



Centro de Pesquisas sobre  
Governação e Desenvolvimento

## **Predicting Mozambique's 15 October 2019 Election**

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## **About the author**

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# Predicting Mozambique's 15 October 2019 Election

## Introduction

On 15<sup>th</sup> October 2019 Mozambicans will be voting for the sixth time in presidential and legislative elections following the country's founding multiparty election in 1994. The founding, second and third elections, respectively in 1994, 1999 and 2004, included votes for positions of the executive president and representatives in the national parliament; and the fourth and fifth elections, respectively, in 2009 and 2014 entailed votes for the executive president and both the representatives of the national and provincial parliaments. The forthcoming 2019 election will be different. It will entail voting for the executive president, representatives of the national and provincial parliaments and, for the first time, voting for the positions of provincial governors as a result of a constitutional amendment in mid-2018 on decentralization.<sup>1</sup>

This Briefing Paper aims to analyse factors that might affect the outcome of Mozambique's elections. Why study elections? Not least because they are fascinating events but also because they provide an insight into the levels of participation, representation and democracy in a given society. The founding election in Mozambique mobilized an "enormous information network covering the entire country, involving almost all of the country's broadcasting, video and advertising companies, dozens of related institutions and thousands of young Mozambicans who were the great communicators of this process in their communities: the voter education agents" (De Maia 1996:151). As such it is interesting to observe the performance of this on the news media and the election issues that were covered by the media and discussed with spouses, co-workers, friends and neighbours. Another reason to study elections is that "elections [can] yield masses of quantitative data amenable to statistical analysis" (Denver 2007:4). Exactly who is going to win an election and with what margin of victory is a matter of some debate. This Paper contributes to that debate by reflecting on some of the long and short-term factors that may affect voting behavior of the 2019 election in Mozambique.

The long-term factors of voting behavior include voters' social characteristics, such as: class, religion and ethnicity but also their party identification. The *social determinant theory of voting behavior* resulted from Lazarsfeld and colleagues (Lazarsfeld, Berelson and Gaudet 1944, Berelson, Lazarsfeld and McPhee 1954) while the *party identification<sup>2</sup> theory of voting behavior* derived from Campbell *et al.* (1960). These theories assumed that voters' social characteristics and their psychological attachment to a political party were determinants affecting their political preference.

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<sup>1</sup> Law of Amendment of the Constitution - Law 1/2018, of 12 June.

<sup>2</sup> Party identification means a sense of attachment to a political party, a feeling of commitment to it and being a supporter of the party.

The short-term factors include current political issues, campaign events and the personalities of party leaders or candidates. The *rational choice theory of voting behavior* appears as an alternative to long-term influences. It assumes that voters “act rationally – that is, before deciding on a course of action (such as buying a particular product) they weigh up the costs and benefits of the various alternatives and they will take the decision which maximizes the benefits and minimizes the costs to themselves” (Denver 2007). Thus, voters make a party choice and vote according to the performance evaluation they make of political parties and candidates by looking at current political issues, campaign events and personalities of party leaders or candidates.

How can you test and analyze the role played by long and short-term factors? This is a very difficult question for any scholar interested in studying voting behavior in Mozambique. Public opinion election data in Mozambique is almost non-existent. Of the five elections conducted so far in the country (1994, 1999, 2004, 2009 and 2014) only one post-election survey has ever been conducted – the post-election public opinion survey of the 2004 election.<sup>3</sup> Subsequently most Mozambican scholars tend to make assumptions and rely solely on anecdotal evidence and unsystematic data to make election debate and analysis, even though aggregated election data from official sources does exist. This debate and analysis therefore remains to be tested with credible data and in the context where there is little demand to collect or provide support and financial resources for its collection.

The effort that I am making with this Briefing Paper is to test the effects of long and short-term factors of voting behavior in Mozambique using general public opinion data on democracy and governance from Afrobarometer<sup>4</sup>. However, Afrobarometer is a broad-based democracy survey, it is not an election specific survey, so whilst it includes scattered questions on elections, party identification and voting behaviour, there are limitations to the type of the analysis that can be undertaken. Further, the data collection is not scheduled to coincide with the period immediately before or after an election, thus respondents can be asked election related questions a long time away from the actual event, raising potential concerns about the reliability of the responses. Due to these limitations I cannot apply high confidence levels to fully testing the factors of voting behavior mentioned above. To minimize this limitation, I combine the Afrobarometer data with official election data. For long-term factors, the Afrobarometer provides information on voter's party identification and for short-term influences, it offers data on performance.

For these factors I pose the following hypotheses:

- A political party that receives high levels of voters identifying with it is likely to receive more support in an election.

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<sup>3</sup> The 2004 Mozambique post-election survey was conducted in early 2005 in collaboration with the Comparative National Election Project (CNEP).

<sup>4</sup> [www.afrobarometer.org](http://www.afrobarometer.org). To date Afrobarometer has conducted 6 rounds of surveys in Mozambique (2002, 2005, 2008, 2012, 2015 and 2018) using a face-to-face structured questionnaire with a nationally representative, random, stratified probability sample of the adult population.

- A party or candidate that is evaluated highly is also likely to have more voters to support it in an election.

Besides these two factors, one tapping long-term and one short-term, I also look at voter intention.

### Long-term influence

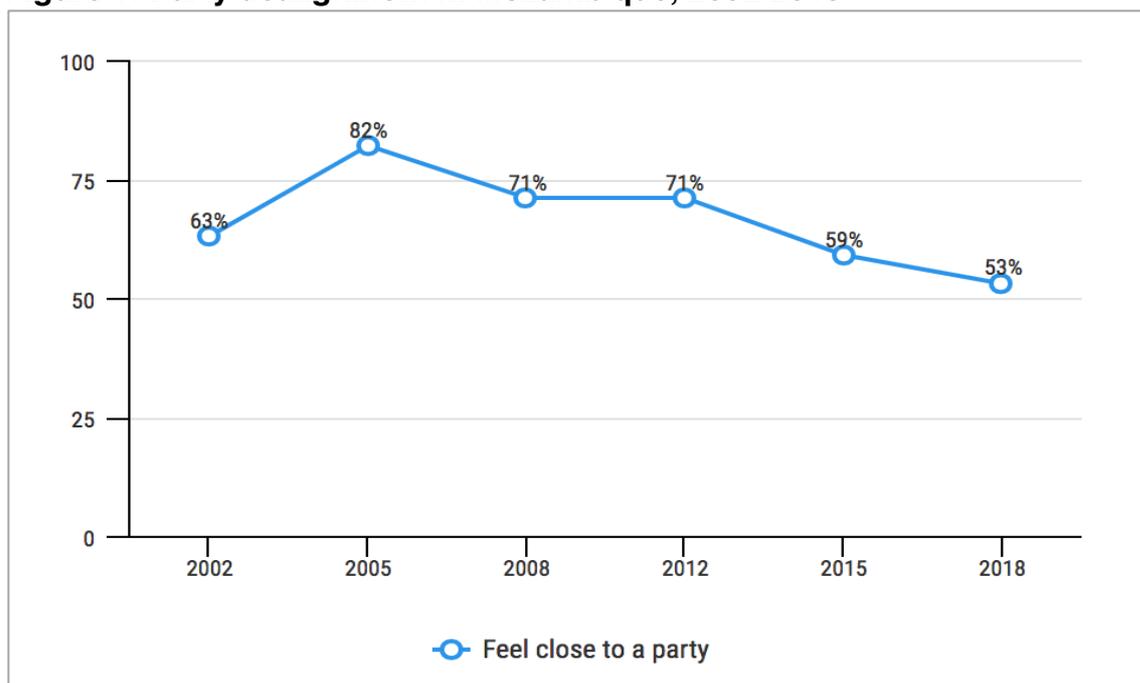
To capture the long-term sense of voters' party identification I use the following survey question: "Do you feel close to any particular political party?" The results of comparison of six surveys conducted by Afrobarometer in Mozambique in Figure 1 show that party identification is relatively high but declining in the country.

Partisanship was high (82 percent) in 2005 – that is, one year after Armando Guebuza was elected to the presidency in 2004. By looking at official election data, Guebuza was elected in 2004 with 64 percent of votes and his party Frelimo with 62 percent of votes to occupy legislative seats in the Assembly of the Republic.

Party dealignment occurred in 2008 – that is, one year before Guebuza was reelected in 2009. In 2009 both Guebuza and his party Frelimo were elected with about 75 percent of votes.

Party dealignment occurred again when Guebuza left office and Filipe Nyusi came into power and again during Nyusi's term. Partisanship reduced from 71 percent in 2012 to 59 percent in 2015; and to 53 percent in 2018. In the 2014 election, Nyusi was elected with 57 percent of votes while his party Frelimo received 56 percent.

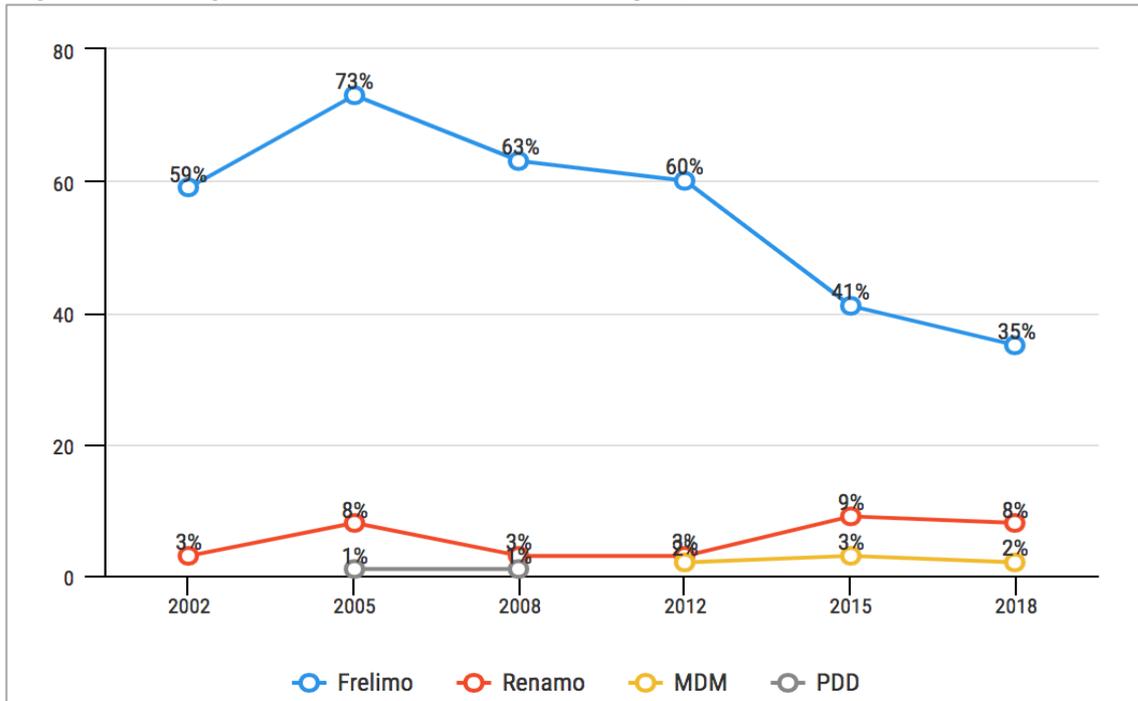
**Figure 1: Party dealignment in Mozambique, 2002-2018**



Note: Afrobarometer survey question: "Do you feel close to any particular political party?" Percentages refer to those who responded 'feel close to a party'.

After asking “Do you feel close to a political party”, for those who responded ‘yes – they feel close to a party,’ interviewers were asked next: “Which party is that?” Comparative analysis of surveys in Figure 2 shows that there is a huge difference in party identification, with the incumbent party Frelimo leading far ahead and opposition parties lagging behind. Nevertheless, with exception to 2005 and 2012, identification with the incumbent party has been declining over time.

**Figure 2: Party identification in Mozambique, 2002-2018**



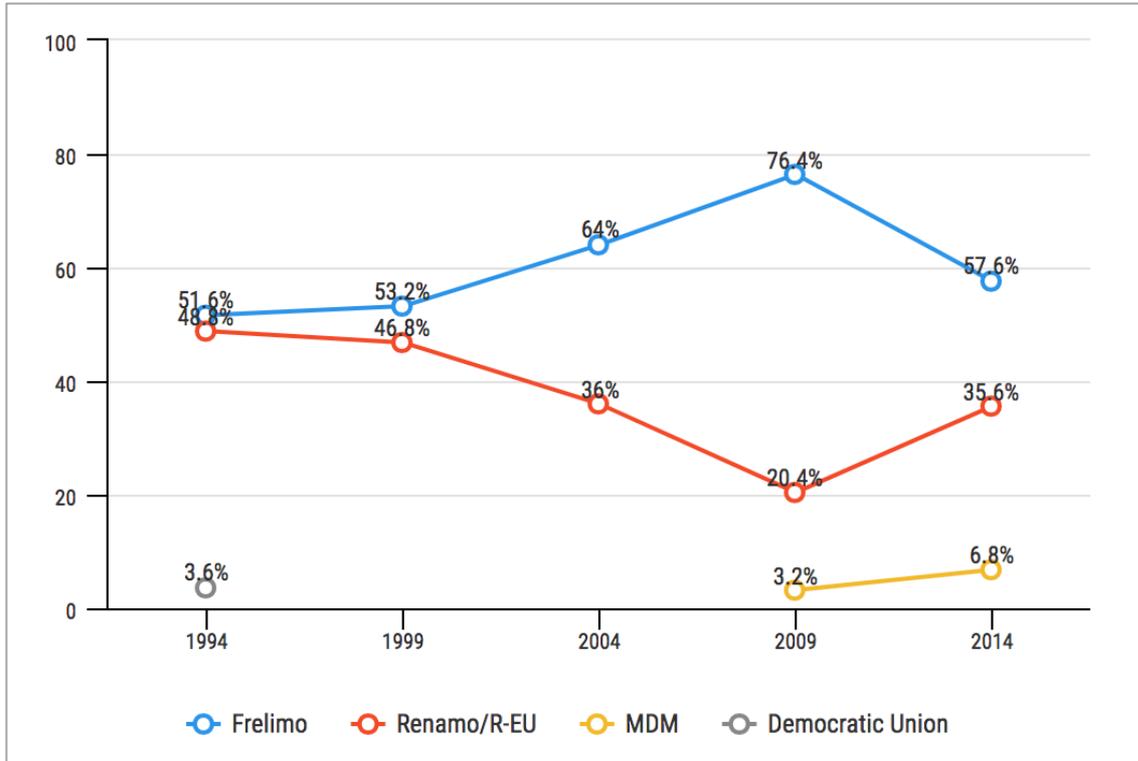
Note: Afrobarometer survey question: “Do you feel close to any particular political party?” [If yes], what party is that?” Percentages refer to those who responded that ‘feel close’ to Frelimo (Front of Liberation of Mozambique), Renamo (National Resistance Movement), PDD (Party for Peace, Democracy and Development) and MDM (Mozambique Democratic Movement). Those parties that received support close to zero were excluded.

Comparing this data with official election data (Figure 3), we observe significant differences. The official data shows that both the first (incumbent party Frelimo) and second (Renamo, the main opposition party) most voted for parties have two-digit percentage of votes. However the public opinion data shows that only the first most for voted party has the two-digit percentage of votes. The second most voted for party appears only with one-digit percentage of votes.

How does one interpret this difference? It is possible that fear and intimidation persists in the Mozambique society following approximately five and two decades, respectively, of colonial (1920/30-1974) and one-party (1975-1994) authoritarianism playing a role in explaining this. Mattes and Shenga (2013) found that most respondents in Mozambique who thought that interviewers were sent by government agencies were less likely to be opinionated about political issues and critical on democratic performance. Mozambicans might be cautious to tell interviewers face-to-

face that they are a supporter of the opposition because they might think that interviewers were sent by the government.<sup>5</sup>

**Figure 3: Party support in Mozambique elections, 1994-2014**



*Note: Based on official election data which is sourced from the institution that administers and supervises elections (National Electoral Commission/Technical Secretariat of Electoral Administration) and validates election results (Constitutional Court). In 1999 and 2004 Renamo campaigned as Renamo-Electoral Union (Renamo-EU) comprising an additional ten parties.*

### Short-term influences

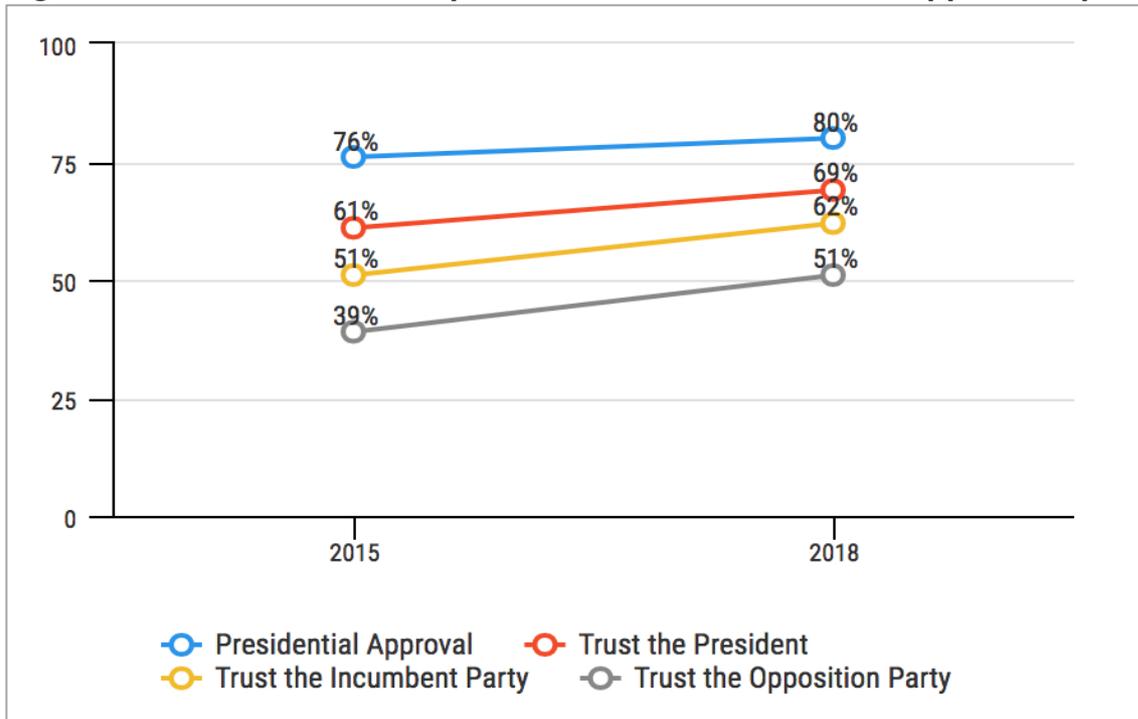
To capture short-term factors I consider performance, namely: approval of the incumbent president, trust in the president and trust in the incumbent and opposition parties (Figure 4). By looking at presidential approval I analyze the performance of the incumbent president Filipe Nyusi in his first year in office in 2015, compared to his fourth year in office in 2018.

Mozambicans give the incumbent president a high approval rate. When Nyusi was inaugurated into office in 2015 his approval rate was 76 percent and it increased in 2018 to 80 percent. The 2015 approval rate may be explained, in part, by the expectation he created during his inauguration to the people. His presidential

<sup>5</sup> At the beginning of interviews the interviewers introduce themselves to respondents saying they did not represent a political party or government agency and that they are doing data collection on governance and democracy in the country for an independent institution normally attached to academia or think tank.

inaugural speech was of 'inclusion'<sup>6</sup> in a context of 'political discrimination' being claimed by the opposition as well as analysts. In the same speech, he also portrayed himself as a 'servant of the people' by stating "the people are my boss".<sup>7</sup> His 2018 high approval may be accounted for, perhaps, in part, by his performance in establishing dialogue with the former Renamo leader Afonso Dhlakama to reduce tensions and political instability and bring back peace to the country to focus on poverty reduction and development.

**Figure 4: Performance of the president and incumbent and opposition parties**



Note: Survey questions: "Do you approve or disapprove of the way that the following people have performed their jobs over the past 12 months, or haven't you heard enough about them to say: President Filipe Nyusi?" "How much do you trust each of the following, or haven't you heard enough about them to say: The President of the Republic? Frelimo? Opposition parties? Percentages refer to those who responded: 'approve' or strongly approve' and trust 'somewhat' or 'a lot'.

Nevertheless, this high approval rate is given in a context where the country faced an unprecedented financial crisis<sup>8</sup> with high level of inflation. According to the World Bank data, inflation reached 19.85 percent in 2016 against 3.55 percent in 2015. It remained at double-digits in 2017 (11.9 percent) and 2018 (12.86 percent).<sup>9</sup>

<sup>6</sup> Nyusi finished his inaugural speech by stating that 'his heart includes all Mozambicans' [in Portuguese "No meu coração cabem todos os moçambicanos"], page 13 of Nyusi's inaugural speech "Discurso oficial: Cerimónia de Investidura S.E. Filipe Jacinto Nyusi Presidente da República de Moçambique", 15 De Janeiro De 2015, Praça Da Independência, Maputo.

<sup>7</sup> Page 2 of Nyusi's inaugural speech on 15 De Janeiro De 2015.

<sup>8</sup> In 2016 donors pulled out direct support from the state budget when an illegal debt of US\$ 2.2 billion with state guarantees was discovered in 2015.

<sup>9</sup> <https://data.worldbank.org/>

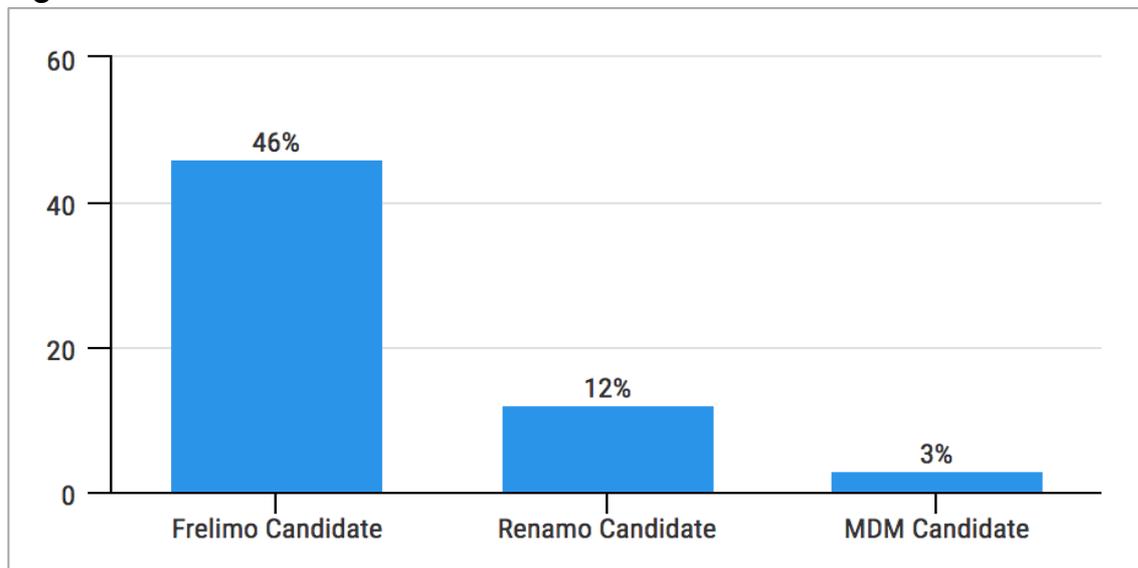
Trust in the incumbent president also improved from 61 percent in 2015 to 69 percent in 2018. The same applies to trust in political parties: trust in the incumbent party Frelimo increased from 51 percent in 2015 to 62 percent in 2018 and trust to the opposition parties, in general, increased from 39 percent in 2015 to 51 percent in 2018. This increase may reflect popular expectations that both the Mozambique president and political parties are essential institutions of its representative democracy.

## Voter intention

After considering long and short-term aspects of voting behavior, the third aspect that I look at, which might help to foresee who is going to win the 2019 election, is voter intention. Opinion poll companies and the media tend to use voter intention to find out or debate who is going to win an election. The voter intention question that can be used is: "If presidential elections were held tomorrow, which party's candidate would you vote for?"

The most recent Afrobarometer public opinion survey conducted in June-August 2018 asked this question. The responses show that about 46 percent said that they would vote for the Frelimo candidate, 12 percent for the Renamo candidate and 3 percent for the MDM candidate (Figure 5). About 28 percent refused to respond to this question and 11 percent said they did not know.

**Figure 5: Vote Intention for the 2019 election**



*Note: Survey question: "If presidential elections were held tomorrow, which party's candidate would you vote for?"*

## Conclusion and Discussion

Based on the only existing longitudinal public opinion data available, the incumbent party Frelimo and its candidate, Filipe Nyusi, present a good or very good prospect of being elected in the forthcoming 15 October 2019 election. In several points of time, Mozambicans tended to express they feel close to Frelimo. They tended to provide

high approval rating to the incumbent president Nyusi as well as tending to say they trust somewhat or a lot the incumbent president and his party Frelimo. If the 2019 election was being held tomorrow Frelimo's candidate Filipe Nyusi would have obtained about 46 percent of votes<sup>10</sup> against 12 percent and 3 percent, respectively, of Renamo and MDM candidates.

Nonetheless, a couple of aspects need to be considered with respect to these findings. First, while Mozambicans tend to express they feel close to Frelimo, at the same time the support for Frelimo appears not only to be declining in the most recent years in 2015 and 2018 but also to levels below 50 percent. This suggests that from the founding to more recent elections there has been a vote shifts as well as realignments. Some Frelimo identifiers might be becoming independents and even voting for other parties or not voting at all.

Second, that support for the opposition is low, with only a one-digit percentage as the public opinion survey presents, may be explained by fear or intimidation in that some people do not want to tell face-to-face to strangers that they identify with the opposition. As the official election data demonstrated, the main opposition party has been receiving significant support during national elections. In the October 2018 local municipal elections, Renamo won five of the seven Nampula province municipalities and in certain provinces has been controlling a number of provincial assemblies.

Third, although Mozambicans tend to provide a high approval rating to the incumbent president as well as trust the incumbent president and his party, they also present a syndrome of being 'uncritical citizens' (Mattes and Shenga 2013).<sup>11</sup> "High proportions of Mozambicans are unable to answer questions pertaining to the performance of government or to offer preferences about what kind of regime Mozambique ought to have. Those who are able to offer answers most often uncritically overrate the performance of the new democratic regime" (Mattes and Shenga 2007:iii). Yet this high performance is given in a context of the country's financial crisis where the prices of food and other day to day items are increasing.

Fourth, that close to half said that they are going to vote for the Frelimo candidate in the 2019 election, one should also observe that this voter intention question was asked far away from the 15 October 2019 election in June-August 2018. Therefore, more than a year ago. From that period until now some voters might have changed their vote intention to vote for another political party, due to short-term influences, such as: current political issues, upcoming campaign events and parties' candidate personalities. Also we do not know the vote intention of voters who refused to give an answer and those who responded do not know. In total, those who refused to answer and said that they did not know who they were going to vote make up a very significant proportion (39 percent). But also one should not forget that these people could be

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<sup>10</sup> With a sample survey (2,400) with 2 percent of margin of error, this could be 48 or 44 percent.

<sup>11</sup> "Critical citizenship" requires citizens who offer their leaders neither "blind trust" nor cynical, knee-jerk distrust but rather a healthy scepticism (Almond and Verba 1962, Mishler and Rose 1997).

those who abstain from voting in the country. In fact, the average of abstention of Mozambique's national elections is high (about 43 percent).

Shedding light on long and short-term influences of voting behavior, most studies show that long-term factors tend to be less determinant than the short-term influences from the rational choice theory (Dalton, McAllister and Wattenberg 2000). Nonetheless, the influence of long-term factors such as ethnicity should not be underestimated in Mozambique's politics today, particularly if it represents cleavage. Although none make up more than 50 percent, Mozambique is a multiethnic country with about 23 ethno-linguistic groups (Liphola 1996)<sup>12</sup> that often tend to be appealed to for votes. In the 1994 election the Renamo candidate, Afonso Dhlakama, made an ethnic mobilization for votes<sup>13</sup> although his main contender Joaquim Chissano from Frelimo made a national identity appeal (Pereira and Shenga 2005:24).<sup>14</sup> After about 40 years, now with change within the Renamo leadership in 2018/19 from Ndaue ethnic group to Makua and within Frelimo in 2014/15 from Tsonga ethnic group to Makonde, it seems that voter mobilization could to a certain extent in some constituencies or locations be based on ethnicity. Besides others accounts on the role of ethnicity on elections (De Brito 1996, Shenga 2008), we have heard within the two major parties' voices saying: "Now it is our time [to rule]" with 'our' referring to ethnicity.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> According to the 2017 population census, Makua is the largest ethnolinguistic group with 26 percent of Mozambicans from 5 years and older speaking the language, INE (2019) IV Recenseamento Geral da População e Habitação 2017. Resultados Definitivos Moçambique, Abril.

<sup>13</sup> "He usually addressed people using ethnic identity, such as: "my Makua brothers" or "my Sena sons and daughters" a practice that had been barred from the national discourse for years" (Pereira and Shenga 2005:24)

<sup>14</sup> Others studies that look at the effect of ethnicity in Mozambique include De Brito, L. (1996) "Voting behaviour in Mozambique first multiparty elections", in *Mozambique: Election, Democracy and Development*, edited by Brazão Mazula; and Shenga, C. (2008) "The Influence of Ethnicity on Electoral Process in Mozambique" *Open Space*, 2(2). 93-99.

<sup>15</sup> Since its establishment, Renamo was "viewed" mainly as Ndaue with Dhlakama in leadership; and Frelimo mainly Tsonga with all previous leaders (Eduardo Mondlane, Samora Machel, Joaquim Chissano and Armando Guebuza) coming from the Tsonga ethnic group, regardless of some contestation to this point of view and their multi-ethnic compositions.

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