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Provincial Autonomy: The Territorial Dimension of Peace in Mozambique

Natália Bueno, Johannes Plagemann, and Julia Strasheim

A year after the 2014 national elections Mozambican security forces began increasing the pressure on Renamo, the main opposition party and former guerrilla movement, to disarm. Following several attacks on his entourage since September, Renamo leader Afonso Dhlakama has gone into hiding. On 19 November the Mozambican president and leader of the ruling Frelimo party, Filipe Nyusi, called for “restraint” in disarming Renamo – thereby exposing an unusual degree of friction between the more radical wing and the moderates within Frelimo.

Analysis

The resurgence of violent conflict in Mozambique in 2013/14 raised new doubts about the country’s peace and democratisation process. After a strong showing at the 2014 national elections, Renamo began demanding autonomy for those provinces in which it won majorities. The governing Frelimo party has rejected these demands.

- Renamo presidential candidate and former civil war combatant Afonso Dhlakama won 37 against Filipe Nyusi’s 57 per cent of the popular vote – to the surprise of many and amid allegations of fraud. Governing Frelimo have since been in negotiations with Renamo but have rejected calls for Renamo’s participation in government.
- Since Filipe Nyusi took presidential office in January 2015, Renamo has repeatedly called for subnational autonomy in six provinces with significant opposition support.
- Although Mozambican provinces are administered by centrally nominated governors, direct elections in 53 mostly urban municipalities allow for some degree of subnational autonomy. A donor-funded decentralisation process since the late 1990s has also contributed to both the deconcentration of power and some devolution.
- Comparative research on territorial autonomy arrangements suggests that such pacts can be a tool for sustainable peace, but that territorial deals should be embedded in broader institutional reforms in order to be a viable solution to conflict.

Keywords: *Mozambique, Frelimo, Renamo, territorial autonomy, peace*

Mozambique since 2013: Peace Unravels

Fifteen months after the 2014 peace accord that ended a 16-months military uprising in Mozambique, the country appears to once again be on the brink of violent conflict. The current political crisis started after the 2014 general election. As in past elections, the victory of the incumbent Mozambique Liberation Front (Frelimo) was overshadowed by allegations of electoral fraud, the misuse of state resources, a lack of transparency, and an “uneven playing field.” The Mozambican National Resistance (Renamo), the main opposition party and former guerrilla movement, immediately rejected the results despite its own unexpected strong showing. Afonso Dhlakama, the long-time leader of Renamo, has constantly made reference to the use of force as a last resort to achieve Renamo’s political goals, which has fuelled fears of civil war in Mozambique. Recently, Dhlakama asked, “Has Frelimo ever accepted to approve anything without being beaten?”¹

Prior to the 2014 elections, Mozambique had experienced almost two years of military confrontation because of a disagreement between Frelimo and Renamo over electoral legislation, the disarmament of Renamo, the integration of Renamo forces into the Mozambican army, and the “depoliticisation” (*despartidarização*) of the state. Depoliticisation aims at reducing Frelimo’s long-standing hold on the state and the ongoing convergence of state and party matters. Frelimo had previously passed new legislation not only limiting opposition parties’ participation in national and provincial elections but also reducing their capacity to contest elections in most constituencies (Manning 2010). In response, Renamo demanded further reforms of the electoral system, including changes to the National Elections Commission (CNE), which had purportedly manipulated past electoral processes in favour of Frelimo.

Following an attack on Renamo’s military base in Satunjira by national force in October 2013, Dhlakama declared the suspension of the Rome General Peace Accord. Renamo retaliation was limited mostly to the central provinces, but their impact on Mozambican society was severe. Besides numerous casualties, they contributed to the destruction of Mozambique’s infrastructure and

caused significant economic losses, including the suspension of foreign direct investment. Consequently, memories of Mozambique’s brutal civil war resurged and old fears were resurrected.

On 5 September 2014 former president Armando Guebuza and Dhlakama signed the Accord on Cessation of Hostilities and thus brought military hostilities to a halt. The signature of the new peace agreement represented renewed hope, and allowed for both parties to focus their efforts on contesting the upcoming general election in October 2014. However, the agreement did little to ease the political tensions between the two parties. Even though Renamo voters attended the polls in great numbers, voter turnout was still low when compared to the 1990s – only 51 per cent of all eligible voters. The main presidential candidates were Filipe Jacinto Nyusi (Frelimo), Afonso Dhlakama (Renamo), and David Simango (Democratic Movement of Mozambique, MDM). Frelimo once again prevailed, with Nyusi securing 57 per cent of the vote.

The new leader himself and his transition to power have also caused uncertainty in Mozambique. Nyusi is native of Mueda Cabo Delgado, the country’s northernmost province and home to the Makonde people, who fought for liberation against Portugal. The Makonde represent a strong interest group in the Ministry of Defence and greatly influenced Nyusi’s selection as a presidential candidate. Compared with previous Mozambican presidents, Nyusi has had a very short political career. He spent a great part of his professional life in the business sector and only entered politics in 2008, when he was nominated minister of defence by then president Armando Guebuza. Although Guebuza concluded his term in office in line with the constitutional two-term limit, he initially remained Frelimo party leader. This raised doubts about his commitment to the democratic process because, historically, presidents have always occupied both posts. Guebuza’s resignation as party leader three months after Nyusi was sworn in as president exposed Frelimo’s internal friction. According to the newspaper *Savana*,² even before Nyusi’s inauguration, Guebuza had declared his intention to hold on to the Frelimo leadership to the dismay of other leading Frelimo figures, such as Alberto Chipande.³ This reveals

1 *Savana* weekly newspaper, printed edition, Maputo, 26 June 2015.

2 *Savana* weekly newspaper, printed edition, Maputo, 30 January 2015.

3 Alberto Chipande is a senior member of Frelimo, *Maconde*,

that it will be a big challenge for Nyusi to consolidate power inside Frelimo, particularly over the remaining *guebuzistas*, who have adopted a radical position towards Renamo's claims. In the words of former foreign affairs minister, Leonardo Simão, "poor communication and strong hostility characterised the relationship between Guebuza's government and Renamo."⁴ Under such conditions, the emphasis Nyusi placed on equality and political inclusion in his inaugural speech, as well as his reiteration of his availability to meet with Dhlakama, indicated a renewed willingness to negotiate.

Nevertheless, the reality on the ground differs considerably from the rhetoric and declarations. The most recent outbreaks of violence have seen an already unstable situation further deteriorate, raising concerns about whether Nyusi will be able to maintain peace in the country and keep the *guebuzistas* at bay. A first violent incident occurred on 12 September 2015, when Dhlakama's motorcade was met with gunshots in Macossa, Manica province. Dhlakama claimed that he was the victim of a Frelimo plot, while Frelimo accused Renamo of staging the attack. The episode remains unclear, and no conclusive investigation has been carried out – though several news reports confirm a major battle lasting hours took place and left dozens dead on both sides. According to Professor Lourenço Joaquim da Costa do Rosário, rector of the Universidade Politécnica and a mediator in talks between the government and Renamo, some within Frelimo sought to assassinate Dhlakama before integrating the remaining Renamo forces into the army (*Africa Confidential* 2015: 5). After another attack on Dhlakama's entourage in Amatongas, Manica province, on 25 September, Dhlakama returned to the bush for the first time since last year's elections. Not even one day after his public reappearance and return to Beira, the capital of Sofala province, Dhlakama's house was raided and his personal guard disarmed. After 10 hours of turmoil the Renamo leader finally agreed to hand over his personal guard's arms to a group of mediators – an unusual concession from a party leader whose bargaining power has always primarily consisted of the threat of violence.

and uncle of President Filipe Nyusi.

4 The interview was conducted by Natália Bueno in Maputo, August 2015.

The Recent Call for Territorial Autonomy

As soon as the general election results were announced, Renamo declared it did not recognise their validity. They alleged that nearly one million votes had been rigged in favour of Frelimo. To remedy the situation, Dhlakama at first proposed the creation of a transitory government composed of technocrats to rule the country until the next elections in 2019. Soon, however, Dhlakama abandoned the idea and instead began demanding greater autonomy for the six provinces in which he claimed to have won a majority – Nampula, Niassa, Tete, Zambezia, Sofala, and Manica.

Dhlakama's demands were codified in a bill that envisaged the establishment of autonomous provinces represented by Renamo in the Mozambican Parliament. The bill called for the immediate creation of the six aforementioned autonomous provinces, the nomination of provincial council presidents (*presidentes de conselhos provinciais*) according to which presidential candidate won the most votes in each province, and the transfer of 50 per cent of all revenues generated by resource extraction to the new autonomous provinces. However, on 30 April 2015 Frelimo shot down (*chumbou*) the proposal based on Article 271 of the Constitution of Mozambique, which states the objectives of local administration in the country. One senior Mozambican journalist, Tomás Vieira Mário, commented, "Once again, the latest elections, held in October, appear not as a fundamental right for every citizen, but as a curse for our Nation!"⁵

From 9 June to 12 June the National Council of Renamo convened in Beira. Despite Dhlakama's threats, the council decided against the immediate use of force and instead insisted on resuming negotiations with the government. The situation, however, has remained uncertain ever since. Notwithstanding the significant economic growth during the last decades, dissatisfaction with the ruling party is widespread, and inequality is rising – both of which have arguably contributed to social unrest. On top of this, attempts to integrate former Renamo fighters into the nation's security forces have failed and Frelimo membership continues to be essential for professional advancement in many businesses and the bureaucracy.

5 *Savana* weekly newspaper, printed edition, Maputo, 19 June 2015.

The resulting feeling of exclusion and marginalisation unites Renamo's lower level ex-combatants and higher ranks.⁶ This begs the following question: Can provincial autonomy serve as a lasting solution to the political conflict in Mozambique given its history of decentralisation reforms?

The History of Decentralisation in Mozambique

A common distinction in the analysis of decentralisation processes is that between *devolution* and *deconcentration*. Whereas devolution refers to the establishment of autonomous subnational units (e.g. cities or federal states headed by directly elected local governments), deconcentration merely describes the downward transfer of responsibilities and budgetary discretion within an otherwise centralised state hierarchy. Moreover, while devolution is meant to increase the democratic accountability of the local state, deconcentration tends to focus on increasing administrative efficiency by reducing the gap between administrative decision-making and the affected population.

Following independence in 1975, Mozambique emerged as a unitary socialist state under Frelimo, the former liberation movement. The 1977 Constitution established socialist-style centralisation of the state in which line ministries were vertically deconcentrated.

Since the 1994 Constitution came into force Mozambique has embarked on a gradual decentralisation process, albeit one that precludes the possibility of a federal state. In 1998 local elections were held for the first time in 33 mainly urban municipalities (*autarquias*). The number of urban municipalities has since grown to 53. Nonetheless, these autonomous municipalities have not replaced existing districts, which have also increased in number (from 123 to 150) and continue to be part of the centralised state structure. Despite a far-reaching constitutional mandate "to promote local development," municipalities' autonomy remains limited due to a lack of financial independence and a lack of distinction between provincial responsibilities and municipal responsibilities. At the same time, a process of territorial deconcentration was meant to empower district and provincial admin-

istration by transferring responsibilities from the centre downwards. Currently, districts and municipalities overlap in a number of cases – a fact that highlights the hybrid character of the Mozambican decentralisation process (Plagemann 2009).

Since 2009 provincial elections have been held parallel to national elections. In contrast to municipal assemblies, however, provincial assemblies have a merely consultative role. Like district administrators, provincial governors continue to be nominated by the president. This may create friction in those provinces and districts in which opposition parties have won majorities. The establishment of a centrally nominated state representative (*representante do estado*) to moderate between the district and the municipality in instances of overlap underlines the state's unwillingness to cede control (Weimar 2012: 99).

Local elections and, to a lesser extent, provincial elections have in the past shown their potential to facilitate opposition parties' efforts to increase their visibility beyond individual municipalities and gain access to the state, which has traditionally been under the tight control of the ruling party. The MDM emerged as a viable opposition party following their electoral success in two rounds of local elections (2008 and 2013/14). After Renamo boycotted the 2013 local elections in the midst of violent conflict, the MDM competed in all 53 municipalities for the first time. Today, the party controls four municipalities, including three provincial capitals and Mozambique's second- and third-largest cities (Nampula and Beira, respectively). Given the MDM's success – and despite attempts by Frelimo to strengthen its hold on the local level – further devolutionary reforms have not materialised.

Although decentralisation reforms continued throughout the past decade, not least due to significant donor pressure and financial support, the government's proclaimed gradual approach has so far prevented the existence of truly autonomous local governments. Instead, this approach has facilitated partial recentralisation (Weimar 2012: 100–101) and has increased complexity of the administrative landscape due to its lack of a clear vision of state structure and intergovernmental relations. This scenario likely reflects disagreements not only between the central leadership and foreign donors (largely in favour of devolution) but also within the ruling party itself.

⁶ According to Tomás Vieira Mário (in *Savana* weekly newspaper, printed edition, Maputo, 19 June 2015) and interviews conducted by Natália Bueno with Renamo ex-combatants in Maputo, June 2015.

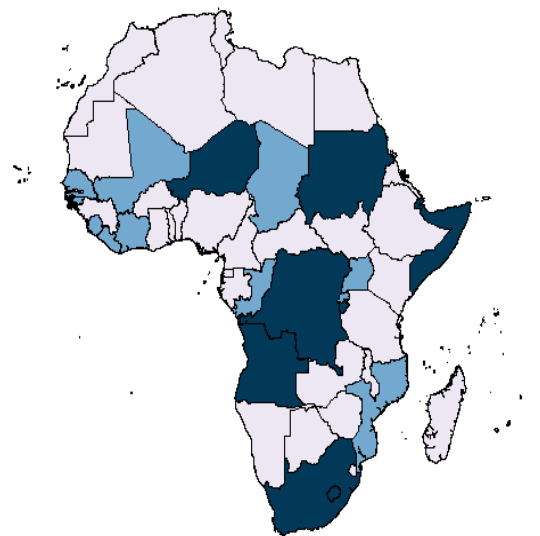
Evidence from Comparative Research on Territorial Autonomy

Would granting Renamo increased territorial autonomy be a sustainable solution to tensions in Mozambique? Since the end of the Cold War, territorial autonomy (e.g. federalism or the establishment of autonomous provinces) has featured as a prominent component of a number of peace processes. Such arrangements are typically laid out in peace agreements negotiated by the conflict parties. Supporters of territorial autonomy deals stress that these institutional arrangements mitigate fears of exploitation amongst marginalised groups, address economic insecurities, increase efficiency in administration, and satisfy local demands for cultural sovereignty (Lake and Rothchild 2005). Opponents of territorial autonomy pacts argue that such deals can create parallel structures of authority that further weaken war-torn states, reinforce divisive ethnic identities, and create new instability and secessionist demands (Wolff 2009).

As Figure 1 shows, territorial autonomy arrangements have predominated in Europe, where they played a key role in peace accords in Kosovo and Bosnia. In Africa, however, they have been much less frequently employed – featuring in only 15 peace agreements between 1989 and 2006 (about 30 per cent) (Zanker et al. 2015). The map

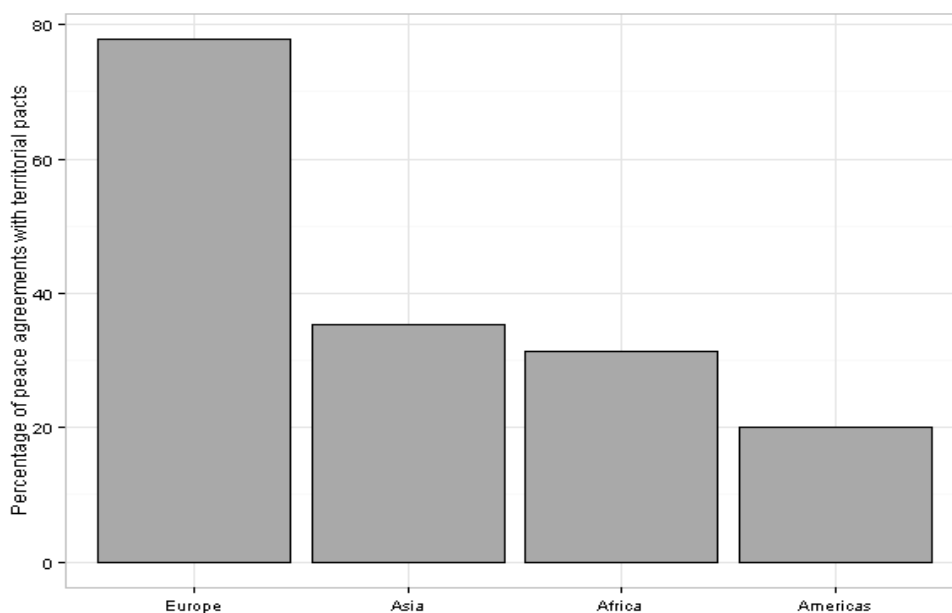
in Figure 2 plots those African countries in which conflict parties signed a peace accord between 1989 and 2006 (in light blue) and those countries in which a peace accord called for territorial autonomy arrangements (in dark blue). These include recent examples of territorial autonomy pacts implemented in Sudan (where enhanced territorial autonomy for South Sudan ultimately culminated in its independence in 2011) and Burundi

Figure 2: African Peace Agreements and Territorial Autonomy Arrangements, 1989–2006



Source: Own illustration based on data taken from Ottmann and Vüllers (2014).

Figure 1. Percentage of Peace Agreements with Territorial Autonomy, 1989–2006



Source: Own illustration based on data taken from Ottmann and Vüllers (2014).

(following the Arusha Peace Agreement in 2000). Nonetheless, continued violence in both these cases shows that territorial autonomy arrangements are no magic bullet for resolving violent internal conflict altogether.

Countries shaded in light blue signed a peace agreement. Countries shaded in dark blue signed a peace agreement that called for increased territorial autonomy (decentralisation, federalism, or autonomous provinces).

When do territorial autonomy arrangements contribute to sustainable peace, and what lessons can be learned from comparative research for Mozambique? Generally, the research suggests that when fully implemented, territorial autonomy arrangements are amongst the key contributors to durable peace. For instance, of 33 autonomy arrangements struck in peace agreements between 1989 and 2004 across the globe, all 9 deals that were fully implemented were followed by lasting peace; even those countries where territorial autonomy implementation was only partly achieved were more peaceful than countries without autonomy arrangements (Jarstad and Nilsson 2008). Nevertheless, recent literature stresses that conflicts are not automatically more easily resolved at the subnational level (Ansorg et al. 2013); on its own, territorial autonomy is often an insufficient long-term solution to internal conflict. The evidence shows that in post-conflict societies, territorial autonomy is most helpful when combined with other conflict resolution instruments, particularly power-sharing deals at the central government level (Cederman et al. 2015, Wolff 2009).

Prospects for Territorial Power-Sharing in Mozambique

Comparative findings suggest that subnational autonomy can – under certain circumstances – be an effective tool for consolidating peace. However, evidence from other cases also suggest that growing tensions in Mozambique cannot be resolved by simply granting Renamo territorial autonomy; instead, territorial arrangements need to be embedded in broader negotiations and institutions at the national level. Earlier this year, Renamo’s poorly manufactured legislative initiative demonstrated to be wholly inadequate for such an undertaking, and, more importantly, Frelimo did not express a

willingness to engage in the “depoliticisation” of the state in earlier rounds of negotiations.

Nevertheless, pressure to decentralisation has been amounting. Venancio Mondlane of the MDM recently said, “There is no escape from decentralisation and power-sharing in Mozambique, but we have our own ideas about it.” He added that although the MDM supported decentralisation, they saw the revision of electoral legislation and of the Constitution as a viable alternative to Renamo’s failed legislative initiative⁷. For them, such reform would be a long-term process. Indeed, a credible proposition for provincial autonomy would include meaningful provincial elections for a body with legislative powers and budgetary authority and elected provincial governors instead of centrally appointed ones. This would effectively amount to transforming the unitary Mozambican state into a quasi-federal one.

Given Frelimo’s control over the decentralisation process since the 1990s, its hold on national unity for ideological and political reasons, and the reactions to Dhlakama’s proposition, such a radical step is extremely unlikely. Consider that on 3 March 2015 Gilles Cistac, a prominent constitutional lawyer and professor at Eduardo Mondlane University in Maputo, was shot dead in broad daylight. Although the motives remain unclear and the assailants have not been identified, there appears to be no doubt that this was a political act. After all, contrary to Frelimo’s claim that Renamo’s regional autonomy proposal was unconstitutional, Cistac argued that the Constitution did in fact permit the establishment of autonomous provinces despite its commitment to Mozambique as a “unitary state.” Following his assertion, Cistac was ferociously attacked on social networks. It appeared, as one observer notes, that “Renamo’s demand [has] hit an especially sensitive nerve in Frelimo” (Darch 2015: 2). The most recent armed confrontations – attributed by some to Frelimo’s radical Guebuza wing – only added to the impression that Nyusi’s conciliatory tone had reached its limit.

On 30 November 2015 Renamo parliamentary group submitted a partial revision of the Mozambican Constitution as a substitute for the autonomous provinces bill shot down by Frelimo in late April. According to Renamo, the Constitutional revision was meant to establish a greater auton-

⁷ The interview was conducted by Natália Bueno in Maputo, August 2015.

omy of Mozambican provinces (*autarquia provincial*) similar to municipal autonomy by, among others, calling for provincial assemblies to elect provincial governors.⁸ As a provisional measure, the proposed bill ascribed the presidential candidate with most votes in the respective provinces the right to choose the governor. Frelimo's parliamentary group in the Commission for Constitutional Affairs, Human Rights and Legality rejected Renamo's revision. The Commission, however, recommended the creation of an ad hoc commission to review the Constitution with the intention to further its decentralisation⁹. Whereas Frelimo's ambivalent record in decentralisation reforms, the governing party's hold on central power and the recent radicalization of the political conflict suggested little room for compromise over Renamo's demands for autonomous provinces in the first place, Nyusi's recent intervention in slowing down Renamo disarmament may nevertheless have opened a new space for dialogue over subnational autonomy as a contribution to sustainable peace in Mozambique.

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⁸ See Renamo press release *A Perdiz* No. 155 (p. 2), downloaded from: <<http://macua.blogs.com/files/perdiz-n%C2%BA-155.pdf>> (06 December 2015).

⁹ *Savana* weekly newspaper, printed edition, Maputo, 04 December 2015.

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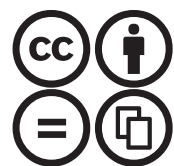
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