

## Editorial

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Mozambique appears to be emerging slowly from a contested and traumatic post-election period marked by violence. The main political parties have signed an agreement to work together on reforming the political system, and President Daniel Chapo has met with independent presidential candidate Venâncio Mondlane. Although many Mozambicans remain deeply disappointed with the outcome of the electoral process, this meeting has been seen widely as a positive and hopeful sign. Meanwhile, Venâncio Mondlane – the presidential candidate who had called for protests – has submitted an application to officially register his political party. During the elections, Mondlane allied himself with a smaller party, Partido para o Desenvolvimento de Moçambique (PODEMOS), but the alliance broke down following disagreements on the use of violent protests to pressure the government into annulling the election results or forming a government of national unity.

Mozambique has generally experienced a tumultuous post-independence history under the leadership of Frente para a Libertação de Moçambique (FRELIMO), a revolutionary movement widely respected for rejecting any neocolonial arrangements with Portugal. This stance earned FRELIMO considerable admiration, particularly in a context of widespread disillusionment with the outcomes of independence in most of the rest of Africa.

Gaining independence in 1975 under the leadership of FRELIMO, then headed by Samora Machel, the country went on to establish a socialist one-party state. From 1977 to 1992, Mozambique endured one of the bloodiest civil wars in Africa. The conflict between FRELIMO and the Resistência Nacional Moçambicana (RENAMO), a rebel group created and supported by Rhodesia and later by apartheid South Africa, took a devastating toll on the country. Hundreds of thousands of Mozambicans were killed, maimed or forced to flee into neighbouring

countries as refugees. Samora Machel, Mozambique's first president, became one of the war's most significant casualties when he died in a mysterious plane crash in 1986. He was succeeded by Joaquim Chissano, who faced the dual challenge of confronting a multi-front war of destabilisation and navigating the country through a painful period of structural adjustment. These reforms were aimed at pulling Mozambique out of the Soviet sphere of influence and integrating into the global market economy. In 1992, Chissano reached a peace agreement with his RENAMO counterpart, Afonso Dhlakama, through the Rome General Peace Accords, which paved the way for Mozambique's first multiparty elections in 1994.

This ushered in a period of democratic transition, albeit marked by political instability. In the first multiparty elections of 1994, Joaquim Chissano defeated Afonso Dhlakama. Despite tensions, they maintained a fragile peace. Chissano secured re-election in 1999 and served his final term. He was in turn succeeded by Armando Guebuza who won the 2004 and 2009 elections. Throughout this period, FRELIMO retained political dominance, whereas RENAMO's influence declined, partly because of asphyxiation by FRELIMO, which controlled state resources and used them effectively. The rise of a second opposition party, Movimento Democrático de Moçambique (MDM), further fragmented the opposition landscape.

Between 2010 and 2019, Mozambican electoral politics were defined by significant precarity, characterised by renewed tensions and threats of resumption of armed conflict. Indeed, in 2012, RENAMO resumed the armed struggle, alleging electoral fraud and exclusion. This escalation intensified clashes, particularly as the country approached the 2013 municipal elections. A ceasefire was reached ahead of the 2014 elections, which was won by Felipe Nyusi. However, RENAMO once again alleged persisting electoral fraud. In 2017,

a violent Islamist insurgency linked to ISIS erupted in the northern province of Cabo Delgado, leading to deaths and the displacement of hundreds of thousands. The worsening conflict drew in regional and international actors, including Rwandan forces, to support counterinsurgency efforts.

The post-electoral violence of 2024–2025 marked a new phase in Mozambique's political trajectory. It followed the highly contested 2023 municipal elections, during which FRELIMO faced serious accusations of widespread fraud, sparking protests and unrest. At the centre of the controversy was Venâncio Mondlane, RENAMO's mayoral candidate for Maputo at the time, who later contested the 2024 presidential race as an independent candidate. Reports suggest that Mondlane broke ranks with RENAMO after the party accepted the results of the disputed election.

It is arguably fair to suggest that Mozambique's current political challenges are deeply rooted in the legacy of FRELIMO's Marxist-Leninist politics. Like other 'liberation movements in power' across Africa (such as the MPLA of Angola, SWAPO of Namibia, ZANU-PF of Zimbabwe and ANC of South Africa), FRELIMO has been criticised for consolidating state power to advance narrow partisan interests, a practice that has gradually undermined its political legitimacy. Public discontent seems to stem more from frustration with FRELIMO's dominance than from genuine support for opposition figures like Venâncio Mondlane, whose admiration for Jair Bolsonaro and Donald J. Trump reflects an unsettling degree of ideological naivety. The recent protests echoed tactics seen in similar post-election uprisings in the US on 6 January 2021 and in Brazil on 8 January 2023.

FRELIMO's early post-independence rule sought to establish a socialist state through nationalisation, central planning and wide-ranging social reforms, aligning itself with broader Cold War-era socialist experiments across Africa. However, like many such efforts on the continent, FRELIMO's policies were confronted by significant challenges, chief among them being the constraints, including direct interference, imposed by the dominant global capitalist system, which left little room for socialist experimentation. FRELIMO's abrupt nationalisation of industries and collectivisation of agriculture, combined with economic mismanagement and systemic inefficiencies, compounded the country's challenges. A lack of skilled personnel, exacerbated by the mass exodus of Portuguese settlers, resulted

in significant administrative and technical setbacks. Moreover, the country's overreliance on state control stifled private initiative and contributed to deepening economic stagnation.

Part of Mozambique's external challenge stemmed from its entanglement in Cold War rivalries. FRELIMO aligned with the Soviet Union and Cuba, whereas neighbouring apartheid South Africa and Rhodesia (Zimbabwe) supported the anti-communist RENAMO insurgency. The resulting civil war (1977–1992) devastated both the economy and the country's social fabric, severely undermining FRELIMO's ability to realise its socialist vision. FRELIMO's experience is, to some extent, similar to that faced by other African socialist states. Like Julius Nyerere's Ujamaa in Tanzania, Mozambique's collectivisation failed to achieve agricultural self-sufficiency. And, similar to Ethiopia's Derg regime, FRELIMO contended with armed insurgencies that destabilised its governance. However, unlike Ethiopia, Mozambique's socialist leadership relied less on authoritarian purges and more on mass mobilisation to sustain its rule. By the late 1980s, Mozambique's socialist model had collapsed under the combined weight of prolonged economic crisis, civil war and mounting international pressure. In 1990, FRELIMO officially abandoned Marxism, embraced multiparty democracy and initiated market-oriented reforms, aligning with a broader continental shift away from socialist governance in Africa.

In retrospect, FRELIMO's Marxist experiment can be seen as a bold yet ultimately flawed attempt at radical transformation. Although it led to notable social progress in areas such as education and healthcare, its economic policies became unsustainable, and the prolonged civil war severely hindered meaningful development. FRELIMO's experience underscores the broader challenges African nations encountered in implementing socialist models in postcolonial contexts, particularly amid economic fragility, geopolitical pressures and internal opposition.

The context sketched out in this editorial is useful in framing the interventions in this special issue of CODESRIA Bulletin. This special issue brings together the voices of a select number of Mozambican intellectuals who have studied the post-election violence. Their analyses should be read against the background of a highly polarised society, where strong political views compete against analytical rigour as criteria for the validation of claims. The au-

thors assembled in this volume have different political outlooks and, in this sense, they represent a broad spectrum of views in Mozambique.

Elísio Macamo, the guest editor of this Bulletin, focuses on the paradox of violence as a destructive force and a means of asserting citizenship in Mozambique. Egna Sidumo investigates the failure of post-electoral dialogue in Mozambique, arguing that deep-rooted political distrust and institutional weaknesses prevent effective democratic consolidation. Rui Miguel Lamarques and his co-authors explore the historical and political delays that have hindered Mozambique's development, while Tomás Vieira Mário discusses the role of the Mozambican press in covering high-risk elections.

Tomás Timbane evaluates the legal mechanisms for contesting and validating election results in Mozambique, paying specific attention to judicial effectiveness and electoral integrity. Ruth Castel-Branco examines the broader issues of inequality, unemployment and the social unrest driven by

widespread poverty – one of the underlying causes of the post-electoral crisis. Dilman Michaque Gabriel Mutisse, for his part, looks at the impact of social media on protests in Maputo, exploring how digital platforms shape activism, mobilisation and political discourse. In an interesting disciplinary flip, Katia Taela examines the post-electoral political climate in Mozambique through the lens of feminist anthropology, discussing intellectual and activist responses to the ongoing crises. Finally, Egídio Chaimite provides an overview of Mozambique's political and economic uncertainties, offering insights into potential future developments and challenges.

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