

Malawi

Country name (English)	Malawi
State title (English)	Republic of Malawi
Name of citizen	Malawian
Official languages	English [eng] ¹ (national language: Chichewa [nya])
Script	Roman
Romanization System	N/A
ISO-3166 code (alpha-2/alpha-3)	MW / MWI
Capital	Lilongwe
Population / Area	118,484 sq km / 22.18 million ²

Introduction

Malawi is a landlocked country in southeastern Africa, characterized by diverse terrain, including plateaus, mountains, and the expansive Lake Nyasa (known in Malawi as Lake Malawi), one of the largest lakes in Africa and a key feature of the country's geography and economy.

Prior to independence, it was known as Nyasaland and gained independence as Malawi in 1964. Malawi shares borders with Tanzania, Mozambique and Zambia.

Geographical names policy and sources

For HMG use, geographical names should be taken from official sources if they can be acquired, such as Malawi's Department of Surveys:

<https://www.lands.gov.mw/index.php/portfolio/departments-functions/departments-of-surveys>.

Geographical names are likely to be presented in English orthography, though if diacritical marks are found on such sources, these should be retained (see *Languages*, below).

The US Board on Geographic Names (BGN) [Geographic Names Server](#) can also be used as a source for names in Malawi. Additionally, the Africa Geoportal may be used as a helpful source of geospatial data and names³.

¹ ISO 639 language codes are used throughout this Factfile.

² UN data.

³ This is a source collated from multiple sources, including Esri, organisations working in Africa and crowdsourced information. It should be used as a supplementary source.

Languages

Though English is the official language of Malawi, it is not widely used as a first language and the national and most widely spoken language is Chichewa [nyɑ]. Chichewa (also seen as Chewa, the ‘chi’ prefix meaning ‘the language of’) and the second most widely spoken language, Chitumbuka [tum] (also Tumbuka), are used in schools. These languages had official status until 1968.

The orthography of Chichewa was standardised in 1973 in the *New Chichewa Orthography Rules*.

Inventory of characters (and their Unicode encodings⁴):

Though unlikely to be encountered on official mapping, both Chichewa and Chitumbuka orthography include one letter with a diacritical mark in addition to the unmodified letters of the basic Roman script: Ŵ, ŵ [Unicode encoding 0174, 0175].

Administrative structure

Malawi's administrative divisions consist of 3 regions divided into 28 districts⁵. The regions are Northern (MW-N), Central (MW-C), and Southern (MW-S): each region is headed by a regional administrator though the districts can be considered having the primary administrative function and are listed in the table below, with the parent region shown for information. The districts are all named after their administrative centre.

District	ISO 3166-2 code	Administrative Centre	Parent region	Centre location
Balaka	MW-BA	Balaka	Southern	14°59′20″S 34°57′33″E
Blantyre	MW-BL	Blantyre	Southern	15°47′13″S 35°00′50″E
Chikwawa	MW-CK	Chikwawa	Southern	16°02′31″S 34°48′07″E
Chiradzulu	MW-CR	Chiradzulu	Southern	15°41′51″S 35°11′06″E
Chitipa	MW-CT	Chitipa	Northern	09°42′17″S 33°16′27″E
Dedza	MW-DE	Dedza	Central	14°22′58″S 34°19′54″E
Dowa	MW-DO	Dowa	Central	13°39′12″S 33°56′19″E
Karonga	MW-KR	Karonga	Northern	09°56′00″S 33°56′00″E
Kasungu	MW-KS	Kasungu	Central	13°02′11″S 33°28′56″E
Likoma	MW-LK	Likoma	Northern	12°05′00″S 34°40′00″E

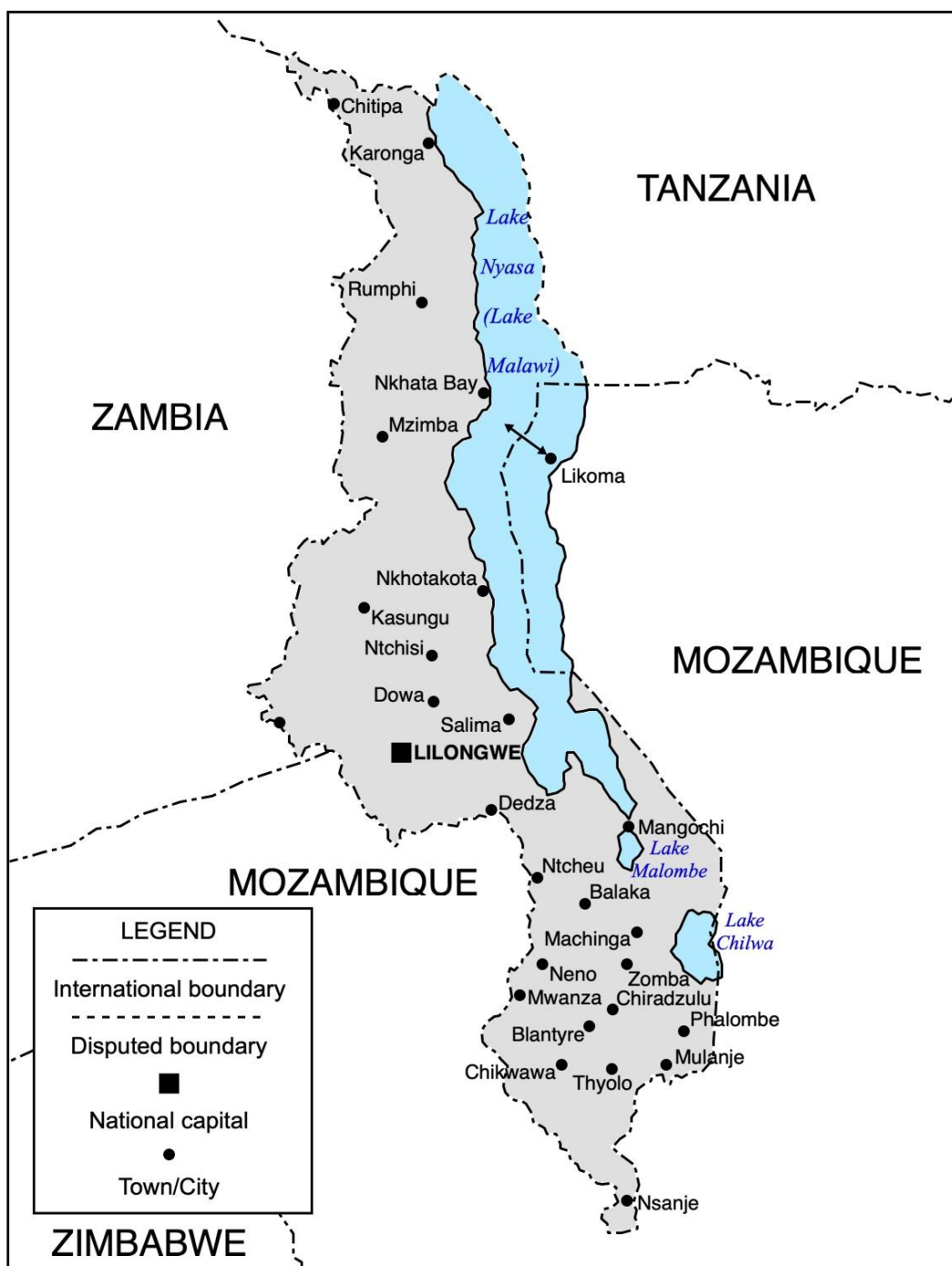
⁴ See www.unicode.org

⁵ It should be noted that some sources additionally record the cities of Mzuzu, Lilongwe and Blantyre as administrative districts separate to the area of the wider district of the same names. The 2020 census suggests these three cities plus Zomba City (i.e. a total of 32 districts).

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District	ISO 3166-2 code	Administrative Centre	Parent region	Centre location
Lilongwe	MW-LI	Lilongwe	Central	13°58'01"S 33°47'14"E
Machinga	MW-MH	Machinga	Southern	15°01'05"S 35°28'45"E
Mangochi	MW-MG	Mangochi	Southern	14°27'48"S 35°15'19"E
Mchinji	MW-MC	Mchinji	Central	13°47'46"S 32°53'22"E
Mulanje	MW-MU	Mulanje	Southern	16°01'32"S 35°30'14"E
Mwanza	MW-MW	Mwanza	Southern	15°36'35"S 34°31'21"E
Mzimba	MW-MZ	Mzimba	Northern	11°53'56"S 33°35'35"E
Neno	MW-NE	Neno	Southern	15°23'53"S 34°39'12"E
Nkhata Bay	MW-NB	Nkhata Bay	Northern	11°36'30"S 34°17'53"E
Nkhotakota	MW-NK	Nkhotakota	Central	12°55'45"S 34°17'50"E
Nsanje	MW-NS	Nsanje	Southern	16°55'00"S 35°16'00"E
Ntcheu	MW-NU	Ntcheu	Central	14°49'03"S 34°38'23"E
Ntchisi	MW-NI	Ntchisi	Central	13°22'31"S 34°00'13"E
Phalombe	MW-PH	Phalombe	Southern	15°48'23"S 35°39'02"E
Rumphi	MW-RU	Rumphi	Northern	11°01'10"S 33°51'17"E
Salima	MW-SA	Salima	Central	13°47'05"S 34°27'30"E
Thyolo	MW-TH	Thyolo	Southern	16°04'13"S 35°08'50"E
Zomba	MW-ZO	Zomba	Southern	15°23'09"S 35°19'08"E

Map of Malawi



Map produced by PCGN for illustrative purposes only, and is not to be taken necessarily as representing the views of the UK government on boundaries or political status.

Other Significant Locations

PCGN recommended name	Other names	Location	Feature Type
Chizumulu Island ⁶	Chisumulu	12°01'11"S 34°37'25"E	Island
Lake Chilwa		15°12'00"S 35°50'00"E	Saltwater lake (1,040 sq km)
Lake Nyasa (Lake Malawi)	Lake Malawi (Malawi); Lake Nyasa (Tanzania); Lago Niassa (Mozambique)	1°00'00"S 34°30'00"E	Lake (Malawi, Tanzania, Mozambique) (29,600 sq km)
Likoma Island ⁶		12°03'58"S 34°43'50"E	Island
Mount Mulanje	Mulanje Mountains	15°56'59"S 35°35'37"E	Mountain (3,002 m)
Sapitwa		15°56'55"S 35°35'26"E	Highest peak on Mount Mulanje
Zambezi River	Rio Zambeze (Mozambique)	11°22'11"S 24°18'30"E	River (Zambia, Angola, Namibia, Botswana; Zimbabwe; Mozambique)

Useful references

- Africa Geoportal: <https://www.africageoportal.com/>
- BBC Country Profile: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-13864367>
- CIA World Factbook: <https://www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/>
- Ethnologue: www.ethnologue.com (for information on languages)
- International Organization for Standardization (ISO): www.iso.org
- ISO Online Browsing Platform (OBP): <https://www.iso.org/obp/ui#home>
- Malawi administrative divisions: <https://localgov.gov.mw/councils.php>
- Malawi census 2020: <https://malawi.unfpa.org/sites/default/files/resource-pdf/2018%20Census%20Preliminary%20Report.pdf>
- PCGN Country Names list: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/country-names>
- Unicode: www.unicode.org
- US Board on Geographic Names GEOnet Names Server: <https://geonames.nga.mil/geonames/GNSHome/welcome.html>

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⁶ Likoma Island and Chizumulu Island are separate exclaves of Malawi (i.e. they are each surrounded by Mozambique territorial waters). They are administered together as Likoma District.