

Freedom in the World 2024 - Mozambique

Overview

The ruling party's unbroken incumbency before and since the first multiparty elections in 1994 has allowed it to establish significant control over state institutions. The opposition has disputed the results of recent elections, and its armed wing fought a low-level conflict against government forces that persisted until a truce was signed in 2016. Hundreds of thousands of people have since been internally displaced due to an ongoing Islamist insurgency, but some of them are returning as a result of increasing security in Cabo Delgado. Mozambique also struggles with corruption, and journalists who report on it and other sensitive issues risk violent attacks.

Key Developments in 2023

- The Islamist insurgency in Cabo Delgado Province remained ongoing during the year, leaving hundreds of thousands of people displaced. However, despite continued conflict, a relative improvement in security allowed an increasing number of internally displaced persons (IDPs) to return to their place of origin by year's end.
- Mozambique was added to the "grey list" of countries under increased monitoring by the intergovernmental Financial Action Task Force (FATF) in June due to concerns about its anti-money laundering and counterterrorism financing policies; the designation may inhibit the country's ability to attract foreign investment and participate in international financial transactions.
- In October, Mozambique held local elections; the ruling Front for the Liberation of Mozambique (FRELIMO) claimed victory in the vast majority of municipalities amid accusations of fraud and excessive police force against opposition protesters.

Political Rights

A Electoral Process

A1 0-4 pts

Was the current head of government or other chief national authority elected through free and fair elections?

1 / 4

The president, who appoints the prime minister, is elected by popular vote for up to two five-year terms. President Filipe Nyusi of FRELIMO won the presidential contest in 2019 with 73 percent of the vote. Additionally, because FRELIMO won the most votes in all provinces, it received the right to select all 10 of the country's provincial governors. Turnout was reported at just over 50 percent.

The campaign was marred by violence, much of which targeted opposition members or their supporters, and several politicians and activists were killed. Anastácio Matavel, a respected independent election observer, was killed that October; several members of an elite police unit were convicted of Matavel's murder in 2020, though questions remain about the motivation behind the crime.

Opposition parties denounced the election as fraudulent, and there were credible reports of ballot-box stuffing; interference with the registration of election observers; serious voting-register inaccuracies; and tabulation irregularities. Civil society organizations and international observers characterized the polls as not free, unfair, nontransparent, and the worst since the introduction of multiparty democracy in 1994. They also argued that the ruling party had captured the electoral machinery through the appointment process of the National Elections Commission (CNE). International observers expressed concern about the reports of irregularities and election-related violence, but ultimately recognized the outcome.

A2 0-4 pts

Were the current national legislative representatives elected through free and fair elections?

1 / 4

Members of the 250-seat unicameral Assembly of the Republic are elected to five-year terms. The 2019 legislative elections were held concurrently with the presidential election. FRELIMO took 184 seats, up from 144 previously. The Mozambique National Resistance (RENAMO) won 60 seats, down from 89 previously, and the Democratic Movement of Mozambique (MDM) took 6 seats, down from 17 previously.

The legislative polls were marred by the same violence, irregularities, and fraud allegations as the presidential election. International observers objected to their conduct but accepted the results; opposition parties rejected the elections; and a coalition of civil society groups called them patently flawed.

Municipal elections held in October 2023 were also marked by allegations of irregularities by civil society observers and a violent crackdown on opposition protests against the outcome. According to results published by the Constitutional Court in December, FRELIMO won 60 of the 65 municipalities, while RENAMO took 4 and the MDM, 1.

A3 0-4 pts

Are the electoral laws and framework fair, and are they implemented impartially by the relevant election management bodies?

1 / 4

Elections are administered by the CNE and a support body, the Technical Secretariat for Electoral Administration (STAE). While the CNE's members hail from FRELIMO, RENAMO, the MDM, and civil society, FRELIMO effectively controls the selection process. Domestic and international observers have long argued that this structure has led to the politicization of the body and deeply undermines stakeholder confidence in its operations.

The CNE's administration of the 2019 elections drew sharp domestic and international criticism. Among other significant issues, large discrepancies emerged between the CNE's voter rolls and records kept by the National Institute of Statistics, notably in Gaza Province, a FRELIMO stronghold. CNE records showed more than 300,000 more registered voters in Gaza than voting-age adults counted in the 2017 census. The conduct of the October 2023 municipal elections was also criticized, with allegations that observers were forcefully expelled from polling stations and ballots were tampered with during the counting process.

In August 2023, President Nyusi signed a constitutional amendment postponing district elections that had been due to take place in 2024; the election date had been part of a 2019 peace deal between FRELIMO and RENAMO.

B Political Pluralism and Participation

B1 0-4 pts

Do the people have the right to organize in different political parties or other competitive political groupings of their choice, and is the system free of undue obstacles to the rise and fall of these competing parties or groupings?

2 /
4

The right to form political parties is largely respected. While many parties compete, most lack resources to campaign effectively and build a public following. Opposition leaders face harassment and threats for speaking out against the government. Figures within FRELIMO perceived as acting in conflict with the aims of the party can encounter obstacles, including intraparty disciplinary measures.

B2 0-4 pts

Is there a realistic opportunity for the opposition to increase its support or gain power through elections?

1 /
4

FRELIMO first took power when Mozambique gained independence in 1975 and has maintained it since the 1992 agreement that ended the country's civil war and the 1994 multiparty elections. Since then, FRELIMO has maintained an electoral advantage by using public resources to fund campaign activities.

In 2018, the parliament overwhelmingly approved constitutional reforms that would allow the indirect election of provincial governors, district administrators, and mayors. The changes were viewed as beneficial to RENAMO and a step toward greater decentralization and political stability. However, because FRELIMO secured an overwhelming victory in the severely flawed 2019 elections, ostensibly winning the most votes in all provinces, it selected all the country's provincial governors, effectively nullifying the constitutional reforms.

Police used excessive force against opposition demonstrations during the 2023 municipal election campaign period and after the results were announced.

B3 0-4 pts

Are the people's political choices free from domination by forces that are external to the political sphere, or by political forces that employ extrapolitical means?

2 /
4

Unelected elites in FRELIMO, including military figures and powerful businesspeople, retain great influence and play a large role in shaping the party's platform. Civil servants face acute pressure to campaign and vote for the ruling party, and to make financial contributions to it. Those who openly support opposition candidates face intimidation by elements of the party embedded in state administration and the police.

B4 0-4 pts

Do various segments of the population (including ethnic, racial, religious, gender, LGBT+, and other relevant groups) have full political rights and electoral opportunities?

2 /
4

Ethnic minorities are generally able to participate fully in political life, and people from various ethnic groups hold high-level government positions. However, FRELIMO's support base lies in the extreme north and extreme south, and ethnic groups concentrated in other regions, such as the Ndaou and Macua, are underrepresented. In 2019, three districts affected by the regional conflict in Cabo Delgado Province could not vote for security reasons. Many ethnic-minority voters who live there, notably members of the Makonde and Mwani ethnic groups that are concentrated in the region, were effectively disenfranchised. During the 2023 municipal elections, that region was able to hold voting with no restrictions.

Women hold 43 percent of seats in the parliament. In March 2022, Mozambique achieved gender parity at the cabinet level, becoming one of only 14 countries in which women hold at least 50 percent of ministerial posts. Nevertheless, men continue to hold most key political positions.

C Functioning of Government

C1 0-4 pts

Do the freely elected head of government and national legislative representatives determine the policies of the government?

1 / 4

Power remains generally centralized in the executive branch, which dominates the parliament and all other branches of government. The 2018 constitutional reforms introduced some measures to reduce centralization but were effectively overridden by FRELIMO's victory in the severely flawed 2019 elections.

Foreign donors have significant influence on policymaking, specifically as it relates to economic policy and public sector reform. Business elites connected to FRELIMO have a strong impact on government decisions, particularly on those related to foreign investment in the oil, gas, and agriculture sectors.

C2 0-4 pts

Are safeguards against official corruption strong and effective?

1 / 4

Corruption remains widespread at the highest levels of government. Patronage networks are deeply entrenched, with various groupings competing for state resources. The anticorruption legal framework is undermined by a variety of loopholes: for example, embezzlement is not included in the Anti-Corruption Law. The judiciary, susceptible to pressure from the executive branch, further impedes the enforcement of anticorruption laws.

In 2021, the corruption trial began for the perpetrators of the 2016 “*dividas ocultas*” (“hidden debts”) scandal, when three companies secretly and illegally received a more than \$2 billion loan. Nineteen defendants—including former finance minister Manuel Chang, who approved the illegal loans, and Armando Ndambi Guebuza, the son of former president Armando Guebuza—were charged with corruption. In December 2022, Ndambi Guebuza and 10 other defendants were found guilty on charges relating to the scandal, and were handed sentences of between 10 and 12 years in prison.

In July 2023, Chang was extradited to the United States from South Africa—where he had been arrested in 2018—to face trial for fraud and money laundering charges. Mozambique had also sought his extradition, but in May 2023, South Africa's Constitutional Court denied Mozambique permission to appeal a lower court's ruling that Chang be sent to the United States.

C3 0-4 pts

Does the government operate with openness and transparency?

2 / 4

Despite the passage of a freedom of information law in 2014, it is difficult to obtain government information in practice. The government is especially opaque regarding the Islamist insurgency in Cabo Delgado Province.

In June 2023, the FATF added Mozambique to its “grey list” of countries under increased monitoring, due to deficiencies in its anti-money laundering and counterterrorism financing policies; the FATF said it was working with Mozambique to strengthen the effectiveness of these efforts.

Civil Liberties

D Freedom of Expression and Belief

D1 0-4 pts

Are there free and independent media? | 2 / 4

State-run outlets dominate the Mozambican media sector, and authorities often direct such outlets to provide coverage favorable to the government. However, several smaller independent outlets provide important coverage. Journalists frequently experience government pressure, harassment, and intimidation, which encourages self-censorship.

The government is known to retaliate against critical journalists, including by canceling public advertising contracts. Journalists and political commentators appearing on television programs have been the targets of attacks and kidnappings in recent years. Police frequently harass, assault, and detain journalists. In December 2023, João Chamusse, editor of Ponto por Ponto newspaper, was found dead outside his home in KaTembe, near Maputo. Chamusse, who had covered corruption and had criticized the government in commentary on TV Sucesso, had reportedly received death threats prior to his killing.

Defamation is punishable by up to one year in prison and a fine. In June 2023, the regional press freedom group Media Institute of Southern Africa (MISA) reported that authorities in the northern province of Nampula had opened a criminal defamation investigation into TV Sucesso journalist Leonardo Gimo in connection with a 2022 report on alleged police corruption. The charges remained pending at year's end.

In June 2022, the government adopted a bill to amend Mozambique's antiterror law. Among other things, the bill contains provisions penalizing those who "publicly reproduce false statements regarding terrorist acts" with up to eight years in prison. Press freedom advocates expressed concern that the amendment could effectively criminalize reporting on the insurgency in the north of the country.

A draft media law, proposed in 2020, has been criticized by MISA and other civil society groups for creating a state media regulator and limiting broadcasts by foreign media outlets. The law remained under discussion in parliament at year's end.

D2 0-4 pts

Are individuals free to practice and express their religious faith or nonbelief in public and private?

3 / 4

Religious freedom is generally respected, but government responses to attacks by armed Islamists have involved closing mosques and detaining Muslim leaders, alarming human rights activists.

Roman Catholic churches have been the target of attacks by Islamist insurgents in recent years. Aid to the Church in Need International, a Catholic charity, said that in September 2023, members of the Islamic State (IS) militant group stormed a village in Cabo Delgado and opened fire on Christians after separating them out from Muslims, killing at least 11 people.

D3 0-4 pts

Is there academic freedom, and is the educational system free from extensive political indoctrination?

2 / 4

There are no legal restrictions on academic freedom. However, academics have been hesitant to criticize the government since law professor Gilles Cistac was murdered after supporting RENAMO in a televised appearance in 2015.

D4 0-4 pts

Are individuals free to express their personal views on political or other sensitive topics without fear of surveillance or retribution?

**2 /
4**

Civil society groups claim that authorities monitor criticism of the government posted online. There have been reports of government intelligence agents monitoring the emails of opposition party members. Ahead of the 2024 general elections, government critics reported an increased climate of fear, fueled by the 2022 amendments to the antiterror law and the draft media law.

E Associational and Organizational Rights

E1 0-4 pts

Is there freedom of assembly?

1 / 4

Freedom of assembly is constitutionally guaranteed, but the right to assemble is subject to notification and timing restrictions. The government frequently disallows protests due to errors in the organizers' official applications.

Threats to freedom of assembly have increased over the past several years, as activists and community leaders who speak out against injustice, abuses by the government, or the high cost of living have faced excessive force and arrest by security forces.

Large protests are relatively rare. In March 2023, police fired tear gas at the funeral procession of rapper Edson da Luz, known as Azagaia, in Maputo. The procession for the rapper, who was known for his protest lyrics that highlighted poverty, corruption, and human rights violations, was attended by thousands of people. Days later, police in Maputo and other cities forcefully broke up peaceful protests to remember Azagaia; at least seven protesters and organizers were detained in Maputo, Gaza, Inhambane, Sofala, and Nampula.

Score Change: The score declined from 2 to 1 because police have increasingly used severe violence to crack down on demonstrations in recent years.

E2 0-4 pts

Is there freedom for nongovernmental organizations, particularly those that are engaged in human rights– and governance-related work?

**2 /
4**

Most nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) operate without significant legal restrictions. However, draft legislation introduced by the government in September 2022 aims to impose a number of new regulations on NGOs. The bill contains provisions requiring NGOs to submit activity reports and allowing for the arbitrary dissolution of nonprofit organizations, among other things. Civil society groups criticized the proposed legislation as overbroad and excessive, saying it represents an attempt by the government to suppress dissent and silence human rights defenders. The bill had not been passed as of year's end.

In August 2022, leading human rights activist Adriano Nuvunga found a bullet with his name carved into it in his backyard. More than 50 NGOs condemned the threat against Nuvunga, which came amid a squeezing of the civic space in Mozambique.

Humanitarian operations in northern Mozambique are sometimes prevented from operating freely due to violence in the region.

E3 0-4 pts

Is there freedom for trade unions and similar professional or labor organizations? | 2 / 4

Workers have the right to form unions, but several restrictions impede the right to strike and make the practice rare. Public-sector workers are not allowed to strike. Many unions are not independent and operate under the influence of FRELIMO.

F Rule of Law

F1 0-4 pts

Is there an independent judiciary? | 2 / 4

Judicial independence is hampered by the dominance of the executive branch. The attorney general is directly appointed by the president, with no legislative confirmation process. Pressure from FRELIMO's leadership often impedes investigations into corruption and fraud. While former president Guebuza and members of his administration have been implicated in fraud and embezzlement, prosecutions were not promptly launched against them. Civil society leaders supported the extradition of Guebuza-era finance minister Chang to the United States to face corruption charges, alleging that he would receive lenient treatment if he faced trial in Mozambique.

F2 0-4 pts

Does due process prevail in civil and criminal matters? | 2 / 4

Although due process rights are constitutionally guaranteed, these rights are not always respected in practice. RENAMO leaders assert that the police arrest members of their party arbitrarily. Due to resource constraints and an understaffed judiciary, lengthy pretrial detentions are common.

F3 0-4 pts

Is there protection from the illegitimate use of physical force and freedom from war and insurgencies? | 1 / 4

Fighting between RENAMO and FRELIMO lasted for over a year before the parties agreed to a truce in late 2016. While a formal agreement was reached in 2019, a dissident group of RENAMO fighters resisted demobilization. During 2022, thousands of these remaining RENAMO fighters were demobilized and disarmed. The last RENAMO base, in the central province of Sofala, was closed in June 2023.

Residents of Cabo Delgado Province continued to suffer from violence and displacement due to an Islamist insurgency that continued in 2023. The government continued to accept support from regional partners during the year, including Rwanda and the Southern African Development Community (SADC), who have helped reclaim significant territory. SADC and Rwandan military forces continued to successfully counter the insurgency in 2023, leading to a notable improvement in the security environment in Cabo Delgado. In August 2023, SADC leaders extended the group's military operation in Mozambique through July 2024. In October 2023, a new wave of attacks in the province caused returnees to flee again, contradicting the claims by the state and that the situation had been stabilized.

F4 0-4 pts

Do laws, policies, and practices guarantee equal treatment of various segments of the population?

2 /
4

Mozambican police reportedly discriminate against Zimbabwean, Somali, and Chinese immigrants. People with albinism continue to face discrimination, persecution, and violence.

Women experience discrimination in education and employment; on average, women are less educated and earn less than men. Sexual harassment in the workplace and at schools remains widespread. Homosexuality was decriminalized in 2015, but LGBT+ people face significant discrimination.

Many Rwandan refugees, some of whom fled violence perpetrated by the Rwandan military, have reported feeling unsafe due to the Rwandan army's presence in Cabo Delgado. Several thousand Rwandans were reported to be exiled in Mozambique as of the end of 2023. An early 2023 extradition deal—agreed by the two governments and awaiting ratification by Mozambique's parliament at the end of 2023—sparked fear among exiles that it would be used by the Rwandan government to forcibly repatriate refugees and dissidents residing in Mozambique.

G Personal Autonomy and Individual Rights

G1 0–4 pts

Do individuals enjoy freedom of movement, including the ability to change their place of residence, employment, or education?

3 /
4

Although Mozambicans face no formal restrictions on domestic or international travel, movement is hampered by the presence of checkpoints manned by corrupt police officials, who often harass and demand bribes from travelers.

Hundreds of thousands of Mozambicans have been displaced due to the ongoing insurgency in Cabo Delgado Province. The UN's International Organization for Migration (IOM), reported in August 2023 that there were just over 850,000 IDPs in Mozambique, mostly from Cabo Delgado. Although most displaced people continue to live in sites or host communities, 540,000 people have returned to their area of origin in Cabo Delgado, the IOM said. However, the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) reported in October 2023 that 7,000 residents recently moved out of Cabo Delgado's northeast due to a succession of attacks and fear of further violence.

G2 0–4 pts

Are individuals able to exercise the right to own property and establish private businesses without undue interference from state or nonstate actors?

2 /
4

The law does not recognize private property outside urbanized areas; citizens instead obtain land use rights from the government. Many citizens are uninformed about the land law and fail to properly register their holdings. The government must approve all formal transfers of land use rights in an often opaque and protracted process. As a result, most land transactions occur on an extralegal market.

There is no legal restriction to private business. However, businesspeople do face kidnappings and extortion.

Under customary law, women usually cannot inherit property. The government does not frequently intervene to protect women's property rights when inheritance is denied.

G3 0-4 pts

Do individuals enjoy personal social freedoms, including choice of marriage partner and size of family, protection from domestic violence, and control over appearance?

2 /
4

Domestic violence is pervasive in Mozambique and laws against it are infrequently enforced. Early and forced marriages remain common in rural areas.

Mozambique has historically possessed one of the world's highest rates of child marriage, though in 2019 the government passed legislation closing a loophole that previously allowed the practice.

Children and women have been especially impacted by ongoing violence in Cabo Delgado. Insurgents have kidnapped children to be used as soldiers, and women are being captured as sexual slaves.

G4 0-4 pts

Do individuals enjoy equality of opportunity and freedom from economic exploitation?

2 /
4

Many women and girls from rural areas are at risk of becoming drawn into sex trafficking and domestic servitude. Government efforts to confront trafficking are improving but remain inadequate, according to the US State Department's 2023 *Trafficking in Persons Report*. The report noted that although the Mozambican government was making efforts to eradicate trafficking, it still fell short of the minimum standards.

Child labor is allowed for children between 15 and 17 years old with a government permit. However, children under 15 frequently labor in the agriculture, mining, and fishing sectors, where they often work long hours and do not attend school. Many observers note that the government's 2017 plan of action to address the high number of children who are employed has been ineffective.