

## POLITICAL CRISIS IN MOZAMBIQUE: A HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

### Introduction

Worries regarding fraudulent activity in Mozambique's general elections, scheduled for October 2024, have evolved into a widespread movement opposing Frelimo, the ruling party since the country gained independence. This article tries to examine the historical roots of post-election violence and explores the discontent directed towards the ruling party, Frelimo. Mozambique's post-election unrest reflects deep-seated political, economic, and social tensions that may lead to challenges in neighbouring countries. Protesters created a burning barricade on the streets of Maputo on December 28, 2024, after Mozambique's Constitutional Council confirmed the election of Daniel Chapo, candidate of the Frelimo party, which has been in power for 49 years. As Mozambique faces a political crisis following disputed national elections and violent protests, its southern border with South Africa has become increasingly volatile, affecting trade and travel.

### Historical Background

After gaining independence from Portugal in 1975, the nation established a Marxist-Leninist regime. A peace agreement reached in 1992 resulted in the laying down of weapons. Nonetheless, instead of leveraging the newfound harmony between the political and social factions, Frelimo persisted in dominating all government institutions. Its leaders took control of important economic resources. Another opportunity to embrace a democratic path was squandered. Since officially diverging from the Marxist-Leninist path in 1989, the party has adopted a mixed governance model, establishing ineffective, formally democratic institutions within an authoritarian political framework. In simple terms, the nation's political system exists somewhere between true democracy and an authoritarian regime.

The first multiparty elections took place in 1994 and were won by Frelimo. Though there were a few setbacks, they were generally viewed as free and fair. The initial challenge to this established order arose during the second multiparty elections of 1999, where many believed opposition candidate Alfonso Dhlakama emerged victorious. However, the electoral

commission under Frelimo announced Joaquim Chissano of the party as the victor, despite doubts from impartial observers. It became evident that no other political party in Mozambique could govern the nation apart from Frelimo. Consequently, elections in the country continued to serve as a means of consistently reinstating Frelimo in power, despite inconsistent polling outcomes following the onset of multiparty democracy.

The 2014 elections, conducted during the second Frelimo-Renamo conflict, which brought Filipe Nyusi to leadership, were similarly fraudulent. The Nyusi administration exhibited early signs of ineffectiveness, with key public services failing and pushing citizens into frustration. Frelimo's support base started to show signs of discontent with a government that grew more corrupt and struggled to consistently pay civil servants their salaries, leading to ongoing strikes. Consequently, the army's morale has been diminished as it battles jihadist terrorism in Cabo Delgado under challenging conditions.<sup>2</sup> Mozambique is still recovering from the bloody 15-year civil war waged by the leftist Frelimo party against the Renamo rebel group after independence. The country held its first elections in 1994, marking the first elections without armed groups associated with political parties, following a process of disarming militias. Despite rich natural resources, including newly discovered natural gas, the country has struggled with rebellion, especially against the Islamic State group in the northern province of Cabo Delgado.

## **The 2024 election and the unrest aftermath**

The disgruntled youth of Mozambique support Mondlane, who broke with Renamo, and he and the new Podesa party supporting him are key contenders to end Frelimo's lengthy rule<sup>3</sup>. Many citizens and opposition parties have rejected the results of the October 9 presidential election, citing police use of lethal force to suppress growing protests in Maputo and other cities. The ruling party, Frelimo, was accused by opposition parties of ballot stuffing, voter list manipulation, and staffing polling stations with loyalist officials, even before the results were known. The 34-million-person nation has long accused Frelimo of tampering with elections. In response to the alleged tampering, independent candidate Venancio Mondlane, who finished second to Chapo, called for a nationwide strike and urged people to remain at home in the days following the election. Violence broke out once more after Mondlane's lawyer and the official spokesperson for the political party that supported Mondlane were killed. Since then, protests have spread throughout the nation in waves. A statue of current President Filipe Nyusi, who is

resigning after serving no more than two terms, was overturned, and its head was severed by demonstrators in one city. After his lawyer was killed, Mondlane posted on social media that he had fled in fear for his life. Although his current location is unknown, he has called for more protests on social media, stating, "So that we can then be freed from these shackles that have held us up for 50 years."

## **Concluding Remarks**

It is impossible to characterize Mozambique as a single nation-state. For example, Mozambique continues to be divided along regional and ethnic lines, in contrast to Angola on the southwest coast of Africa, which also gained independence from Portugal in 1975. There has been a pervasive belief since Mozambique's independence that a corrupt political and economic elite from one region controls the entire nation. Despite coming from Cabo Delgado, President Nyusi's background did not change these feelings of exclusion. It increased interethnic rivalry. After his lawyer was killed, Mondlane posted on social media that he had fled in fear for his life. Although his current location remains unknown, he has called for more protests on social media "so that we can then be freed from these shackles that have held us up for 50 years."

**\*Views are personal**

### **Author:**

Ms. Alka Jha  
Ph.D. Student  
Department of African Studies,  
University of Delhi  
**Email:** [alkajhadu75@gmail.com](mailto:alkajhadu75@gmail.com)

### **Forwarding Faculty:**

Prof. Gajendra Singh  
Professor & Former Head  
Department of African Studies  
University of Delhi

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