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Mozambicans head to the polls in a tense election that is largely peaceful on election day, although violence during the campaign period and reports of fraud may lead to greater conflict in the future. Reports of violence increase in the run-up to the 15 October election and government riot police are arrested for the murder of Anastascio Matavele, the regional coordinator of Sala da Paz, a civic election observation consortium in Gaza Province, on 7 October. Russia-based private military organisation, the Wagner Group, has reportedly won a contract to secure Cabo Delgado Province – the area that will hold the major LNG projects – from Islamist groups.

Election day is peaceful ...

Mozambicans went to the polls on 15 October in a tense election that was largely peaceful on the day, although violence during the campaign period and reports of fraud may lead to increased conflict in the future. These elections are the litmus test for the recent peace agreement between the ruling **Frente de Libertação de Moçambique (Frelimo)** and the major opposition party, **Resistência Nacional Moçambicana (Renamo)**, which have been involved in a civil war since Mozambique's independence. The elections will signal to investors whether the country is ready for investment beyond that in the gas sector. While there is widespread evidence of fraud, the peace deal is likely to hold as long as the opposition wins several key provinces. Frelimo candidate and Mozambique's President **Filipe Nyusi** (2015-present) will win another term in office, but the key result will be how well Renamo does in the polls.

There were very few incidents on election day, with isolated conflicts in **Nampula Province** when Renamo supporters refused to leave the polling premises, leading police to fire tear gas and warning shots to disperse them.¹ Nampula Province is a Renamo stronghold and the supporters wanted to remain at the polling station to "protect their vote" after many allegations of stuffed ballot boxes, and election observers being removed from polling stations.²

The **Comissão Nacional de Eleições (CNE)** (national election commission) released partial results on 18 October showing that Nyusi won 75% of 830,000 votes counted thus far, while Renamo candidate **Ossufo Momade** had just 20%.³ By comparison, Nyusi won 57% of the votes in the 2014 election compared to 37% for former Renamo leader **Afonso Dhlakama**.⁴ Frelimo is also dominating the parliamentary election with 70% of the 750,000 votes counted compared to Renamo's 22%.⁵ Again, this is surprising considering Frelimo's poor showing in the municipal elections in 2018, in which it won just 51.8% of the votes.⁶

The provisional results will strengthen the opposition's argument that the elections were fraudulent and many of the electoral observers agree. The **United States (US)** embassy in **Maputo** said its observers witnessed numerous irregularities during the elections and vote counting, such as the presence of 300,000 'ghost voters' on the electoral roll in **Gaza Province** in the south.⁷ The CNE has

¹ The South African, 17 Oct 2019

² The South African, 17 Oct 2019

³ Citizen, 18 Oct 2019

⁴ Citizen, 18 Oct 2019

⁵ Citizen, 18 Oct 2019

⁶ Citizen, 18 Oct 2019

⁷ Citizen, 18 Oct 2019

said that Gaza Province turnout was 100%, which the US embassy disagrees with in view of the low turnout during the early and middle parts of the day.⁸ The **European Union (EU)** observer mission stated that

“...interparty violence was prevalent as well as mistrust between the main political parties and a lack of confidence that the electoral administration ... (was) independent.”⁹

The CNE must publish the final results of the poll by 30 October, although provincial results are expected on 21 October.¹⁰ Given the provisional results, the CNE is likely to announce that Frelimo has easily won the election, which will lead to even greater calls that the election was fraudulent. Whether this turns to violence depends on the extent to which the elections were rigged. One of the terms of the new peace deal is that the party that wins the province chooses the governor, rather than the president choosing the provincial governors (see *ARC Briefing Mozambique* Nov 2017). Renamo will expect to win Nampula Province, for example, where Momade will then become the provincial governor – the first governor not from Frelimo since independence in 1975.¹¹ Renamo supporters will also want to win **Zambezia** and **Cabo Delgado** provinces. Frelimo may have concerns about Renamo ruling Cabo Delgado, since it is the site of Mozambique’s major gas finds.

The election was almost undoubtedly flawed and the government did what it could to limit Renamo’s campaign abilities in the run-up to the election (see below). The question now is how greedy is Frelimo – will they concede some provinces to Renamo in the interest of the peace agreement in order to have a semblance of legitimacy for this election? Or will the Frelimo elite think short-term and name themselves winners of provinces they would have no chance of winning in a free and fair election? A Frelimo win in a majority of the traditional Renamo strongholds – **Zambezia**, **Nampula**, **Sofala**, **Manica** and **Tete** – will drastically reduce the likelihood of the peace deal being followed and increase the risk of conflict in the country.

... though campaign violence foreshadows Frelimo’s plans to win

There were several reports of violence in the run-up to the 15 October election. One of the most serious incidents involved the arrest of government riot police for the murder of **Anastascio Matavele**, the regional coordinator of **Sala da Paz**, a civic election observation consortium in Gaza Province, on 7 October.¹² If the allegations are true, Matavele’s murder shows the ruling party’s willingness to use violence to silence its critics and increases the risk of counter-violence from other political parties if the election results overwhelmingly favour Frelimo. The attackers were in an accident as they fled the scene, where one died and two others were arrested, and were identified as members of **Grupo de Operações Especiais da Unidade de Intervenção Rápida** (special operations unit of the riot police).¹³ To date there has been no statement on whether this was a government-sanctioned operation, although national police commander **Bernardino Rafael** admitted on 8 October that four police officers were involved in Matavele’s murder.¹⁴ A possible motive for Matavele’s murder is the Sala da Paz revelation of 300,000 ghost voters on the electoral roll in Gaza Province. Another election observer in Gaza Province said:

“...[the murder] makes me feel scared. I’m living in fear. After this the situation is worse, we are being followed. It doesn’t sit well with me.”¹⁵

Matavele’s murder was one of many reports of intimidation and violence during the campaign period. **Renamo Women’s League** president **Babula Jeque** and her husband, **Joao Fenhane**, were killed on 14 October in Tete Province.¹⁶ Unknown assailants shot Jeque and Fenhane as they rode a motorcycle

⁸ Citizen, 18 Oct 2019

⁹ Business Day, 7 Oct 2019

¹⁰ Citizen, 18 Oct 2019

¹¹ Al Jazeera, 15 Oct 2019

¹² Business Day, 7 Oct 2019

¹³ Business Day, 7 Oct 2019

¹⁴ AFP, 8 Oct 2019

¹⁵ Al Jazeera, 17 Oct 2019

¹⁶ Club of Mozambique, 18 Oct 2019

to leave the electoral register with Renamo delegates.¹⁷ The assassins were not caught, so it is not possible to say whether this was a Frelimo-sanctioned operation or a robbery gone wrong. There are similarities to Matavele's murder: the victims were shot quickly while in transit and the murderers were able to escape quickly.

In addition to these incidents, the Renamo breakaway group, the **Junta Militar de Renamo (JMR)**, also claimed several attacks against civilians in the run-up to the election and promised more violence afterwards if elections took place.¹⁸ JMR leader **Mariano Nhongo** said on 14 October that

"...when people go to vote, they are voting for war. We will fight the government, that is not a problem. For us to avoid war, the government has to negotiate and integrate all Renamo forces into the police and the army. Therefore, if there is voting, there is war."¹⁹

These incidents do not bode well for Mozambique's political stability. The alleged murders of Matavele and Jeque show that the ruling party will do whatever it takes to remain in power, and is willing to use so-called 'death squads' to silence its opponents and critics. This will limit civil society's voice and willingness to criticise the government. JMR attacks are likely to continue, albeit on a small-scale, as there is no evidence that Nhongo controls a large number of followers. Nevertheless, pre-election violence and the very high risk of violence following the election results may limit investor appetite to do business in the country, even with the potentially high rewards.

Russia's controversial Wagner Group wins Mozambique security contract

A Russia-based private military organisation, the **Wagner Group**, has reportedly won a contract to secure Cabo Delgado Province – the area that will hold Mozambique's major liquefied natural gas (LNG) projects – from **Islamist** groups.²⁰ Mozambique is the latest of many **African** countries that Russia has courted; while Mozambique may be able to take advantage of Russia's willingness to enter the market, there is a risk that the government will instead sign further deals that will not translate into development for the majority of Mozambicans. The Wagner Group reportedly beat the **Lancaster 6 Group**, controlled by **Hong Kong**-based **Frontier Service Group** in which private military company **Blackwater** founder **Erik Prince** is involved.²¹

Kremlin spokesman **Dmitry Peskov** denied that Russian soldiers are in Mozambique.²² However, photos showed a Russian **Antonov An-124** military transport delivering an **Mi-17** military helicopter as well as army vehicles and other equipment in October at **Nacala Airport**, which are reportedly for the 160 military contractors in northern Mozambique.²³ However, Peskov may be technically correct considering the military equipment is for the Wagner Group, a private military company despite its close ties to the Russian government. The Wagner Group is controlled by **Evgenii Prigozhin**, a close associate of Russia's President **Vladimir Putin** (2000-2008, 2012-present).²⁴ According to a report by an exiled Russian critic, **Mikhail Khodorkovskii**, Wagner and other firms plan to turn Africa into a strategic hub for the Russian government by reducing Western influence.²⁵

Russia, like many other countries, has been eager to find a foothold in Mozambique and its large gas discoveries. President Nyusi visited Russia in August,²⁶ the first Mozambican leader to do so in 22 years, and signed several energy and security agreements during his visit with Putin.²⁷ These agreements were among the many cooperative agreements since 2015, and allow Russian naval

¹⁷ Club of Mozambique, 18 Oct 2019

¹⁸ Business Day, 7 Oct 2019

¹⁹ Al Jazeera, 14 Oct 2019

²⁰ Tamil Guardian, 2 Oct 2019

²¹ MacauHub, 18 Oct 2019

²² Bloomberg, 8 Oct 2019

²³ The Globe and Mail, 20 Oct 2019

²⁴ Middle East Online, 16 Oct 2019

²⁵ Middle East Online, 16 Oct 2019

²⁶ Business Day, 22 Aug 2019

²⁷ The Globe and Mail, 20 Oct 2019

vessels to dock at Mozambican ports and authorise the deployment of Russian military advisers.²⁸ Russia also pardoned 95% of Mozambique's debt during the August visit.²⁹

The Wagner Group contract comes as Russia looks to increase its presence in Africa. Russian military contractors have been operational in the **Central African Republic** and **Sudan** recently, and the government has increased its interests in mining and energy sectors in several other African countries.³⁰ President Putin is hosting a summit for African leaders from 23-24 October, with 35 African leaders expected to attend.³¹ Russia's trade with Africa tripled over the decade to \$20 billion in 2018 and its interests are diversified from energy to mining and security.³²

Mozambique and Russia have enjoyed close ties for many years. Russia supported Frelimo during the independence war with **Portugal** from 1964 to 1974, and during Frelimo's ensuing civil war against Renamo from 1977 to 1992, and appears to still favour Frelimo despite the introduction of democracy. A Russia-based thinktank, the **International Anticrisis Centre**, released an opinion poll in early October forecasting a strong Frelimo win, despite Mozambique not allowing such polls during campaigns, while other analysts forecasted Frelimo's weakened electoral state and the unlikelihood of an easy Frelimo win in the elections.

Russia needs Mozambique more than Mozambique needs Russia at the moment, which gives the government leverage in its negotiations. However, the Mozambican government has been trying to keep much of Russia's involvement in the country as covert as possible, a troubling sign that the deals signed are not as good for Mozambique as they should be, and that short-term interests were placed above what is best for Mozambique in the long-term.

Planner

30 Oct 2019 **(Mozambique)** General elections results announced

2031 **(Mozambique)** Maturity date under new Eurobond debt restructure deal

Chronology

17 Oct 2019 **Maputo (Mozambique)** *The South African*. Observers say Mozambique's election was held in an orderly manner but are concerned over registration irregularities and an uneven playing field;

17 Oct 2019 **Maputo (Mozambique)** *Mining Technology*. **Canada**-based mining company **Fura Gems** acquires a 100% interest in ruby prospecting licence 5572L in **Montepuez District**;

17 Oct 2019 **Maputo (Mozambique)** *Reuters*. **Australia**-based mining company **Syrah Resources** says it will cut 30% of the jobs at the **Balama** graphite operation due to poor prices;

16 Oct 2019 **Maputo (Mozambique)** *Reuters*. Major opposition **Renamo** party presidential candidate **Ossufo Momade** warns that Renamo will not accept any votes that are reportedly manipulated;

16 Oct 2019 **Maputo (Mozambique)** *Reuters*. **United States** prosecutors says that **Jean Boustani**, the salesman for **Lebanon**-based shipbuilding company, **Prinvest**, was the mastermind of the \$2 billion hidden debt scandal;

16 Oct 2019 **Maputo (Mozambique)** *News24*. NGO **Forum de Monitoria do Orcamento** requests the **Gauteng High Court (South Africa)** to review a previous decision to extradite

²⁸ The Globe and Mail, 20 Oct 2019

²⁹ Club of Mozambique, 21 Aug 2019

³⁰ Stratfor, 10 Sep 2019

³¹ The Globe and Mail, 20 Oct 2019

³² The Globe and Mail, 20 Oct 2019

Mozambique's former finance minister, **Manuel Chang**, to **Mozambique** and instead extradite him to the **United States** on corruption charges;

15 Oct 2019 **Maputo (Mozambique)** *Mail & Guardian*. **Mozambicans** begin voting in the general election;

10 Oct 2019 **Maputo (Mozambique)** *WorldOil*. **United States**-based oil company **ExxonMobil** awards three contracts worth \$13 billion to build an LNG plant in northern **Mozambique**;

8 Oct 2019 **Maputo (Mozambique)** *AFP*. National police commander **Bernardino Rafael** admits that four police officers were involved in the murder of election observer **Anastacio Matavele**;

8 Oct 2019 **Maputo (Mozambique)** *Reuters*. **United States**-based oil company **ExxonMobil** says it will invest more than \$500m in the initial construction phase of its LNG project;

7 Oct 2019 **Maputo (Mozambique)** *Reuters*. **United States**-based oil company **ExxonMobil** says it will not take a final investment decision on its \$30 billion LNG plant on 8 October, despite earlier reports;

7 Oct 2019 **Xai-Xai (Mozambique)** *eNCA*. Unidentified gunmen reported to be part of the riot police unit kill **Anastacio Mtavele**, the head of a local election observation mission, in **Gaza Province**;

6 Oct 2019 **Maputo (Mozambique)** *Reuters*. **United States**-based oil company **ExxonMobil** will finalise its investment in **Mozambique** in a signing ceremony on 8 October;

4 Oct 2019 **Maputo (Mozambique)** *ISS*. A **Russia**-based security company reportedly beats **United States**-based security contractor headed by former **Blackwater** head **Erik Prince** for a security deal to secure the **Cabo Delgado Province**;

3 Oct 2019 **Pungue Region (Mozambique)** *Citizen*. Unidentified gunmen kill three people in an attack on a bus in central **Mozambique**;

30 Sep 2019 **Maputo (Mozambique)** *Reuters*. **France**-based oil company **Total** completes its acquisition of **United States**-based **Anadarko Petroleum's Mozambique** assets;

28 Sep 2019 **Maputo (Mozambique)** *O Pais*. The government reportedly wants \$880m in capital gains tax from the takeover deal of **United States (US)**-based oil company **Anadarko Petroleum** by **Occidental Petroleum**;

27 Sep 2019 **Maputo (Mozambique)** *DefenceWeb*. The **Russian** air force delivers an Mi-17 helicopter and other equipment to **Mozambique** in a sign of growing Russian military activity in Mozambique;

25 Sep 2019 **Mbau (Mozambique)** *AFP*. Suspected **Islamic** jihadists kill 12 people in two separate attacks;

25 Sep 2019 **Maputo (Mozambique)** *ZimLive*. **Zimbabwe's** energy minister, **Fortune Chasi**, says that **Mozambique** will begin export of 100 megawatts of electricity to Zimbabwe;

21 Sep 2019 **Maputo (Mozambique)** *Political Analysis South Africa*. The **World Bank's** lending arm, the **International Development Association**, grants \$57m to **Mozambique** to interconnect the Mozambique and **Malawi** electricity grids.

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