and their consequences. Utilising instrumentalism as the theoretical framework, the study has found that the political agency of the politicians in question was primarily driven by personal interests rather than a genuine pursuit of distributive justice. The interpretation of Hastings Banda's pursuit of national unity (1964–1994) as the foundation of the marginalisation of the Tumbuka ethnic community overlooked the Tumbuka's own tribalistic tendencies. By underscoring Banda's attempts to raise Chewa ethnic consciousness at the expense of the previously academically and professionally progressive Tumbuka, such interpretation sought to justify the scholarly regard of ethnicity as an invented notion. The transition to multiparty politics in post-Banda's regime liberalized the political landscape, which in turn intensified these claims and deepened ethnic divisions within Malawi. The study has highlighted the severe implications of these claims, including the rise of xenophobic and genocidal attitudes towards the Tumbuka, the formation of an 'unMalawian' identity among the Tumbuka, and the emergence of elitism among them. Considering the centrality of the Tumbuka politicians on conflictual ethnic relations in Malawi, the study has concluded by underscoring the regard for a broader understanding of the sources of ethnic conflict, suggesting that such conflicts often stem from more complex factors than ethnicity alone.