

## Escalating civil unrest leads to increased protection risks and poverty

### PROBABILITY



### IMPACT



### OVERVIEW

On 9 October 2024, Mozambique held general elections featuring three main presidential candidates: the Frelimo party's Daniel Chapo, successor to outgoing President Filipe Nyusi; Venâncio Mondlane of the new Podemos party; and Ossufo Momade of the Renamo party. Allegations of vote tampering, restricted access for opposition representatives and observers, and the misuse of state resources marred the election process (DW 15/10/2024; IRI 11/10/2024; ICG 15/11/2024; EUEOM 22/10/2024). Though Chapo led early results, Mondlane alleged victory on 10 October based on parallel vote counts.

On 21 October, protests erupted after Mondlane called for demonstrations and a nationwide general strike (ICG 15/11/2024). The police's heavy-handed response – including firing live ammunition at demonstrators; the targeted killing of two senior opposition figures, including Mondlane's lawyer, who was preparing a case claiming electoral fraud; and the declaration by the National Election Commission on 24 October of Chapo as the winner with 71% of the votes– intensified the protests across the country, including in Beira, Maputo, Nacala, Pemba, Nampula, Zambezia, and Chimoio (ECHO 13/12/2024; ICG 15/11/2024; AI 06/11/2024; Crisis24 25/10/2024; Expresso 24/10/2024; BBC 20/10/2024). Mondlane subsequently went into hiding, although he has continued to incite protesters, through social media, promising to continue until the Frelimo party concedes the election (BBC 02/12/2024; BBC 04/11/2024; ICG 15/11/2024).

Between 21 October and 13 December, 275 protests and riots were reported, with at least 130 people killed, more than 2,000 injured (including by bullets), and almost 4,000 arrested and detained, including children (ACLEd accessed 18/12/2024; Público 15/12/2024; HRW 24/11/2024). Protests have grown violent in urban centres, such as Maputo, Nampula, and Zambezia, evidenced by the increasing number of casualties, arrests from the riots, and violent clashes

with the police, who have used live ammunition and tear gas (ACLEd accessed 18/12/2024; Público 15/12/2024; AIM 04/12/2024; HRW 29/10/2024). After Cyclone Chido hit northern Mozambique on 15 December, Mondlane called for a temporary halt in the protests to mourn the victims. According to Mondlane, protests, which will be “life or death”, should restart on 23 December (Observador 16/12/2024 and 18/12/2024).

Since the protests began, economic disruption has been extensive and continues to worsen as general strikes shut down businesses and block key infrastructure. Protests that cause road closures frequently paralyse urban centres, including Maputo, Nampula, and Zambezia (ICG 15/11/2024; AJ 15/11/2024). Between 7–9 December, the state-owned Electricidade de Moçambique announced electricity provision restrictions in the south of the country, including Maputo, because of the protests (O País 09/12/2024; RFI 08/12/2024; Público 07/12/2024). Until 11 December, operations in Maputo port remained suspended since 6 November, affecting the flow of goods (Bloomberg 19/12/2024; BL 11/12/2024; Reuters 07/11/2024). The border with South Africa has also been temporarily closed on different occasions, most recently between 9–12 December, affecting crucial imports such as food supplies (Bloomberg 09/12/2024; DNoticias 09/12/2024).

Since the start of the protests, government crackdowns on free speech – including mobile network and internet shutdowns, press restrictions, and intimidation – have further fuelled tensions (AJ 15/11/2024). While foreign governments and human rights organisations condemn the excessive use of force, more opposition parties and figures, including the Renamo party, have joined the call to overturn the elections (RTP 04/12/2024; The Guardian 28/11/2024; HRW 24/11/2024). Protests have evolved from rejecting alleged election fraud to include broader demands for systemic reform, citing corruption, poverty, a lack of opportunities, and restricted freedoms under the Frelimo party's decades-long rule (ICG 15/11/2024; AJ 15/11/2024).

Over the next one to three months, there is a very high probability of escalating civil unrest across the country, as neither Mondlane nor the Government appears willing to compromise. The unrest could worsen with the expected 23 December announcement by the Constitutional Council of the verified election results, continued internet shutdowns and press restrictions, direct incitement to violence or extremism from either side, and increasing violent crackdowns and police brutality. An escalation could damage the economy and lead to a widespread breakdown in law and order, intensifying poverty, aggravating humanitarian needs (such as protection and food security), and further limiting humanitarian access, including for the humanitarian response to Cyclone Chido.

## ABOUT THIS REPORT

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### Aim

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This report provides an analysis of the risk of escalating civil unrest in Mozambique following the general elections on 9 October 2024. The report provides a brief of the current context in the country, identifies the factors (triggers) that could lead to further civil unrest, and outlines key impacts should such a risk materialise, including effects on humanitarian operations.

ACAPS' risk analysis aims to identify potential changes in the context that may lead to humanitarian consequences. Explaining how situations might develop and understanding their potential impacts can support humanitarian decision makers and responders in their planning, including preparedness efforts and anticipatory action activities, improving the overall response.

### Scope

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This report examines the political, socioeconomic, and security dynamics influencing Mozambique's current context, focusing on anticipating the potential impacts of increased civil unrest. It assesses a short-to-medium-term risk within a timeline of one to three months (up to March 2025). The context and dynamics of violence in Mozambique are complex and interact with other factors beyond the 9 October 2024 elections; however, such a detailed analysis is beyond the scope of this report.

### Methodology

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ACAPS based this analysis on its risk methodology and a secondary data review of publicly available sources in English and Portuguese. The ACAPS risk methodology defines risk as the probability of a hazard materialising combined with the estimated impact of such hazard. The impact is the combination of the anticipated humanitarian consequences of a hazard materialising. It can comprise an increase in the number of people needing assistance, the severity of their needs, or both. Probability is the chance of a hazard materialising. ACAPS' risk methodology is available [here](#).

## Limitations

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Risk analysis focuses on negative outcomes and may not adequately consider the potential benefits or opportunities of different events. While, in such a complex context, the potential impacts of escalating civil unrest and violence may be far-reaching, this report aims to highlight the impacts seen as most emergent. Information and data gaps limit the analysis because data on remote regions and politically sensitive events is limited, and potential information suppression adds to the analytical constraints. At the same time, while the aim is to ensure that all information is current at the time of publication, the fluidity and fast-evolving nature of the situation means that the report may not capture all recent developments.

## CONTEXT

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### Political background

Mozambique has endured decades of political instability since achieving independence from Portugal in 1975, with a civil war between the Frente de Libertação de Moçambique (Frelimo) and Resistência Nacional Moçambicana (Renamo) lasting until 1992. Since 1975, even after multiparty elections began in 1994, the Frelimo party has been in power (*Britannica* accessed 04/12/2024; *WB* accessed 04/12/2024). The country's governance is classified as authoritarian, with concerns existing over corruption, the independence of the judiciary system, electoral fairness, the right to political participation, and the presence of free and independent media (*EIU* 15/02/2024; *Freedom House* accessed 04/12/2024). Allegations of irregularities have characterised elections in the country, including the previous general elections in 2019, often leading to violence before, during, and after the polls (*CIP* 19/02/2024; *TWP* 23/10/2019).

### Humanitarian situation

Mozambique's political, socioeconomic, and humanitarian crises are deeply intertwined because of the impacts of conflict, natural hazards, and extreme poverty. As of 5 December 2024, UNICEF estimates that 4.8 million people are in need of humanitarian assistance across the country, including 3.4 million children and 480,000 people with disabilities (*UNICEF* 05/12/2024). From April–September 2024, 2.79 million people experienced acute food insecurity – i.e. Crisis (IPC Phase 3) or worse conditions – and it is estimated that more than half of the population cannot afford a nutritious diet (*WFP* accessed 04/12/2024). Mozambique is currently ranked among the world's poorest countries, with close to 75% of the population living below the extreme poverty line of USD 2.15 a day (*WB* accessed 04/12/2024; *UNDP* accessed 04/12/2024). With 80% of the population under 35 years old, young people play a critical role in Mozambique's society but face limited opportunities and difficult job and life prospects (*IMF* 22/07/2024; *CIA* accessed 04/12/2024).

Climate-related disasters have significantly affected Mozambique. The impacts of Cyclones Idai and Kenneth in 2019, Cyclone Freddy in 2023, and, more recently, Cyclone Chido in December 2024 have affected millions of people, killing and displacing many, destroying infrastructure, affecting agricultural production, and limiting humanitarian access (OCHA 15/12/2024; UNICEF accessed 04/12/2024; WMO 02/07/2024; WFP 24/03/2023). During the yearly October–April rainy season, an estimated 2.5 million people are at risk of experiencing recurrent tropical cyclones, heavy rains, and floods (IFRC accessed 04/12/2024 and 25/03/2024; OCHA 28/12/2023).

In resource-rich Cabo Delgado province, Mozambican and international forces have been unable to curb an insurgency linked to Islamic extremist groups that began in 2017 (The Christian Post 25/11/2024; WB accessed 04/12/2024). The conflict has caused, destruction, instability, and displacement across northern provinces of Cabo Delgado, Niassa and Nampula, leading to humanitarian needs, especially for women and girls (OCHA 13/12/2024; HRW 11/01/2024; OCHA 28/12/2023). In October 2024, a recent surge in insecurity led to increased constraints to humanitarian operations (OCHA 12/12/2024, OCHA 29/11/2024). By 29 November, 541,000 people remained displaced in Cabo Delgado because of the conflict (OCHA 29/11/2024).

## RATIONALE

Mondlane insists that demonstrations will persist until his demands for electoral victory and anti-corruption reforms are met. This signals a strategy to maintain public pressure by paralysing major cities, such as Maputo, through protests, road blockages, and general strikes. The Government, however, seems to be betting on protest fatigue, promising not to back down against the demonstrators (ICG 15/11/2024). Security forces have had a record of abuse over the past decades, putting demonstrators at risk of state violence. After the October elections, the Government has heavily relied on the military and police to quell protests and detain the opposition, while also limiting internet access and restricting press activities (Freedom House accessed 04/12/2024; AJ 15/11/2024; HRW 24/11/2024; Público 04/12/2024). These measures have failed to maintain public order, however, and instead have led to widespread resentment, violent behaviour, growing mistrust in the Government and public institutions, and the intensification of protests (RFI 10/12/2024; Observador 14/11/2024; ICG 15/11/2024).

Both sides' rhetoric could become more extreme, hostile, and polarising as they try to mobilise support in the absence of peaceful dialogue. Mondlane, despite calling for peaceful demonstrations and strikes, has repeatedly employed revolutionary rhetoric to mobilise protestors, while the government promises to continue its "heavy hand" against the protests it calls "urban terrorism" (ICG 15/11/2024, Público 04/12/2024; DW 22/10/2024). A change in the approach towards direct incitement to violence and rebellion or the use of more divisive language from either side could escalate tensions, fuelling further hostilities in the streets (RFI 10/12/2024; AJ 15/11/2024; ICG 15/11/2024).

As the opposition is not expected to back down, the Government could respond through increasingly oppressive measures, such as prohibiting demonstrations and strikes, further restricting internet access, and sponsoring the harassment of opposition supporters and violent police crackdowns on protesters (ICG 15/11/2024). Such measures could backfire, fuel increased dissatisfaction, and galvanise more public support for the opposition, potentially leading more people to join the demonstrations.

An increase in the number of people joining the protests or the frequency of protests themselves could further challenge the already limited capacity of the police to exert crowd control. Security forces could resort to more hostile dispersal tactics, as they have already done through live ammunition, leading to escalations in violence (Observador 06/12/2024; Crisis24 accessed 17/12/2024). An increasing number of highly publicised acts of state brutality, as reports and videos of arrests and violent killings spread widely through media and social media, could lead to more aggressive protests in return, possibly creating a feedback loop of escalating violence and unrest (The Guardian 28/11/2024).

The publication of the verified election results, expected around 23 December, could lead to more unrest. If the Constitutional Council uphold the election results without adequate and transparent justification, protests by opposition supporters are likely to escalate, possibly triggering more violence. The opposition has repeatedly criticised both the National Election Commission and the Constitutional Council – tasked with running the polls and addressing electoral fraud allegations – for their lack of independence and transparency and a longstanding bias towards the incumbent Government (RFI 08/12/2024; DW 25/10/2024; O País 08/11/2024). If the electoral authorities fail to take satisfactory steps to make the polls more transparent – such as publishing disaggregated results by polling station and allowing independent observers to investigate the fraud allegations – the lack of action could undermine their credibility further and lead to increasing concerns of bias and interference within the electoral system (ICG 15/11/2024). If Chapo is declared the winner after the verification of the results, his inauguration on 15 January 2025 could trigger more protests and violence.

## Key anticipated impacts

Escalating civil unrest and violence could bring extended impacts to the population, first affecting those participating in the demonstrations and strikes and those living where the protests occur, especially in cities such as Maputo, Nampula, and Zambezia. As the disruption extends, however, impacts could become more severe and far-reaching, affecting the larger Mozambican economy, with significant impacts on those already living in extreme poverty and with existing humanitarian needs, especially those in the Cyclone Chido affected provinces of Cabo Delgado and Nampula.

## Increasing mortality and protection risks

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An escalation of civil unrest is expected to lead to increased mortality, as confrontations between police and protesters frequently turn violent, with multiple casualties common. It will also significantly heighten protection risks, such as direct attacks on civilians, unlawful arrests or detentions, theft, and extortion. These will particularly affect young men, who make up most of the protest demographic, but also women and children involved in the strikes and demonstrations (BBC 02/12/2024; AJ 31/10/2024). If the unrest continues, criminal activities, such as looting, are expected to rise as escalated social tensions and a growing disregard for the rule of law create a permissive environment for abuses.

## Loss of livelihoods and increased poverty

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Prolonged unrest and escalating violence have the potential to further disrupt livelihoods, increasing poverty and disrupting socioeconomic stability. Particularly in urban centres such as Maputo and Nampula, strikes, roadblocks, and violence are expected to continue disrupting markets and paralysing businesses, leading to further income losses for those dependent on such livelihoods (RTP 06/12/2024; Jornal de Negócios 13/11/2024). Informal workers, who rely on daily earnings and represent nearly half of Mozambique's economy, are particularly vulnerable to such income shocks, potentially leaving them unable to meet basic needs (O.E 25/01/2024).

Additional damage and obstructions to roads, ports, borders, and power infrastructure would cause economic and productivity losses, disrupt supply chains, and increase inflation, making it more challenging for households in an already impoverished population to meet their needs (WB accessed 04/12/2024; ICG 15/11/2024). The increased escalation of violence would likely trigger further closures of the border with South Africa, Mozambique's largest trade partner. Such closures would also halt the flow of essential goods, including food, fuel, and medicine, and affect Mozambican exports, with potentially broad negative impacts on its economy. Such widespread effects on livelihoods risk heightening inflation while reducing income streams, entrenching poverty and deepening inequality in Mozambique.

## Worsening food insecurity

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Disruptions to supply chains and markets, combined with potential negative impacts on agricultural production, could significantly undermine food security. The December–March period marks the peak of planting and weeding and the beginning of harvesting, which are critical stages of the agricultural calendar (FEWS NET 06/2024). If the current unrest extends to agricultural areas, disruptions could reduce yields and subsequently cause food shortages, affecting both rural subsistence farmers and urban consumers dependent on those products.

Because goods primarily move within Mozambique via road networks, more protests, roadblocks, and strikes could affect food supply chains and markets, escalating food scarcity and prices, in particular for urban centres such as Beira, Maputo, and Nampula (AJ 15/11/2024). Mozambique's reliance on imports, including for staple foods, also makes border closures and port disruptions critical factors (FEWS NET 01/2019). Rising food prices disproportionately affect low-income households, pushing more people into higher levels of food insecurity. As more than half of the population already cannot access nutritious food, and one in every three children under five is chronically malnourished, higher food insecurity could significantly increase severe acute malnutrition (WFP accessed 04/12/2024).

## Impacts on humanitarian response

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Growing unrest, insecurity, and infrastructure damage can significantly impede humanitarian access to populations in need. Roadblocks and the destruction of infrastructure also disrupt supply chains crucial for humanitarian operations, while internet shutdowns hinder coordination and communication. If protests continue in the most cyclone affected provinces, including Nampula and Pemba, timely access to people with humanitarian needs could be hampered (ECHO 13/12/2024). Increased government restrictions and bureaucratic impediments to humanitarian organisations perceived to be aligned with the opposition, including through repressive control and limitations on movement, can severely strain operational capacities. If violence escalates, increased costs for security and the evacuation of international staff could further complicate the humanitarian response.