



Notes on Recent Elections

The 2009 presidential and parliamentary elections in Mozambique

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1. Background

Mozambique has moved far to arrive at the point of discussing electoral issues. A former Portuguese colony, Mozambique struggled for almost a decade to gain independence in 1975 only then to find itself locked into a Cold War era civil conflict that lasted over 16 years. The major factions were FRELIMO and RENAMO with the principal factional leaders being Joaquim Chissano and Afonso Dhlakama respectively. As the Cold War drew to a close, money became scarce for both sides, and there was little choice but to give up fighting. Peace came in 1990 for the first time in almost 30 years, and 1994 saw an election that was dominated by the two former civil war factions and their leaders. The election, widely considered free and fair, brought the former communist leader Chissano to power for a five year term. His FRELIMO party won a majority of seats in the legislature, and the rebuilding process began.

The second elections were held in 1999. Again it was FRELIMO and RENAMO dominating the ballot, but this time the margin was much closer. Nevertheless, Chissano held on to office and FRELIMO retained a somewhat depleted foothold in parliament. Other than the tighter race, it is notable to mention that this election saw an almost twenty percentage point drop in voter turnout. The next elections,

in 2004, saw a new FRELIMO candidate as Chissano accepted the two-term limit of the constitution and stepped aside. The new candidate, Armando Guebuza, defeated Dhlakama and RENAMO by a comfortable margin, and FRELIMO gained a considerable majority in parliament. This election saw a further decline – of thirty percentage points – in turnout, down to 36%, but it was still considered free and fair with some irregularities (Hanlon and Fox, 2006).

The 2009 elections were considered less free and fair than the previous electoral cycles. The elections were monitored by several groups, notably the Electoral Institute for Southern Africa (EISA), South Africa, the African Union, the European Union (EU), and the Organization of Islamic Conference. Domestic observers were mainly channelled through the civil society group called Electoral Observatory (EO). Each group issued statements after the elections, some offering harsher criticism than others. The EU, EISA, and EO groups all expressed their concern regarding the handling of certain issues regarding the new party, the Democratic Movement of Mozambique (MDM), as well as widespread (though often unsubstantiated) reports of voters being turned away from the polls unless they carried FRELIMO cards (EISA, 2009; EU, 2010; EO, 2010).

2. Presidential election

The 2009 election featured the mainstay FRELIMO and RENAMO parties but it was the new party, the MDM, which

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would generate the most discussion and controversy. FRELIMO again fielded Armando Guebuza, who was seeking a second term. His first five years in office had seen remarkable economic growth and FRELIMO was expected to do well in the elections. RENAMO again nominated Afonso Dhaklama, who would be participating in his fourth presidential run. However, RENAMO was stricken with internal power struggles that effectively crippled its ability to compete on the level that it had in previous elections. After Daviz Simango, party leader and mayor of Mozambique's second largest city Beira, was forced from the party on what seemed to be baseless corruption charges, Dhaklama became more isolated within RENAMO. The ousted leader formed a new party (MDM) and was able to convince almost half of RENAMO's leadership to follow.¹ Simango and MDM were able to obtain a place on the ballot for the presidential race but were excluded by the National Election Commission (CNE) from nine of the thirteen constituencies in the legislative race.²

The campaigns were largely centred on messages of change, even with FRELIMO. MDM's message seemed to resonate with the youth and their rallies were dominated by younger people. FRELIMO was pushing change in the sense that they had changed the country for the better over the last five years, and they planned to continue to do so. RENAMO was stuck with the role of playing opposition to FRELIMO. This, when coupled with their recent fracturing, was difficult to sell. Overall the campaigns went smoothly, with a few accusations being lodged at possible misuse of government equipment and funds by FRELIMO. While this may simply be a matter of superior fundraising or the power of incumbency at work, there was little doubt that FRELIMO dominated the campaign trail in terms of media penetration, signage, and visibility.

Table 1 shows the results of presidential elections over time as well as the turnout percentage among registered voters at each election. It is clear that Guebuza's victory was not only by the largest margin in the brief electoral history of Mozambique, but it was also the most dominant. The once competitive Dhaklama saw a sharp decline in his vote, and Simango was able to wrest a small percentage of votes from the front-runners despite the hurdles he had to overcome in terms of recognition and undercutting by the CNE and other parties. The voter turnout percentage rose slightly compared with the 2004 election. This perhaps stems from the fact that FRELIMO made a get-out-the-vote campaign a high priority, seeking the legitimacy that comes from winning an election with higher turnout, but the presence of MDM may have increased turnout as well.³

¹ This information is taken from several interviews conducted by the author during the 2009 election season with both MDM and RENAMO leadership, including Afonso Dhaklama. Full interview transcripts are available from the author.

² Mozambique has ten provinces and the capital city Maputo is also given special provincial status. The remaining two constituencies are made up by Mozambicans living in Europe and elsewhere in Africa.

³ This view was expressed by several FRELIMO leaders, including Joaquim Chissano, in interviews conducted by the author and others during the 2009 election season.

Table 1

Presidential elections in Mozambique over time 1994–2009. Source: National Election Commission (<http://www.stae.org.mz/>).

Candidate	Percentage of Votes	Voter Turnout (Percent registered voters)
1994		87.9
Joaquim Chissano (FRELIMO)	55.3	
Afonso Dhaklama (RENAMO)	33.7	
All others	10.9	
1999		69.5
Joaquim Chissano (FRELIMO)	52.3	
Afonso Dhaklama (RENAMO)	47.7	
2004		36.4
Armando Guebuza (FRELIMO)	63.7	
Afonso Dhaklama (RENAMO)	31.7	
All others	4.5	
2009		44.6
Armando Guebuza (FRELIMO)	75.0	
Afonso Dhaklama (RENAMO)	16.4	
Daviz Simango (MDM)	8.6	

3. Parliamentary election

The 2009 parliamentary elections were held simultaneously, with 19 parties on the ballot and 250 seats available. In the 2004 election, FRELIMO had won 160 seats compared with RENAMO'S 90, which represented a significant widening of the narrow 16-seat gap produced by the 1999 elections. Members of the unicameral Assembly of the Republic are elected via a list system of proportional representation based on the thirteen constituencies which act as multi-member districts. As noted above, the CNE did not allow MDM to participate in nine of the thirteen constituencies. The commission determined that the paperwork was not handled properly for these provinces, and MDM was consequently not allowed a place on the ballot. This severely limited the possibilities for the new party and consequently left FRELIMO and RENAMO to vie for a majority of the available seats. However, the CNE was criticized by several observer groups for excluding MDM. This set a tone for these elections that had not been present in the previous three, namely that the CNE was playing a much larger role in political affairs than before.

Beyond the exclusion of MDM, the parliamentary race was uneventful. Table 2 shows the results from the parliamentary election. FRELIMO was just as dominant as it was in the presidential race and took a large majority of the seats. MDM, while handicapped, still managed to capture eight seats, a feat not previously achieved by any third parties. With over 75% of the seats, FRELIMO has complete control of the parliament for the first time in Mozambique's short democratic history. It is not yet clear what effect, if any, this will have on how FRELIMO governs. The effectiveness of MDM will be minuscule compared to what it could have been had they been able to participate fully in the election. The developing story will be whether or not MDM can survive intact as a legislative party until the next election. If MDM continues to grow, then it is at least possible that they may replace RENAMO as the second party.

Table 2

2009 Mozambican Parliamentary Election Results. Source: National Election Commission (<http://www.stae.org.mz/>).

Party	Seats	Change from 2004
FRELIMO	191	+31
RENAMO	51	–39
MDM	8	N/A
All others	0	0

4. Implications

Three main points are worth considering in respect to the 2009 elections. First, FRELIMO was able to garner a markedly larger percentage of the vote. What is not clear is the cause. FRELIMO argues that it was simply due to the ineffectiveness of its opponents. While this could very well be the case, it does not negate the concerns about single-party dominance expressed by several of the observers. FRELIMO and Guebuza were able to consolidate enough power to the point that Mozambique is looking more like a one-party system. With so much power, FRELIMO is likely to govern in a way that further solidifies its position as the dominant party. While other parties exist, they have no real control over any aspect of the national government. This was troubling to many of the observer missions and indeed raises serious concerns for the future of political competition in Mozambique. The almost total meltdown of RENAMO's political structure contributed to FRELIMO's increased power, and has left RENAMO teetering on the brink of nonexistence. RENAMO lost almost half of its executive council to MDM and its ability to campaign was diminished by funding shortfalls. It is clear that RENAMO was hurt by losing Simango and other key leaders as they lost votes and legitimacy. Dhaklama is still firmly in control, and maintains a loyal following, but it remains to be seen if RENAMO can make a resurgence or if it is resigned to further decline and marginalization.

The emergence of MDM is of interest for several reasons. It is the first third party that has been able to make any headway at all. While not a serious threat to the major parties in 2009, MDM did show that it was organized enough to get votes from various strata of Mozambican society. The leader of MDM, Simango, is the son of a famed independence era leader and holds wide popularity in his mayoral city of Beira. Perhaps most compelling is that MDM is not a holdover faction from the civil war. While some of its leaders were defectors from RENAMO, Simango and most of his followers generally came of age after the war had ended. This is evident in everything about MDM, from its name to its published manifesto. Whether MDM represents a larger

change in the political climate or a simple challenge to the old guard, at the least it represents a new era in Mozambican politics. While on the surface it appears that MDM and RENAMO combined are simply the same as the RENAMO of the past, there could be deeper trends. For example, MDM's widespread support among the youth – including many not yet of voting age – may serve to make it a lasting force into the next election. Simply put, a third party certainly diversifies the mixture from the old civil war factions-turned-parties, and the lasting effects and impact of MDM among previous non-voters is yet to be determined.⁴

5. Conclusion

The 2009 Mozambican elections centred on a new party (MDM), a stronger ruling party (FRELIMO), and a dwindling opposition (RENAMO). In terms of democratic credentials, these elections were the most criticized of the four national elections held since the end of the civil war in 1990. FRELIMO won more than 75% of the votes in both the presidential and parliamentary races. RENAMO, the former battlefield and now political opponent of FRELIMO, has fallen far from its once strongly competitive status. A new party, MDM, has given a voice to a new generation, and even recruited voters from the other parties. The story of this election is one of both domination and new hope. Voter turnout remained low but did increase appreciably compared with 2004. And, while the election maintained the fractionalization of the civil war era, the presence of MDM represents the beginning a new generation of politics. Indeed, this election may have been the last for many in the civil war generation. Guebuza is now term-limited and RENAMO is struggling to stay afloat. The 2014 elections will be the first for a new post-war generation and seems likely to produce a new narrative in Mozambican democracy.⁵

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⁴ In interviews, MDM leaders asserted that they have recruited numerous party workers and voters from a portion of Mozambican society that had not previously voted.

⁵ Joseph Hanlon's bulletin is an excellent source for those interested in this and previous Mozambican elections (Hanlon, 2009).