



# OPENSOURCE

A Digest of the Open Society Initiative for Southern Africa

Volume 2 Issue 2 June 2008

*Opening Societies Through Advocacy*

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## Citizenship

### **Chidi Odinkalu**

highlights the multi-faceted dimensions of inclusive citizenship and considers the prospects for peace and security in Africa

### **Julia Harrington**

explores the "hidden logics of citizenship", pitting theory against practice

### **Nicole Fritz**

dissects the notions of multiculturalism and nation-building in modern nation-states

### **Professor Lazarus Miti**

shows how language can be a tool to either include some or exclude others

### **Kumi Naidoo**

interrogates citizenship participation and the modalities for enhancing citizens' participation

# CITIZENSHIP



OSISA  
Open Society Initiative  
for Southern Africa

*Opening Societies Through Advocacy*

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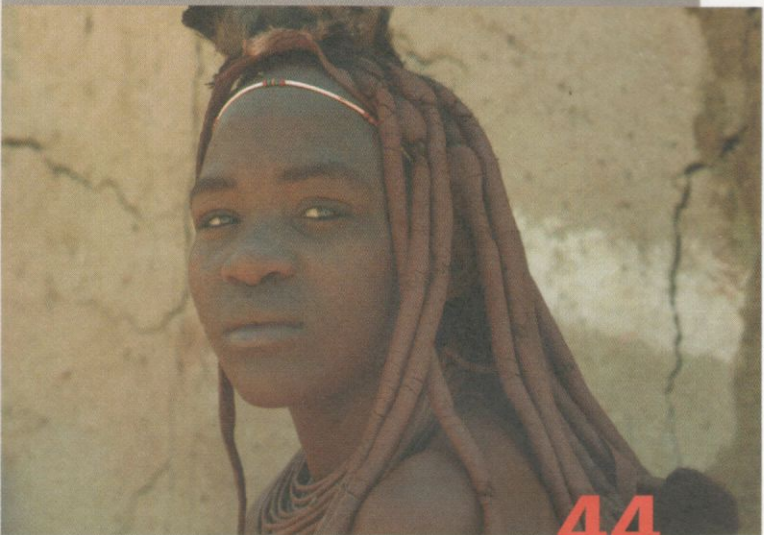
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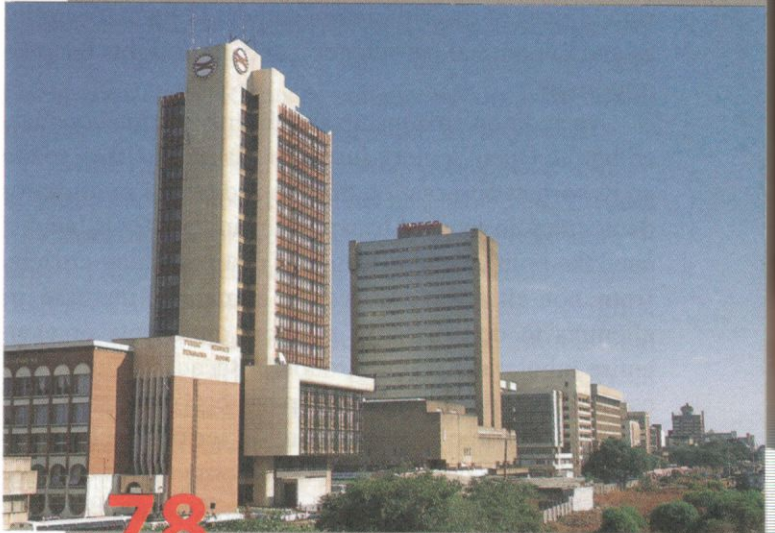
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# The Influence of ethnicity on electoral processes in Mozambique

By Carlos Shenga

**T**his paper focuses on the various emergent debates characterising ethnicity and democratic citizenship. More specifically, it analyses the ways in which social cleavage in an ethnically divided society becomes salient on people's choice in multiparty elections. How does ethnicity influence those who obtain support from the people, especially political parties? It is important to know this considering that ethnic cleavages may differ from one society to another, and that not all of them should necessarily be politicised (Przerworski *et al*, 1986). For instance, "before the advent of democratic rule in South Africa, most had expected the country to experience an explosion of politicised ethnicity when minority rule was replaced" (Piombo, 2004). Piombo's evidence shows that this has not come to pass, and ethnic political parties have declined in number and influence in post-apartheid South Africa. What about Mozambican politics?

This study assumes that ethnic cleavage has shaped, to some extent, Mozambicans' choice in the multiparty legislative elections. It is expected that the Frelimo ruling party will more likely get electoral support from Tsonga and Makonde ethnic identities, while Renamo – the main political opposition – will more likely obtain support from central and northern ethnic identities (including Senas, Ndaus, Makuas, Lomwes, and Chuabos).

The reasoning behind this proposition is that in Mozambique, the post-colonial Frelimo ruling party



Sigrid Spinnox/Afrika Photos

comprised mainly Tsonga elites due to the marginalisation of those from central and northern regions who founded the three original liberation movements (MANU, UDENAMO, and UNAMI), subsequently united by Eduardo Mondlane into FRELIMO.<sup>1</sup> This marginalisation results from internal struggles that occurred during the liberation war, with the expulsion of many FRELIMO cadres from the central and northern regions (including FRELIMO deputy president in 1969, Urias Simango), thus opening the doors for Tsonga domination and control over the liberation movement. Alongside the Tsonga elite, Mozambique's post-colonial government also comprised a small ethnic group from northern Mozambique (called Makonde). Most of the expelled cadres from Frelimo were sent to re-education camps. Some died and others just disappeared from the camps.

On the other side, Renamo – the movement that fought against Frelimo (and now the main political opposition) – took advantage of this marginalisation and used as its base of support the central and northern ethnic identities (with exception to the Makonde people).

This study is based on the official election data from the National Electoral Commission from the past legislative multiparty elections, broken down by region, constituency – which includes 10 provinces plus Maputo city – and district. This is aggregated data which is limited to group voting behaviour rather than individuals. Instead of showing how individuals voted,

the data only shows how ethnic groups did. It also uses relevant secondary sources and some of the author's experiences on the issue.

**The Relevance of people's electoral choice**

The people's choice in the elections is an act of citizenship participation, which makes democracy possible in an environment which "requires: 1) universal adult suffrage, 2) recurring, free, competitive, and fair elections; 3) more than one serious political party, and 4) alternative sources of information" (Dahl, 1971; Diamond and Morlino, 2005:x-xi). It is a form of political participation known as voting.

Elections are central to democracy. They empower citizens by allowing them to participate in politics by determining the personnel and policies of government. They make governments accountable to the electorate, at least once every five years. This increases interest in and discussion about political events and public affairs, media coverage and political activity through electoral campaigns. "It occasions mass political behaviour and determines who rules the country and thus affects the lives of all of us" (Denver, 1994:4).

**Ethnic cleavage: a likely explanation of people's partisan choice**

The ethnic cleavage explanation assumes that the structure of ethnic division is a powerful influence on who obtains support from the public. According to Horowitz (1985), ethnicity exerts a strong influence on voters' choices in segmented societies by generating a long-term psychological attachment that anchors citizens to parties, and where casting a vote becomes an expression of group identity.

It is one of the most applied models explaining people's choice in ethnically divided African societies (Atieno-Odhiambo, 2002; Omolo, 2002). It assumes that Africa is a traditional and agrarian society where citizens are believed to have a much stronger preference for parties that they support by their particular ethnic group rather than other considerations (such as government performance). The ethnic cleavage explanation is based on a historical and descriptive framework classified by Seekings (1997) as "parochial scholarly traditions." For this explanation, ethnicity is conceptualised as primordial, static and essentialist, assuming that identity acquired at birth remains intact despite other multiple and secondary identities assumed in adult life.

**Ethnically divided society**

Before I analyse ethnic variation based on people's partisan choice, let me first describe the pattern of ethnic divisions in Mozambique. By using data gathered by NELIMO (1989 and 1992) we observe at least 23 ethno-linguistic groups in Mozambique, distributed as follows:

- **southern region:** the southern ethnic groups are collectively known as Tsonga, comprising Cicopi, Gitonga, Xichangana, Xironga, Xitsuwa;
- **central region:** Cimanyika, Cindau, Citewe, Cibalke, Cisena, Cimarendje, Cinyungwe, Echuabo;
- **northern region:** 14) Emmakua, 15) Elomwe, 16) Cinyanja, 17) Ciyao, 18) Shimakonde, 19) Kiswahili, 20) Kimwani, 21) Cimakwe, 22) Cindonde, and 23) Cingoni.<sup>2</sup>

In spite of this ethnic diversity, it should be noted that in each of these three regions there are two or three ethno-linguistic groups that cover an entire province. In the northern Cabo Delgado province, for instance, "of the eight languages spoken there, just four – Emmakua, Shimakonde, Kimwani, and Kiswahili – ensured the cultural-linguistic interchange between the different linguistic groups" (Liphola, 1996:268). The same occurs in southern region among the Tsonga people, where Xichangana and Xironga are regarded as a single ethno-linguistic group. While Cisena and Cindau are dominant in the central region, the Emmakua-Elomwe ethnic group (which is the largest in the country) dominates the northern region.<sup>3</sup>

Despite the existence of many small ethnic groups, there is no real "dominant" one. However, this does not suggest the absence of conflict among those groups. During the liberation struggle many central and northern ethnic elites (with exception of the Makondes) were marginalised from FRELIMO and replaced by Tsonga or southern ones, who controlled the liberation movement. The first Mozambican post-colonial government was disproportionately composed of Tsonga (or southern elites). Even though in post-colonial Mozambique the Frelimo government introduced a policy to kill "tribes" and ethnicity as a strategy for nation building, ethnic animosities are clearly manifest with southern (Tsonga) ethnic groups treating central and northern ones differently.

Considering that this study uses aggregate data from the National Electoral Commission it measures ethnic identity by ethnic-region variables.

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Table:

Northern	Cabo Delgado	Nampula	Niassa
Central	Manica	Sofala	Tete
Southern	Gaza	Inhambane	Maputo
Emigrant	Africa	Europe	TOTAL

Source: Pe  
\*Mozambic

**The Impacts of ethnic identity on people's choice**

A key question is apposite in this discussion: is there evidence that ethnicity influences who gets support from the people in the Mozambican multiparty legislative elections, based on the aggregate data from National Electoral Commission?

The results of the 1994 founding legislative election show ethnic-region variation based on political preference. Mozambicans from the southern region (or Tsonga) ethnic groups (including Copis, Bitongas, Changanas, Rongas, and Tsuwas) are more likely to vote for Frelimo, while those from the central region (including Ndaus, Senas, Chuabos, Manyikas, Tewes, Balkes, Marendjes, and Nyungwes) and the northern region (including Makuas, and Yao,) are more likely to support Renamo. Despite this trend, Makonde and Nyanja ethnic groups were more likely to prefer Frelimo in the northern region (see Figures 2, 3, 4 and 5).

In general, two "sanctuaries" where Frelimo and Renamo parties won more than 75 percent of the votes

can be observed (de Brito, 1996; see the attached maps). The Frelimo ethnic sanctuary comprises all Tsonga ethnic groups and Makonde ones, while the Renamo sanctuary entails Ndau and Sena ethnic identities. These ethnic sanctuaries remained intact until the 1999 and 2004 multiparty elections.

That the majority of Tsonga are more likely to support Frelimo reflects the fact that the majority of Frelimo's main historical leaders (and a majority of its cadres) come from the Tsonga ethnic groups, which certainly influenced the population from this ethnic identity to vote for their party. That Makondes and Yaos attach their political preference to Frelimo may be traced to the fact that Frelimo has had a long presence in the region of those ethnic groups during the liberation struggle (in the so-called "liberated zones"). With respect to central and northern ethnic groups' alignment with Renamo, this could be due to the fact that many Frelimo cadres from those ethnic groups "were expelled or left the movement" (de Brito, 1996). This

Table:1

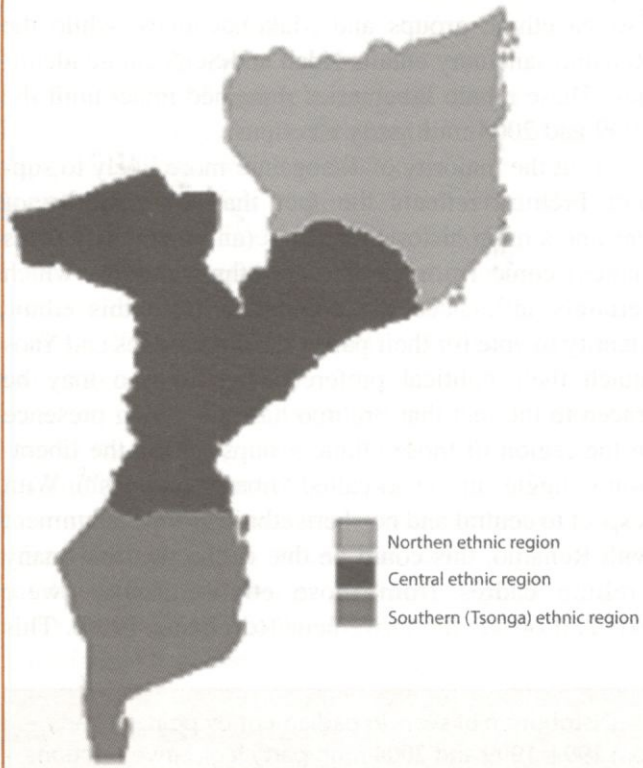
Distribution of seats in parliament by political party – results from 1994, 1999 and 2004 multiparty legislative elections

	1994			1999		2004	
	Frelimo	Renamo	Democratic Union	Frelimo	Renamo Electoral Union	Frelimo	Renamo Electoral Union
<b>Northern ethnic region</b>							
Cabo Delgado	15	6	1	16	6	18	4
Nampula	20	32	2	24	26	27	23
Niassa	7	4	0	6	7	9	3
<b>Central ethnic region</b>							
Manica	4	9	0	5	10	7	7
Sofala	3	18	0	3	18	6	18
Tete5	9	1	8	10	14	4	
Zambézia	18	29	2	15	34	19	29
<b>Southern (Tsonga) ethnic region</b>							
Gaza	15	0	1	16	0	17	0
Inhambane	13	3	2	13	4	15	1
Maputo City	17	1	0	14	2	14	2
Maputo Province	12	1	0	12	1	12	1
<b>Emigrants *</b>							
Africa						1	0
Europe						1	0
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>129</b>	<b>112</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>132</b>	<b>118</b>	<b>160</b>	<b>90</b>

Source: Pereira, J. and Shenga, C. 2005. *Strengthening Parliamentary Democracy in SADC Countries: Mozambique Country Report*. Series editor Tim Hughes, SAIIA. Pretoria.

\*Mozambicans living abroad were allowed to vote in the 2004 election.

Figure 1: Distribution of three ethnic regions



Source: de Brito, L. 1996. Voting Behaviour in Mozambique's First Multiparty Elections. In *Mozambique: Elections, Democracy and Development*, edited by Brazão Mazula. Maputo. Note: the figure title was adapted by the author.

Figure 2: Ethnic regions where Frelimo and Renamo won majorities, 1994 legislative election



Source: de Brito, L. 1996. Voting Behaviour in Mozambique's First Multiparty Elections. In *Mozambique: Elections, Democracy and Development*, edited by Brazão Mazula. Maputo. Note: the figure title was adapted by the author.

also reflects the fact that “the colonial authorities undertook a series of activities trying to halt the advance of Frelimo’s guerrilla army into the central region of the country” (de Brito, 1996); and with independence, Frelimo’s distrust of the people of the central ethnic groups was further increased, due to the war unleashed by the Rhodesian regime, which was later extended and “Mozambicanised” with the formation of the Mozambique National Resistance (MNR, later Renamo) (see de Brito, 1996:470).

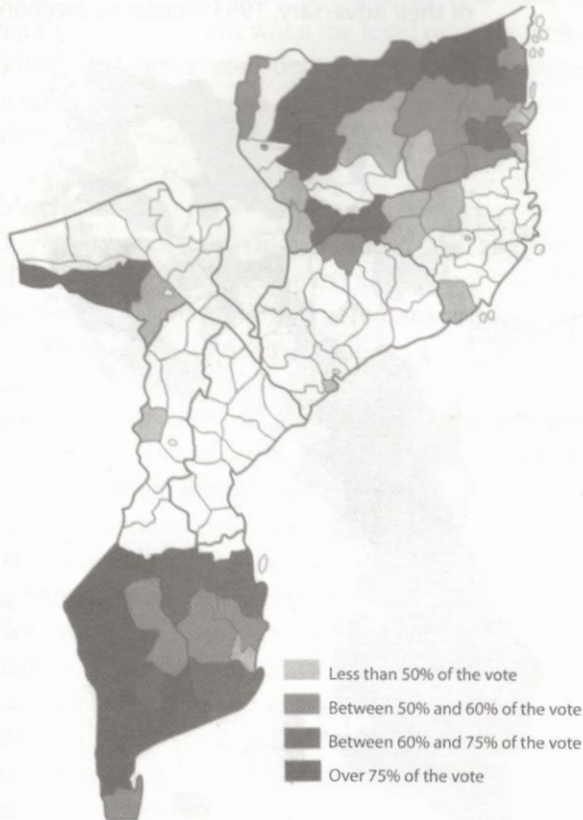
However, it should be noted here that these ethnic variations are not directly related to popular partisan preference. Even though some Makuas voted for Renamo in Nampula province, other Makuas from Cabo Delgado and Niassa provinces voted for Frelimo. In addition, some of the Tsongas from Govuro unexpectedly supported Renamo rather than Frelimo. In spite of this, this study can confidently state that in the 1994 multiparty legislative elections, the overwhelming majority of Changanas and Makondes were more likely to support Frelimo, due to their historical alignment



Sigrid Spinnox/Afrika Photos



Figure 3: Ethnic regions where Frelimo won a majority, 1994 legislative election



Source: de Brito, L. 1996. Voting Behaviour in Mozambique's First Multiparty Elections. In *Mozambique: Elections, Democracy and Development*, edited by Brazão Mazula. Maputo. Note: the figure title was adapted by the author.

with this party; while an overwhelming majority of Ndaus and Senas were more likely to prefer Renamo. Even though in the 1999 and 2004 multiparty legislative elections, the turnout reduced significantly, these overwhelming majorities continued to be more or less salient. In fact, the majority of Tsonga and Makonde ethnic identities continued to support Frelimo strongly in 1999 and 2004; and the majority of Ndaus and Senas also continued to do so with respect to Renamo in the same periods (see the attached table).

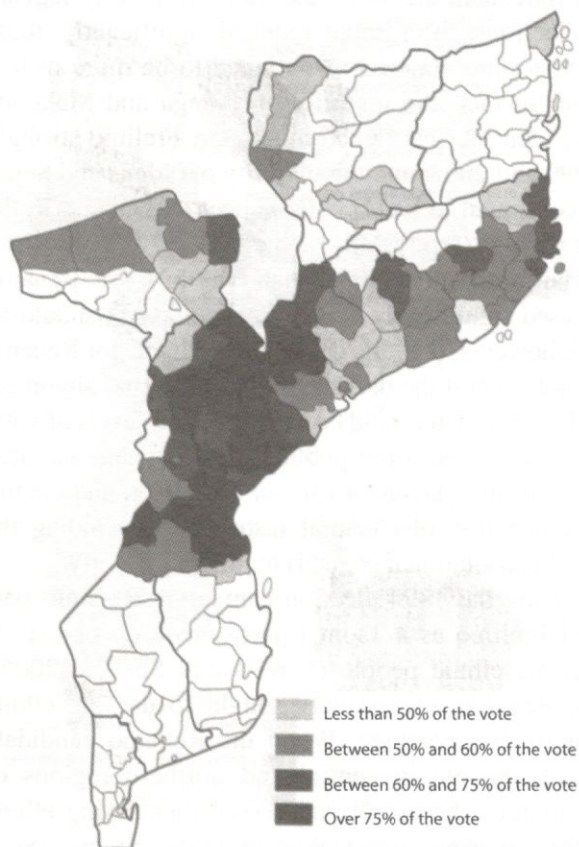
The proportions of Chuabo voting for Renamo decreased significantly from 1999 to 2004. It should be noted, however, that this decrease in support for Renamo does not suggest the decline of Chuabo ethnic alignment with Renamo. This could be a result of low levels of voter turnout, stemming from public disillusionment and apathy due to high levels of official corruption and control and domination of electoral institutions (including the judicial constitutional council) by the ruling party.<sup>5</sup>

During the 1994 election campaign, Renamo portrayed Frelimo as a Tsonga party made up of mainly Changana ethnic people (Pereira and Shenga, 2005). Thus, Renamo aggressively sought to use the ethnic factor to its advantage. When the Renamo candidate spoke to people in central and northern regions of Mozambique, he usually addressed them using ethnic identity, such as “my Makua brothers” or my “Sena sons and daughters” – a practice that had been barred from the nationalist discourse for years (Pereira and Shenga, 2005:24; see also Cahen 1998; 2002). While Frelimo had a pro-modernisation approach, addressing all people simply as Mozambicans and discouraging the use of ethnic classifications, Renamo (in contrast) decided to use greater numbers of electoral activists from the groups that were less represented in the Frelimo government, particularly among the core of old Northern Creole (from Zambezia valley, Mozambique Island and Ibo island), the Ndaus-Senas elite, and the Makuas-Lomwe elite.<sup>6</sup> During the 1994 campaign, Renamo activists were forced to speak mainly in local languages, and to wear the colours associated with northern and central ethnic groups. In doing this, Renamo leaders wanted to remind the people, particularly those in Central and Northern Mozambique, that they had suffered under the one-party system, and to portray Renamo as the party of those who were marginalised (Pereira and Shenga, 2005).

Compared to South Africa, a study on “political institutions, social demographics and the decline of eth-

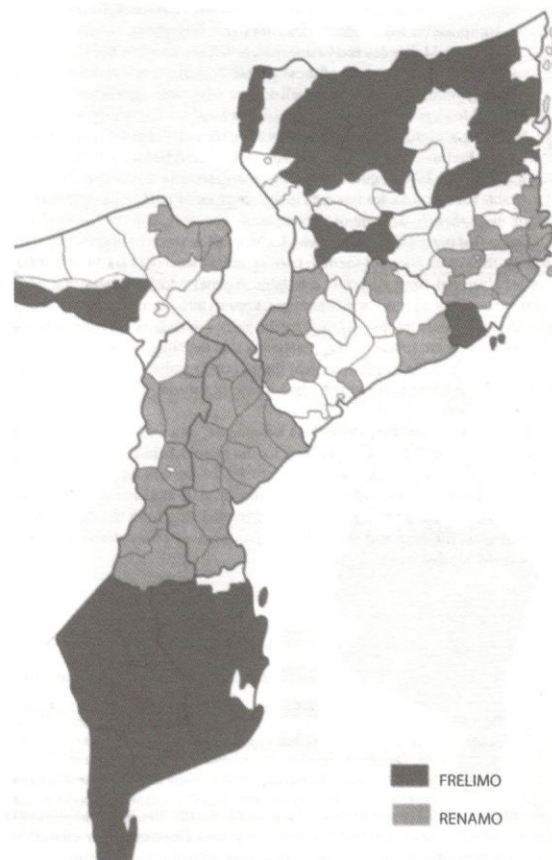


Figure 4: Ethnic regions where Renamo won a majority, 1994 legislative election



Source: de Brito, L. 1996. Voting Behaviour in Mozambique's First Multiparty Elections. In *Mozambique: Elections, Democracy and Development*, edited by Brazão Mazula. Maputo. Note: the figure title was adapted by the author.

Figure 5: Ethnic regions where Frelimo or Renamo won more than twice the number of the votes of their adversary, 1994 legislative election



Source: de Brito, L. 1996. Voting Behaviour in Mozambique's First Multiparty Elections. In *Mozambique: Elections, Democracy and Development*, edited by Brazão Mazula. Maputo. Note: the map title was adapted by the author.

nic mobilisation in South Africa, 1994 – 1999”, Piombo concludes that “it is important to acknowledge the miracle that South Africa has produced insofar as being able to prevent the emergence of divisive ethnic conflict” (Piombo, 2004:28). Piombo (2004) advances that:

“Prior to 1994, South Africa was considered to hold great potential for ethnic and racial conflicts as it initiated a system of democratic rule. The peacefulness of the consolidation process and the absence of ethnic violence is, undeniably, an optimal outcome for a country that had been riddled by deeply divisive communal divisions for decades. The fact that one can discuss “normal” politics in South Africa, where parties compete in free, fair, and relatively peaceful elections, owes a great deal to the conflict-

reducing effects of the country’s political institutions and spirit of national reconciliation. This relative normalcy and lack of ethnic politics are exactly what make South Africa a crucial case for studying the conditions under which ethnic conflict may be avoided, and for how various institutional structures interact with other factors to shape the mode of partisan mobilisation in democratising countries” (Piombo, 2004:29).

In summary, based on aggregate data, one can confidently say that Mozambican ethnically divided society manifests its societal divisions in the political arena, especially in the Frelimo and Renamo parties, in Renamo’s mobilisation, and in people’s partisan prefer-

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ence. One can also track how various groups behave, but it is not possible to capture behaviour at an individual level. However, many research surveys have found that this is not evident when the level of analysis is individual, and other considerations (including cognitive awareness, government and party performances) are taken into consideration.

### Conclusions

This study showed evidence that ethnic divisions are related, to some extent, to party formation, mobilisation and people's party political preference in Mozambique.

While ethnic-regional variations are found in partisan choices, conclusions can be only inferred from groups and not individuals. Data showed that there is ethnic alignment on people's choice, with Changanas and Makonde ethnic groups more likely to vote for Frelimo, and (on the other hand) Ndaus and Senas more likely to vote for Renamo. This reflects the ethnic alignment on the formation of the two biggest parties during the liberation struggle. Many Frelimo historical leaders (and many of its cadres) come from Tsonga groups – especially Changanas – and many of its cadres from central ethnic groups were expelled from the movement; while the former took control of the movement, the latter created Renamo. Thus, people's choice in Mozambique reflects the internal ethnic struggles between southern ethnic groups and the central and northern ones within the liberation movement – struggles that also contributed to the formation of these two parties.

Renamo, used ethnicity for political mobilisation in the 1994 election campaign but this strategy was not repeated in further electoral campaigns, either by Renamo or other political parties. Due to constant appeals for national unity (mainly from the ruling party), future Mozambican politics could be characterised by a continued decline in ethnic based voter mobilisation. ●

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### Endnotes

- 1 In this paper, "FRELIMO" in capital letters, refers to the Front for the Liberation of Mozambique, while "Frelimo" refers to the political party.
- 2 For (ethnic) regional division see also the attached Figure 1.
- 3 Languages: Emakhuwa 26.1 percent, Xichangana 11.3 percent, Portuguese 8.8 percent (official; spoken by 27 percent of population as a second language), Elomwe 7.6 percent, Cisena

6.8 percent, Echuwabo 5.8 percent, other Mozambican languages 32 percent, other foreign languages 0.3 percent, unspecified 1.3 percent (1997 census).

- 4 Southern ethnic groups used a (rude) name of Xingondo to identify those who differ from them in the country.
- 5 The Transparency International and World Bank have been scoring and classifying Mozambique as one of the most corrupt countries in the world. See Transparency International. 2005. The 2005 Transparency International Corruption Perceptions Index. [www.transparency.org](http://www.transparency.org) and [www.worldbank.org](http://www.worldbank.org)
- 6 According to my secondary sources I did not find any Renamo ethnic appeal or mobilisation in the 1999 and 2004 electoral campaigns, even though Ndaus and Senas demonstrated strong support for Renamo in the polls, and Frelimo got strong support from Changanas and Makondes.

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Through facilitation, advocacy, grantmaking, partnership-building and capacity development support, OSISA seeks to foster in Southern Africa the values, ideals, institutions, policies and practices of open society. Open society is essentially an ethos that seeks to entrench human rights and democratic openness, as well as to foster the accountability of those who hold and exercise power in public and other domains.

Efforts towards building and sustaining open societies are, or at least must be, an "ideas-driven" enterprise. Published quarterly, this Digest therefore offers an opportunity for reflection by OSISA, its partners and other stakeholders – a platform where ideas may coalesce, be contested, initiated and developed. In this way, OSISA's strategies, programme efforts and resource deployment remain continually dynamic and informed.

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