

Fair elections key to stability in Mozambique

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Mozambicans go to the polls on 15 October 2019 in presidential, parliamentary and provincial elections. These are taking place in a tense political context and are expected to be the toughest yet for the ruling party Frelimo. This is owing to a declining economy (the result of large-scale corruption), the aftermath of devastating cyclones and insecurity in the north of the country. The elections are also a test for new decentralisation laws passed earlier this year.

Key findings

- ▶ The October 2019 elections take place in Mozambique in a tense political atmosphere owing to fallout from the hidden debt scandal, the aftermath of devastating cyclones and a growing insurgency in the north of the country.
- ▶ Peace talks with Renamo have achieved tangible results, but all Renamo fighters have not yet been integrated into security forces.
- ▶ The results of local elections in October 2018 show this could be a close race.
- ▶ Frelimo is accused of trying to manipulate the outcome of the elections by inflating voter registration numbers in its strongholds.
- ▶ Local elections in October 2018 were also marred by claims of irregularities, notably during the tabulation of votes.
- ▶ Thousands of local observers are expected to play a key role in the elections.
- ▶ The elections will be a test for the new electoral laws that were passed in response to Renamo's call for greater decentralisation.

Recommendations

For the government:

- ▶ In the run-up to the elections, the government should refrain from abusing state resources and media in favour of the ruling party. Aid for cyclone victims should not be used for campaign purposes.
- ▶ The disarmament and reintegration of Renamo fighters into all branches of the security forces should take place as speedily as possible.
- ▶ The government should allow independent media and researchers to investigate the violence in Cabo Delgado province.

For the National Election Commission:

- ▶ The National Election Commission should allow an independent audit of the voters' roll to address allegations that the registration process was manipulated.

- ▶ The commission should allow observers – both local and international – access to all the various stages of the voting and the compilation of results on voting day.

For SADC and the AU:

- ▶ The SADC Electoral Observation Mission should ensure that the revised SADC Principles and Guidelines Governing Democratic Elections are respected by speaking out against any suspected fraud.
- ▶ The AU should ensure that the African Charter on Democracy, Governance and Elections is implemented through the work of its observers and by speaking out against any abuses of the charter.
- ▶ SADC should place the violence in northern Mozambique on its agenda.

Introduction

Mozambicans go to the polls on 15 October 2019 to elect a new president, new members of Parliament and new members of provincial assemblies, as well as provincial governors. These elections are expected to be the toughest yet for ruling party Frelimo (*Frente de Libertação de Moçambique*, or Mozambique Liberation Front), which has been in power since independence in 1976.

The results of municipal elections in October 2018, which saw Frelimo winning with only 51.8% of the total votes, are an indication that the party will have to work harder to maintain its lead. Opposition parties and some civil society organisations have warned against attempts by Frelimo to use the incumbency to its advantage, notably by manipulating the registration process, which came to an end in May 2019.

Several factors play an important role in these elections.

Firstly, the balance of power between Frelimo and Renamo (*Resistência Nacional Moçambicana*, or Mozambican National Resistance) could be affected by the ongoing talks between the two parties and the process of disarming former Renamo fighters, which remains a bone of contention. Renamo rejected the results of the previous elections in 2014 and only agreed to participate in these elections after the government had adopted a number of electoral reforms.

The growing number of attacks by armed insurgents in Cabo Delgado could influence the elections

Secondly, the government's handling of the aftermath of the two cyclones that hit the country earlier this year – the biggest in the country's history and among the most deadly cyclones ever seen in Africa – is key. Owing to the damage done by cyclones Idai in Beira and surrounding areas and Kenneth in Cabo Delgado province, voter registration in those areas was slow and abstention could be higher than elsewhere.

Thirdly, the country is still reeling from the discovery of the so-called 'hidden debt' of US\$2.2 billion. Several high-ranking politicians have been charged with fraud

linked to the scandal, including former finance minister Manuel Chang, who was arrested in South Africa in December 2018. An initial decision in May 2019 by South Africa to extradite Chang to Mozambique instead of the United States (US), where he is also wanted, raised a lot of criticism from civil society in Mozambique. The government was accused of wanting to minimise the fallout from the scandal in the run-up to the elections. The extradition to Mozambique was overturned in July 2019 by the new South African justice minister, Ronald Lamola.¹

Finally, the growing number of attacks by armed insurgents in the northernmost Cabo Delgado province is expected to influence the elections. An estimated 20 000 people have had to flee their homes owing to the attacks and many more might stay away out of fear. The fact that this threat has escalated since the first attacks at the end of 2017 could also damage the reputation of the government and the ruling party. Cabo Delgado is traditionally seen as a Frelimo stronghold.

The aim of this research report is to look at the process in the run-up to the elections in Mozambique in October 2019, with a view to assess how the various issues will impact the vote. The aim is also to reflect the views of election experts and observers in Mozambique on the credibility of the polls and to look at possible outcomes.

A history of troubled elections

Mozambique's first multi-party elections were held in 1994, following the end of the civil war in 1992. General elections then took place in 1999, 2004, 2009 and 2014 – all of them won by the former liberation movement Frelimo.

These polls have often been marred by boycotts and violence, as well as accusations of fraud and corruption against the ruling party. Participation in the elections has also been low, falling to only 45% of the population in 2009 from almost 90% of those registered in 1994. (Exceptionally, turnout for the October 2018 municipal elections was 58%, a huge jump from the 46% of the previous municipal polls in 2013. This could indicate that greater participation in the 2019 elections can be expected, compared to previous years.)

Historically, elections in Mozambique were a two-horse race between Frelimo and Renamo, adversaries

during the civil war. This was until the emergence of the *Movimento Democrático de Moçambique* (Democratic Movement of Mozambique [MDM]) in 2009. The MDM was excluded from participating in several constituencies during legislative elections in that year. According to some observers, this gave it ‘the status of martyr’² and allowed it to campaign on this ticket for the 2013 local elections.

In these municipal elections the MDM managed to win in three of the country’s biggest cities – Beira, Nampula and Quelimane – and in Gurué. At that stage the expectation was that the MDM would grow to become a major force in the country. Renamo, however, had boycotted these local elections, complaining that the playing field was not level and that Frelimo had an unfair advantage, given the structure of electoral bodies.

As part of the peace deal, Frelimo agreed on reforms of the electoral system

Renamo then returned to its military base in Sofala province and waged a war that took hundreds of lives and disrupted traffic on the main north–south highway of the country. At the time analysts³ feared that a civil war could break out again if Renamo continued to keep its troops in its stronghold in Gorongosa. One commentator believed the situation ‘threatened not only the country’s socio-economic stability but also the political stability of the SADC region as a whole’.⁴

However, this did not happen. Lengthy negotiations between Frelimo and Renamo eventually led to an agreement and later a ceasefire in September 2014 that allowed Renamo to participate in the elections of October that year.

As part of the peace deal, Frelimo agreed on reforms of the electoral system, such as multi-party representation at all levels in the management of elections, not only in the National Electoral Commission (*Comissão Nacional Eleitoral* [CNE]). Renamo would henceforth also be represented in the management bodies from a national to a district level – both within the leadership and as part of the technical staff. These reforms also saw the inclusion of party-appointed polling station officials for the first time.

The 2014 general elections witnessed a drop in support for MDM leader Daviz Simango, who only got 6% of the votes compared to 8.6% in 2009. Renamo leader Afonso Dhlakama got 37% of the votes and Frelimo’s Filipe Nyusi 57%. In provincial elections, Renamo got more votes than Frelimo in Tete, Zambezia and Sofala.⁵

Citing irregularities, Renamo then rejected the election results⁶ and refused to disarm until its demands around reforms were met. Renamo’s main political platform centred on decentralisation – a strong argument for its supporters, given the fact that governors in the three provinces where Renamo had won were still appointed by the Frelimo-led central government.

After several more rounds of talks a ceasefire was signed in December 2016. An agreement was reached on new election regulations. These were adopted by Parliament in July 2018 and implemented during the October 2018 municipal elections.

The regulations changed the way mayors were elected – as head of the list of the winning party and not a 50%+1 victory for an individual. This is aimed at ensuring greater decentralisation and party representation at the local level. The real strength of the new electoral laws will, however, be put to the test during the general elections of October 2019, when the constitutional reforms to provincial elections will kick in for the first time.

Renamo still not fully disarmed

As noted, the threat of a return to civil war in Mozambique was averted thanks to negotiations that started in 2013. An agreement was signed in extremis in September 2014, followed by another ceasefire agreement at the end of 2016.

Despite these agreements, the demobilisation, disarmament and reintegration (DDR) of Renamo soldiers have still not been completed. This has become one of the main issues under discussion in peace talks between the government and the former rebel group.

In the first week of May 2019, Nyusi again called upon Renamo to disarm all its remaining fighters so that the elections can be held in peace.⁷ One of the main sticking points revolves around the integration of Renamo members into the State Intelligence and Security Services, which has stalled.

In an interview in early June 2019 Renamo leader Ossufo Momade said if Frelimo really wanted national reconciliation, it would accept Renamo members in the intelligence services.⁹ According to confidential reports, so far only 14 Renamo officers have been appointed in senior positions in the armed forces and 10 in the police, a situation that is unacceptable to Renamo. Momade said a final agreement was expected in August 2019.

Meanwhile, in the posturing ahead of the October 2019 polls, political parties blamed one another for the breakdown in the disarmament process.

'In order to have a credible [election] process we need Renamo to demilitarise, we need peace and stability, because that influences the process. But Renamo doesn't want to demilitarise before the elections,' said Frelimo spokesperson and MP Ciafadine Manasse in an interview.⁹ Frelimo claims that Renamo refused to hand over a complete list of its combatants to the government. Renamo denies this.

Renamo spokesperson Jose Manteigas meanwhile said the fact that 'no Renamo member used a gun' since the truce was signed between the government and Dhlakama in 2016 was proof that the party was committed to disarmament.

'Frelimo are the ones with big problems right now, huge corruption, theft ... they're trying to clean up their image with the international community and ... trying to use the peace process to accuse Renamo,' he said.¹⁰ According to him, Nyusi was merely using the disarmament issue to 'distract the international community'.

Political parties have blamed each other for the breakdown in the disarmament process

Some political analysts in Mozambique, however, believe Renamo is likely to hold on to some of its weapons and its stronghold up until the elections, in order to keep this as a bargaining chip should things go badly wrong with the elections.¹¹

In June 2019 information emerged about an alleged internal coup by Renamo soldiers, a supposed 'military wing', against Momade.¹² Such rumours could damage

both the party's image and Momade's chances of doing well in the presidential polls.

Analysts point out that Mozambique's leaders have shown considerable maturity and have 'affirmed the government's determination to put the interests of the country ahead of personal and/or party interests'¹³ in the negotiations with Renamo. Both Guebuza and Nyusi have shown willingness to choose compromise and dialogue above war with Renamo. These gains, more than five years after renewed hostilities broke out, seem, for now, irreversible.

Thus, while the outstanding pockets of armed Renamo fighters are still a cause for concern, given that Renamo is the main opposition party in the country, indications are that a final agreement will be signed in the weeks just ahead of the polls of 15 October. Momade is already campaigning for the presidential elections and a boycott by Renamo is highly unlikely.

Cyclones leave hundreds of thousands displaced

On 14 and 15 March 2019, Mozambique, parts of Zimbabwe and Malawi were hit by one of the worst cyclones ever in the country and one of the worst in Africa to date. According to estimates by the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), 600 Mozambicans died and 1.85 million people were left homeless and in need of humanitarian assistance.¹⁴ Cyclone Idai brought destruction to Beira, Mozambique's second biggest city, and other parts of Sofala province, as well as parts of Zambezia, Manica and Inhambane.

Little over one month later, on 24 April, another cyclone, named Kenneth, hit Cabo Delgado province. Although fewer lives were lost in this largely rural area, 374 000 people were left homeless.

Civil society groups¹⁵ fear that large-scale destruction and displacement, notably in Beira, could affect participation in these elections. In addition, some in the opposition fear the government could use the humanitarian aid that has been coming into Mozambique for its own propaganda purposes in the run-up to the polls. On the other hand, opposition parties have also made use of this crisis to accuse the government of not doing enough.

Parliament set up a commission in early April to investigate allegations that some of the emergency aid was being diverted for party-political purposes.

Preliminary results of the voter registration process showed that the lowest turnout was in Sofala, with just over 20% of people registered, because of Cyclone Idai.¹⁶ Final results published in June 2019, however, showed that 73% of potential voters had registered in Sofala, with 98% registration in Cabo Delgado, the province that was the worst hit by Cyclone Kenneth.

Yet opposition parties and civil society observers have accused the CNE of artificially inflating the registration figures in provinces where Frelimo has a majority – an accusation that could cast a doubt over these figures.

Clearly, the cyclones caused immense damage and human trauma. The events also focused international attention on Mozambique ahead of the elections and could have a serious impact on voting patterns in affected areas. Whether they will have an impact at a national level will depend on how the ruling party and the opposition strategise around messaging during the election campaign.

Economic slowdown following the hidden debt scandal

The October 2019 elections in Mozambique are also taking place in an economic environment marked by slow growth and economic hardship owing to the discovery of so-called ‘hidden debt’ in 2016. This massive corruption scandal involved loans of US\$2.2 billion taken out by the government without the knowledge of Parliament and with the complicity of corrupt bankers in Europe and Russia. Up to 100 people were involved in the scandal, which has affected the economy and politics of the country.

The loans were ostensibly to buy tuna fishing boats and navy patrol vessels, but it has emerged that at least US\$200 million was siphoned off by bankers and high-ranking officials, including former finance minister Chang.

From being one of the fastest-growing countries in Africa, with promising prospects for development thanks to its vast reserves of coal, gemstones and other natural resources, as well as the discovery of massive gas reserves in the north of the country,

Mozambique’s economy and international image plunged to an all-time low.

Compared to average growth rates of over 7% between 2011 and 2015, Mozambique’s gross domestic (GDP) has only grown at around 3% since the hidden debt scandal was uncovered.¹⁷

The opposition clearly aims to capitalise on the resultant crisis to boost its support in the elections. According to Renamo, it plans to show voters that ‘bad policies and bad management’ are pushing Mozambicans into poverty, while they should have been looking forward to a brighter future thanks to the discovery of natural gas.

The October 2019 elections are taking place in an economic environment marked by slow growth

‘We have an abundance of arable land, but we import almost everything from South Africa. This is because of the corrupt mentality of Frelimo,’ said Renamo spokesperson José Manteigas.¹⁸

Other opposition parties are also likely to use this as part of their campaign slogans. Even if the current government of Nyusi were to argue that the debt had been incurred during a previous administration, this could still be damaging to Frelimo.

Liquid natural gas creates high expectations

On 18 June 2019 US firm Anadarko signed a contract to invest US\$25 billion in Mozambique’s gas reserves off the northern coast in the province of Cabo Delgado. This is the biggest direct foreign investment in Mozambique to date.

At the signing ceremony, the company said the investment in natural gas would ‘double the country’s GDP’, create 5 000 direct jobs and employ 45 000 people indirectly. Production of liquefied natural gas is expected to start in 2024 and the government hopes to rake in up to US\$3 billion annually in profits by the early 2030s. Mozambique would then become the third biggest exporter of natural gas in the world.

‘With this project the peasant children will become doctors, the children of miners lawyers,’ Nyusi said at

the Anadarko ceremony¹⁹ – a speech clearly directed at the electorate.

There is a danger, however, that these high hopes for a radical improvement in people's lives will be dashed if corruption persists and the government does not put in place policies for the equitable distribution of the wealth generated by the gas plants.

Mozambique could then easily succumb to the so-called resource curse that has plagued many developing countries: governments and ruling parties get rich through lucrative deals with multinationals, ignoring the needs of the majority of the population, thereby leading to greater underdevelopment and poverty than before the discovery of these resources.

In the run-up to the election, opposition parties have echoed this sentiment.

'The management of natural resources is not inclusive. People are not benefiting from these revenues that should be used for schools and services,' MDM chief whip Lutero Simango said in an interview. 'More than 65% of people live in rural areas, but we don't work the land because there are no conditions for them to do so, no infrastructure to take goods to the market.'²⁰

If corruption persists, Mozambique could easily succumb to the so-called 'resource curse'

In a study entitled 'Can natural gas improve Mozambique's development?', published in 2017, the Institute for Security Studies (ISS)²¹ found that even if Mozambique managed to achieve growth rates thanks to natural gas and other resources, the absolute number of poor people would still increase. This is owing to exceptionally high population growth.

By 2040 the population of Mozambique is estimated to reach 53 million, the 10th biggest in Africa. Of this, 38% will be younger than 15 – a youth bulge that will make it extremely difficult for the government to provide services and maintain stability. Meanwhile inequality is expected to increase.

The ISS research showed that regardless of the outcome of the natural gas production and unless radical policy

changes are made, 'it will be difficult for Mozambique to ensure long term inclusive growth and development'.

The odds are stacked against Mozambicans, and everything possible should be done to ensure that the correct policies are followed to at least try to reduce poverty and increase literacy rates, according to the 2017 study.

Clearly, if something seriously goes wrong in the next few years, such as the threat of war or a return to political instability, these plans for greater development will be even more difficult to implement.

Disarray over the insurgency in Cabo Delgado

In a confidential report²² by the United Nations (UN) Department of Safety and Security, published on 10 June 2019, the organisation concludes:

There is little doubt about the presence and activity of a small group of extremist Islamists [in Cabo Delgado] that have grown in the last few years and adopted a violent agenda with the main objective being to return to a 'true path of Islam' ... [However,] different motives and incentives derived from many multi-layered drivers of insecurity and vested interests in the area are complicating the threat environment.

The wave of brutal attacks in the northern Cabo Delgado province of Mozambique since the end of 2017 is a huge cause for concern for the country and the Southern African region. Since October 2017 an estimated 200 people have been killed in attacks across the province. In 2018 the office of the UN World Food Programme²³ in Pemba, Cabo Delgado estimated that around 20 000 people had been displaced by the violence and that the number of those in need was growing.

Yet there seems to be uncertainty over how to interpret these attacks and what the responses should be. At this stage there are at least five possible theories about the root causes of the insurgency, many of which overlap.

- Several academics and experts in Mozambique have said that the security threat in Cabo Delgado is linked to the abundant natural resources in the area and the sentiment among young, marginalised and jobless Mozambicans that they are being sidelined from

this huge potential source of wealth.²⁴ They point to the fact that several small-scale protests, such as those against the eviction of informal miners by the multinational Gemfields or those calling for jobs in the liquid natural gas sector, have largely gone unnoticed.²⁵ Some protestors have complained about being thrown off their land by powerful politicians who are profiting from the rise in property prices thanks to the new gas installations in the area.²⁶

- Many commentators also point to instances of religious extremism, similar to those in the Sahel, the Lake Chad Basin, Somalia and Kenya. Local Islamic clerics have said in interviews that as far back as 2014–2015 young people in Cabo Delgado began to be radicalised. They started their own mosques and rejected the authority of local imams.
- The attacks have also been linked to rampant trafficking in this part of Africa. Researchers believe that the violent attacks provide a cover for traffickers who exploit the lawlessness of the area to smuggle drugs, wildlife, arms,²⁷ etc. This is similar to the trafficking in the Sahel, particularly northern Mali, which has been linked to the terrorism threat. The fact that the attacks are still on a relatively small scale, without explosives and sophisticated weapons, however, in a sense refutes the idea that these armed groups are receiving major financing from traffickers.
- The role of local politics and powerful business people in Cabo Delgado has also been mentioned as one of the root causes of the instability. Linked to the trafficking, some experts believe that local business people had strong links with the Guebuza regime, and this link has now become tenuous. The instability in Cabo Delgado is ‘a way for the business people to show Nyusi he needs them’, said one civil society activist.²⁸
- Finally, another possible explanation for the instability is a growing link between the armed attackers and Islamist extremists from countries such as Tanzania, the Comoros, the eastern Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) and even further afield. In June 2019 the Islamic State claimed responsibility for some of the attacks, but experts have expressed doubts over these claims.

So far, the government’s response has been twofold: an increased security presence in the area and an attempt to downplay the threat as merely the work of ‘bandits’ or *malfeitores*.

There have also been several arrests by the Mozambican security forces and two public trials. Altogether 80 people received sentences of between 12 and 40 years on charges of murder, organised crime, possession of illegal weapons and attacks against the state. In April 2019, 113 people were acquitted for lack of evidence. According to reports, another 275 people were being held awaiting trial.²⁹

The government’s response has been an increased security presence in Cabo Delgado

In some instances local communities have decided to fight back and have reportedly organised their own vigilante groups, not trusting the security forces to protect them. More hawkish opposition politicians have also accused the government of not doing enough.

Renamo’s Manteigas, for example, said the Mozambican military should ‘do with the armed groups what they tried to do with us’.³⁰ He added:

Our position is that the armed forces should be deployed to eradicate those groups. Because in this country if a group of citizens go out to protest we see military equipment as if we are in Beirut. So I think government should use that power to eradicate the attacks ... Our president [Momade] said there are other forces in the country that can help to eradicate and we don’t know why, but as usual the government lacks military strategy.

MDM chief whip Lutero Simango said his party believed that the inadequate response from government was largely owing to its poor intelligence. Any response should involve neighbouring countries, as well as the Southern African Development Community (SADC). ‘Many SADC countries are involved, such as the DRC, Uganda, Tanzania,’ he said.³¹

Simango believes that if there is no regional response the threat will spread and reach southward to Beira and

eventually to Maputo. 'Once they get over the mountains it is too late.'

How the government reacts in this tense atmosphere in the run-up to elections will decide the future of this region. Africa security experts have warned that government responses in the beginning stages of this kind of insurgency are crucial in determining how the threat will evolve. ISS research, for example, has found that the crackdown by the Nigerian army against Boko Haram and the killing of its charismatic leader Mohamed Yusuf in 2009 led to the radicalisation of the group.

A criminal justice approach to terrorism, where terror suspects are arrested and granted a fair trial, could have a much better success rate, it is believed.³²

It is still unclear to what extent the attacks in northern Mozambique will affect the elections from a national point of view. Cabo Delgado is relatively under populated, with Pemba the biggest city with close to 60 000 registered voters, compared to Maputo with 700 000 voters.

Certainly, the fact that the government seems in disarray and unable to stem the alarming threat is having a negative impact on its image. On the ground and from a practical point of view, the insecurity could prevent tens of thousands of people from voting.

How the government reacts in this tense atmosphere in the run-up to elections will decide the future of this region

The Institute for Multi-party Democracy (IMD), which is part of the Sala da Paz network of civil society organisations monitoring the elections, believes that this will be the case. It says that during the registration period at least five registration centres were unable to open for the entire time because of the insecurity.

The IMD had approached the CNE to ensure that people in the 11 displacement centres would be able to register and vote elsewhere than in their home villages, many of which had been destroyed, said IMD project coordinator Egidio Guambe.³³

The fact that a registration centre was attacked in early May 2019 and six people killed showed that the

attackers were starting to target 'symbols of the state' and would make people fearful of going to the polls, said one observer.

However, others have pointed out that the registration centre was in fact closed on the day the attack happened. It was also the only attack on a registration centre, with more than 7 000 registration centres operating during the 46 days of registration.

Going to vote: new decentralisation laws put to the test

In many ways, the October 2019 elections will put Mozambique's democracy to the test. This is not only because the voting takes place in a strained environment, with various new elements influencing the country's socio-economic and political situations, as noted above – it will also be a test for a new political system that promises greater decentralisation.

As noted earlier, over the years the main concern of Renamo and Dhlakama has been the fact that there is no true decentralisation of power to provinces in Mozambique. Despite the fact that Renamo had won the provincial elections in three of the 10 provinces in 2014, the governors of these provinces were still centrally appointed.

After many rounds of negotiations between the government and Renamo, a new electoral law was thus adopted by Parliament on 18 July 2018 and another set in June 2019 for the 2019 elections.

The new decentralisation legislation provides for three levels of citizens' decentralised representation: at the level of municipalities, districts and provinces. For each of these levels, a legislative assembly is elected. The head of the list of the winning political party in each of these cases then automatically becomes the mayor, district administrator or governor.

Mayors are no longer elected in a separate ballot and both governors and district administrators will come from the winning political party and not be centrally appointed as in the past. However, the election of district assemblies and administrators only starts in 2024.

These changes were first implemented during the October 2018 municipal elections, where mayors were elected through the list system with voters only voting

on a single ballot. In the past, voters were asked to vote separately for the municipal assemblies and for mayors, who needed to get 50+1 percentage points to win. This new system created some confusion, since voters did not always know which individual headed the party list and who would become mayors, noted the Electoral Institute for Sustainable Democracy in Africa (EISA).³⁴

It is at the provincial level where the new decentralisation laws will really make a difference politically, if they are correctly implemented. The October 2019 elections will see, for the first time, the election of governors at the head of the list of the winning party. Therefore, if the opposition gets a majority in any one of the 10 provinces, it will occupy the position of governor – a post no longer appointed by central government.

Mozambique has shown that it can overcome major obstacles through dialogue

Yet there are fears that the ruling party is trying to dilute the newly legislated decentralisation. In early 2019 the government proposed legislation that would see a new position created at a provincial level that would, in essence, duplicate the role of the elected governor. The new ‘provincial secretary of state’ would be centrally appointed. Analysts, who refer to this as Frelimo’s ‘centralisation proposals’, fear that this is a ruse to bypass the newly adopted decentralisation mechanisms.

The *Mozambique Political Process Bulletin*,³⁵ edited by well-known Mozambique scholar Joseph Hanlon, wrote that in terms of the new legislation, the governor and his/her provincial executive council would in future be mirrored by an almost identical structure headed by the appointed provincial secretary.

The bulletin notes there are also major omissions and uncertainties in the proposed legislation, notably concerning the separation of powers and the competencies of both the governor and the secretary of state:

Under the current [old] law, the governor has huge and arbitrary powers over money, land, and appointments. In negotiating decentralisation, the

Figure 18: Mozambique provinces



late Renamo head Afonso Dhlakama had expected Renamo elected governors to retain most of these powers, while the Frelimo government intends to simply transfer those powers to the appointed secretary of state.³⁶

True decentralisation is crucial if the acrimony between Frelimo and Renamo over the issue of provinces – which has turned into violent confrontation so many times in the past few years – is to be resolved. Healthy competition between provinces that are governed by different parties should be possible within a democracy.

Mozambique has shown that it can overcome major obstacles in the years following the end of the civil war through dialogue and compromise. If the government insists on pushing back on its commitment to a decentralised system, these gains could be reversed.

Alleged fraud during the 2018 municipal elections

The local elections on 10 October 2018 were highly contested and could be seen as a foretaste of what might happen in the October 2019 general, provincial and presidential elections.

The results of the municipal elections were as follows:

- Frelimo: 51.78%, or 44 out of 53 municipalities
- Renamo: 38.9%, or eight municipalities
- MDM: 8.5%, or just one municipality, Beira

A leading analyst of Mozambique's elections has pointed out that over the past several elections a trend has emerged whereby the ruling party usually gets four or five fewer percentage points in general elections than it obtained in municipal elections the previous year.³⁷ That means that if Frelimo sticks to its historical trajectory and its score dips by a few per cent compared to the local elections, it could, for the first time, get less than 50%. A possible run-off between the Frelimo and Renamo candidates is thus also not excluded, given these results.

Voter turnout in the 2018 local election was among the highest to date. Altogether 5.3 million people turned up to vote, which is 58% of the voters, compared to 45% in 2014. Higher turnout for the 2019 elections can thus be expected.

While in the past, election fraud mainly consisted of stuffing ballot boxes, during the 2018 local elections irregularities also happened at the tabulation stage

Opposition parties and observer missions meanwhile have alleged widespread election fraud. Observers noted that, while in the past, election fraud mainly consisted of stuffing ballot boxes or the CNE's nullifying opposition votes, during the 2018 local elections irregularities also happened at the tabulation stage where incorrect figures were entered on voting sheets at the district and central level.

In its statement following the elections, EISA said that while campaigning was largely peaceful and voters were generally allowed to cast their votes freely,

the counting process was marred by irregularities, violence and excessive use of force by the security forces in some municipalities, and the intermediate results aggregation, whilst largely regular in most municipalities, are alleged to have serious discrepancies in some municipalities.³⁸

EISA added that in many cases observers were barred from observing the counting process following the vote, a contravention of the electoral law.

Votar Mozambique, a collective of six civil society organisations that had over 600 observers at polling stations across the country, agreed that while the

Frelimo
51.78%

Renamo
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8.5%

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pre-electoral phase and the actual voting went relatively well, with little evidence of fraud, there was evidence of vote rigging during the counting and tabulation period.

Guilherme Mbilana, project coordinator of Votar Mozambique, said that counting at the polling stations, at the district level and at the CNE, was compromised. 'There was a lack of transparency, we can say that it was not a credible process,' he said.³⁹

Votar Mozambique had proof of several instances where vote counting was overseen by delegates and observers from civil society, but when the final results were transmitted to the CNE for the central tabulation process, the results on the voting sheets differed from the ones that had been distributed to observers, he added.

'Frelimo is betting that civil society will remain passive'

Manteigas believes Renamo could have won many more municipalities, including Matola, an urban hub adjacent to Maputo, if it had not been for the fraud:

They falsified the results, they expelled our delegates in polling stations and our delegates were beaten up by the armed forces. Some have been killed in last year's election campaign. Frelimo uses public resources to beat Renamo members. They intimidate Renamo members; that's why Frelimo always wins because the results are all fraudulent.⁴⁰

In several cases the opposition objected to the results and tried to get them overturned by the Constitutional Court. Only in one case, in Marromeu in Sofala province, did the court order a rerun on 22 November because ballot papers had been confiscated by the police and electoral officials.

In the rerun, however, it was alleged that officials again falsified results at the district level after having banned observers and media. The results showed several anomalies – in one instance 811 people voted while only 800 had registered.

There was also a massive jump in voting percentages – to over 90% at one polling station – while observers estimated that only 48% of people on average voted

in the Marromeu municipality. In the end Frelimo was confirmed as the winning party by 772 votes.

The *Mozambique Political Process Bulletin* believes that the fraud in Marromeu does not bode well for the October 2019 elections.⁴¹ In its analysis of the Marromeu dispute, the bulletin wrote:

Free, fair and transparent elections next year depend on the response of the CC [Constitutional Council] and CNE now, and more importantly on whether or not Mozambican civil society and the international community choose to respond. Frelimo is betting that civil society will remain passive. And it is betting that the international community is less interested now in governance, secret debt and elections, and only interested in gas and mineral investments by its companies – and thus will continue to work with a re-elected Filipe Nyusi and Frelimo.⁴²

Serious doubts over the 2019 registration process

Registration for the October 2019 elections closed at the end of May 2019, with 12.7 million voters registering. This number includes the 3.9 million voters in municipal areas who registered for last year's local elections and do not need to register again. Observers estimate that 90% of potential voters have registered.⁴³

Following the registration, the CNE allocated the number of seats per province that will make up the National Assembly. Observers and the opposition have noted a number of serious anomalies. This includes far higher registration rates in ruling party strongholds, which in turn would lead to more seats in Parliament for Frelimo.

According to the final figures released by the CNE (see Table 1), there are considerable changes to the number of voters in ruling party strongholds, notably in Gaza province, compared to opposition strongholds such as Nampula, Zambezia and Sofala.

In Gaza province a total of 1 166 000 people registered, compared to the figures given by the 2017 population census of only 750 000 voting-age adults. This has a major impact on the allocation of parliamentary seats, which is done by calculating the number of registered voters in each province and dividing them by the 248 seats available. Two seats are for Mozambicans in the Diaspora, both in Africa and the rest of the world.

Table 1: Voter registration 2019 and 2014

Provinces	Census* Voting age adults	CNE Voting age adults	CNE Voting age adults as % of population	Registered in 2014	Registered in 2019	Seats in parliament 2014	Seats in parliament 2019
Niassa	845 219	894 930	44%	615 258	653 541	14	13
Cabo Delgado	1 152 447	1 176 752	48%	964 071	1 164 863	22	23
Nampula	2 860 389	2 793 912	46%	2 079 129	2 320 748	47	45
Zambezia	2 565 263	2 098 542	38%	1 948 859	2 072 527	45	41
Tete	1 315 698	1 311 683	47%	971 644	1 079 320	22	21
Manica	966 553	949 279	46%	712 938	890 881	16	17
Sofala	1 122 142	1 149 184	48%	926 746	1 010 825	21	20
Inhambane	739 408	799 453	51%	598 276	665 591	14	13
Gaza	706 519	1 144 337	76%	591 194	1 166 011	14	22
Maputo Province	977 933	1 161 225	56%	757 594	1 002 430	17	20
Maputo City	556 722	736 731	62%	708 812	696 874	16	14
Total	13 862 475	14 166 317	48%	10 874 328	12 720 483	250**	250**

* 2017 census, with 2,8% growth to 2019

** 248 parliamentary seats plus 1 seat for the Diaspora in Africa and 1 seat for the Diaspora in the rest of the world

Source: *Mozambique Political Process Bulletin* – General elections 2019, no 32, 10 June 2019

(In the 2014 presidential election, Dhlakama won more than 50% in two provinces, Sofala [56%] and Zambézia [53%], and had the most votes in three other provinces, Tete and Nampula [both with just under 50%], and Manica [48%]. Nyusi's highest percentages in 2014 were in Gaza [94%], Cabo Delgado [78%] and Inhambane [76%]. In 2014 Manica had the closest presidential race of any province, with 48.4% for Dhlakama and 47.8% for Nyusi.)⁴⁴

Hanlon provocatively asked in an editorial in June 2019: 'Who took Gaza's children?',⁴⁵ since, given this calculation, only 20% of people in Gaza are under the voting age, while on average half of the Mozambican population are underage. In opposition strongholds such as Zambezia the registration process by CNE showed almost 60% were children.

As a result of the controversial registration process of May 2019, of the 248 seats distributed per province, Gaza (a Frelimo stronghold) now gets eight extra seats while Nampula, Zambezia and Sofala (traditionally

Renamo strongholds) lose seven seats. This redistribution was approved by the Frelimo members of the CNE by 11 to five. The opposition complained that this inflated registration was an example of gerrymandering by Frelimo.⁴⁶

The registration process was problematic, which could seriously impact the credibility of the polls

Besides the inflation of the Gaza registration numbers, the *Mozambique Political Process Bulletin* also notes that the CNE has taken unfair advantage of decimal numbers in its allocations of seats for the National Assembly. Owing to this method of calculating seats, Maputo, traditionally a stronghold of the ruling party, was given one extra seat, while opposition strongholds lost a seat:

Maputo province has a coefficient of 19.46. The decimal part, 0.46, is closest to 0.50, so the extra

seat is given to Maputo province. If the so-called d'Hondt method was used, as in some other elections, Maputo Province wouldn't get an extra seat. Instead 1 seat extra would be allocated to Nampula (46 instead of 45) and Zambezia (42 instead of 41) and 1 seat less each to Inhambane (12 instead of 13) and Gaza (21 instead of 22).⁴⁷

The law does not stipulate the use of the d'Hondt method and therefore the CNE always uses the direct proportionality with the decimal adjustment if and when needed.

Clearly, the registration process was problematic in many ways. This could have a serious impact on the credibility of the polls in favour of Frelimo.

A free and fair electoral system?

The voters' roll

In many elections in Africa where the fairness of the polls is contested, the voters' roll is usually a major bone of contention. Opposition parties often allege that the voters' roll is stuffed with fictitious voters to give the incumbent an unfair advantage.

This has been the case in Mozambique as well. Following complaints, opposition parties have managed to gain access to the voters' roll since 2013, but in a closed PDF format rather than an excel spreadsheet.

One elections expert says this makes closer scrutiny of the roll very difficult.⁴⁸ He believes the fact that Mozambican political parties insist on drawing up a new voters' roll for each election is hugely costly and problematic, but there is no political will to keep the roll from one election to the next and simply 'clean it up'.

The electoral commission

Political parties have been at odds about the independence of the CNE for a long time. The CNE is currently made up of representatives of the main political parties based on their representation in Parliament. Currently, that means Frelimo and its allies have 11 of the 17 available seats. This gives it a major advantage when it comes to decision-making on crucial issues.

Frelimo, however, denies that it is using the CNE to influence the outcome of elections. 'Frelimo always wanted a non-partisan electoral management system

with technocrats,' Frelimo spokesperson Caifadine Manasse said in early May 2019. He said Renamo and the MDM wanted a 'politicised' system and were using this to cast doubt upon the credibility of the process.⁴⁹

Since 1993 there have been seven different configurations of electoral commissions. The latest multi-party agreement, following the 2014 deal between the government and Renamo, means that the commission is no longer taking decisions on the basis of consensus, but always along party lines.

Thousands of election observers this year again applied to observe both the voting and the registration process

In every vote, the ruling party will always have at least a majority of one, even if party affiliation – according to the electoral laws – should not play a role in the decisions of the commission.⁵⁰ This practice has dented the credibility of the CNE, many believe.

Finally, while in many countries the head of the electoral commission can be the object of considerable criticism by the opposition, especially in cases of alleged vote-rigging, this has not been the case in Mozambique.

Election observation groups such as Votar Mozambique say⁵¹ they do have regular interaction with the head of the CNE, Muslim cleric Sheik Abdul Carimo, and that he is open civil society's views. Some say, however, that his hands are tied owing to the strong influence of the ruling party in the CNE.

Local observers upping their game

During the 2014 elections, analysts noted that both Renamo and the MDM failed to make public their complaints about the electoral process.⁵² This meant that the media could not help with verifying these claims in the name of greater transparency. In the end, the Constitutional Council – the highest decision-making body that hears electoral disputes – by a narrow margin rejected the complaints.

This year some commentators are again saying opposition parties are not doing enough to point out the weaknesses of the registration process in the run-up to the elections,

even if Renamo did go to the Constitutional Court, the Attorney-General's Office and the CNE to complain about voter registration in mid-2019.

Thousands of election observers this year again applied to observe both the voting and the registration process. The latter is a novelty and it is hoped that it will add to the transparency of the process. There were, however, difficulties in getting the necessary accreditation for observers. The criteria for accreditation were not clear, among other issues, as EISA noted in April 2019.⁵³

When asked how the opposition would prevent fraud in the October 2019 elections, Renamo spokesperson Manteigas said that the party was training huge numbers of observers, both for the registration and for the voting process.

During the campaigning period and in the run-up to the vote, observers from SADC, the African Union (AU), the Community of Portuguese-Speaking Countries and other organisations are also expected to observe the elections.

In the past, SADC and the AU have been wary of criticising the voting process – the same stance SADC and the AU have taken in many elections across Southern Africa.

SADC and the AU have been wary of criticising the voting process – the same stance they have taken in many elections across Southern Africa

In 2014 SADC described the elections as 'generally peaceful, transparent, free, fair and credible' despite claims of vote rigging by the opposition.⁵⁴ It did note, however, the need for the state media to play a neutral role and for the advantage of incumbency to be minimised. In 2014 only 142 observers from SADC were present on the ground,⁵⁵ compared to thousands of local observers.

Guilherme Mbilana of Votar Mozambique said his organisation aimed to have at least three observers in each of the 161 voting districts.

In total an estimated 9 000 local observers will be present during the elections. This includes those of EISA and a network of civil society organisations called JOINT.

Observing elections is a costly undertaking, however, particularly in far-flung rural areas with little infrastructure. Said Mbilana:

It's very expensive, but we do our best ... and even if we had money, the problem is access and roads. There are areas where even with a bicycle you can't go. I was part of an international team in Mueda (Cabo Delgado) observing the elections, we made 30km by car and [when] we reached a river we couldn't go further.⁵⁶

Due to the cost, observers rely mostly on international funding to do their work. In some instances this compromises their legitimacy.

Meanwhile, the Centre for Public Integrity (CIP) said⁵⁷ local observers had already made a difference in exposing fraud such as ballot stuffing during elections. According to the CIP's Borges Nhamire, the presence of observers and media has led the ruling party to change tactics. Fraud is now happening at the level of district tabulation, as noted earlier.

He said international observers had little impact because their teams were small and they barely covered 10% of polling stations. However, experience in Mozambique had shown 'local observation does help to lower fraud'.

Media under pressure

Increasingly, journalists and civil society campaigners in Mozambique face stringent measures by the government, particularly when it comes to reporting on the attacks in the northern Cabo Delgado province.

In 2018 and 2019 international media and rights organisations found it increasingly difficult to travel to the area to report on the violence. In January 2019, two local journalists, Amade Abubacar and Germano Adriano, were arrested in Cabo Delgado and only freed in April for allegedly 'spreading messages harmful to the armed forces'.⁵⁸

In July 2018 the government tried to pass a law that would oblige all local and foreign media to apply for accreditation at exorbitant rates. Foreign media would have to pay US\$2 500 per trip to Mozambique, and foreign correspondents in the country would be charged US\$8 300 per year. Freelancers in the country would be charged US\$500.⁵⁹

This was seen as a measure to discourage the media from reporting freely about the insurgency, the political situation and the hidden debt scandal. The move, however, was put on hold in August 2018 after an outcry by media practitioners.

Civil society organisations campaigning on the debt issue have also been harassed by police. The CIP had T-shirts confiscated during a rally to incite Mozambicans not to pay back the debt incurred during the corruption scandal.

Anti-corruption campaigner Jorge Matine of the Budget Monitoring Forum told in an interview⁶⁰ in Maputo how he was followed and threatened to drop the investigation into the hidden debt scandal. He believes it is important to continue exposing corruption, regardless of the risks. 'Our generation knows how difficult it was for our parents to fight for independence. My father fought colonialism and I'm fighting now for the freedom for my kids,' he said.

Elections in October 2019 will be a major test of the country's democracy and its new electoral laws

Government crackdowns on activists and the media are not a new phenomenon in Mozambique. There have been many attacks on media in the past – the assassination of well-known investigative journalist Carlos Cardoso in 2000 being the prime example.

This general atmosphere of suspicion of the media, linked mostly to the insurgency and the hidden debt scandal, could have an impact on the election campaign. If the media are not free to report what is going on in the country and expose corruption and mismanagement, this is likely to favour the incumbent.

However, the danger would have been greater had the accreditation fee been maintained. Mozambique also has a vibrant and independent media landscape, with several online publications and quality newsweeklies.

Experts believe election campaigning is likely to go ahead as before, with reasonably fair coverage by the media. In its assessment of the 2018 municipal elections, the EISA electoral observation mission said that, despite problems, campaigning was free:

The EISA Election Observation Mission is of the view that the political context, although still fraught with tension and changes, was conducive for open political contest and provided Mozambicans an opportunity to freely campaign and elect their municipal authorities.⁶¹

Experts predict a close race

By 15 June 2019, the cut-off date for the registration of political parties, 39 parties had registered with the CNE for the October elections. Of these, observers estimate that only the three main parties – Frelimo, Renamo and the MDM – have enough depth to field candidates in all 10 provinces and the Diaspora. Some of the other parties might be excluded if they cannot field enough candidates before 31 July, the deadline for candidatures.

Mozambique watcher Hanlon believes that Frelimo is the only party in the country that really knows how to run electoral campaigns efficiently and how to organise ahead of elections. Hanlon, like most observers, believes the party is likely to win the October 2019 elections, albeit with a small margin.

Hanlon says Renamo's former leader Dhlakama 'belatedly understood electoral politics' and could have won if he had not passed away in 2017'.⁶² His successor, Momade, is 'old guard', a former guerrilla who does not have the same political skills and party machinery behind him as his adversary in the elections, the incumbent Nyusi.

Hanlon believes, however, that Frelimo will resort to fraud to make sure it does not slip below 50%.

The MDM's Simango, as noted earlier, did not manage to deliver on the high hopes for the party after the 2013 local elections. Yet some observers believe he might get up to 3% to force a second round between Nyusi and Momade. This will be a first in Mozambique's electoral history and an outcome that the ruling party is likely to try to avoid at all costs.

The spectre of electoral violence

Observers concur that Mozambique does not have a strong history of election violence, yet there were clashes and low-intensity violence between supporters of opposing parties in some districts during the 2018 local elections. Most of the violence occurred in clashes between police and supporters in certain areas.

One human rights activist⁶³ said she believed the upcoming elections would be ‘the most violent yet in Mozambique’s history’ because of the tense political atmosphere and the desire by the ruling party to cling to power despite its dwindling popularity.

Human Rights Watch⁶⁴ documented large-scale actions against political opponents during the confrontation with Renamo between 2014 and 2016.

Other analysts, however, are of the view that political competition is firmly established and that campaigning and voting should proceed without major incidents of violence.

Conclusion

Elections in Mozambique in October 2019 will be a major test of the country’s democracy and its new electoral laws, aimed at greater decentralisation.

Several factors will play a role in the outcome of the elections and in the level of support for the ruling party and the opposition. These include the way the narrative around aid for the cyclone-devastated areas is used in election campaigns and whether the government can come up with adequate responses to the growing insurgency in the north of the country.

Clearly, the opposition will be advantaged by the fallout of the hidden debt scandal, discovered in 2016, but at this stage the campaigning to limit this debt burden is being led by civil society rather than political parties. The government is also trying to minimise the impact of the slow growth linked to the debt scandal by pointing to the tremendous potential of huge investments in natural gas in the coming years.

Meanwhile, there are serious doubts over the credibility of the polls, owing to the irregularities noted during the 2018 local elections. Most of these were rejected by the courts. Anomalies noted during the registration period for the October 2019 elections are also a grave cause for concern. The fact that government strongholds such as Gaza will now have more seats in Parliament than those provinces that traditionally favour the opposition casts a shadow over the process.

Going forward, civil society campaigners and observer networks are expected to be active in holding government to account and to try to ensure transparency in the elections. The national election commission should take note of these interventions by civil society and aim to rectify any obstacles towards a free, fair and credible process ahead of voting day.

Mozambique has come a long way since the dark days of civil war and the return to violent confrontation between government forces and Renamo that ended in December 2016. It is currently facing several threats, not least the alarming attacks in Cabo Delgado province that remain largely unknown in terms of aims and origins. A smooth political process with credible elections that lead to functional decentralisation will help Mozambicans to face those threats together as a nation.

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THE NUMBER OF PARTIES
THAT HAD REGISTERED
WITH THE CNE FOR THE
OCTOBER ELECTIONS BY
THE CUT OFF DATE

Notes

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