

MP-IDSA *Commentary*

Mozambique's Presidential Elections and Implications for India's Energy Security

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S*ummary*

The results of Mozambique's presidential elections have key implications not only for regional security in southern Africa but also for India's quest for energy security.

On 9 October 2024, Mozambicans voted in the country’s presidential elections in which the ruling party, the Mozambique Liberation Front (FRELIMO), is expected to maintain its grip on power since gaining independence from Portugal in 1975. The incumbent President Filipe Nyusi is stepping down after two terms and the party’s candidate—Daniel Chapo—is expected to replace him. His main opponents are Ossufo Momade of the largest opposition party the Mozambican National Resistance (RENAMO), Lutero Simango from the Democratic Movement of Mozambique (MDM), and Venancio Mondlane, an independent candidate who has a strong base among young Mozambicans. The principal issues for the electorate include poverty, youth unemployment, government corruption and the challenge of addressing insurgency and restoring stability in Cabo Delgado province.

Mozambique is a coastal and resource-rich country in southern Africa situated along the Mozambique Channel, a key maritime chokepoint in the Indian Ocean Region (IOR). It is key transit and trading hub which connects the Indian Ocean to the world but is often overlooked as a global maritime chokepoint.¹ The opening of the Suez Canal in 1869 reduced the Mozambique Channel’s significance to global commerce. However, the recent discovery of 100 trillion cubic feet of natural gas in the Rovuma basin and huge coal reserves has renewed major powers’ interest in the region.² The discovery prompted the prospects of earning gas revenues and achieve sustainable economic development.

Genesis of Civil War in Cabo Delgado

Unfortunately, since October 2017, the humanitarian situation in northern Mozambique has been alarmingly deteriorating, triggered by escalating armed Islamist insurgency. Jihadist group Ahlu Sunnah Wa-Jama’a (ASJW) continues to target Mozambican security establishment in response to grinding poverty, a deep sense of marginalisation, and inequality among locals and elites. The objectives of ASJW, locally known as ‘Al Shabaab’, are clear—to establish a society ruled by the Islamic law (Sharia) and gain access to resources and power.

The capture of the port city Mocimboa da Praia and the 2021 attacks in Palma, which is the center of TotalEnergies’ planned US\$ 20 billion liquified natural gas (LNG) project on the Afungi peninsula, has been a cause of serious concern.³ Even

¹ Louis P. Bergeron, “[The Forgotten Chokepoint: The Mozambique Channel’s Rich Past and Bright But Insecure Future](#)”, Center for International Maritime Security, 25 December 2014.

² “[Gas Discovery in Mozambique Holds at least 10 trillion cubic feet](#)”, *The Economic Times*, 5 October 2011.

³ “[Total Declares Force Majeure on Mozambique LNG Project](#)”, *TotalEnergies website*, 26 April 2021.

ExxonMobil has a nearby project that is currently on hold. Initially, Rwandan troops were deployed to secure the peninsula followed by troops from the Southern African Development Community (SADC). However, the SADC Mission in Mozambique (SAMIM), faced several challenges such as outdated military equipment, funding constraint, lack of coordination with the Rwandan forces.⁴ This eventually led to the decision to withdraw the mission in July 2024.

Mozambique’s insurgency was borne out of resentment over the Cabo Delgado region’s poverty.⁵ The region is “a resource treasure trove, boasting Africa’s largest gas reserve”, huge deposits of ruby, and graphite mines that Tesla has been sourcing from since 2021. The exclusion of local communities, especially Muslim Mwani and Mauka, from economic opportunities led to marginalisation which is symbolised by the LNG project. Instead of opting to mine less and create a viable developmental path, the Mozambican government chose to militarise the situation. They are focusing on raw extractivism and achieving short-term gains rather than addressing more complex developmental root causes.⁶

Who is Daniel Chapo?

Media houses are touting Daniel Chapo, a 47-year-old politician and governor of Inhambane province for the past eight years as the new kid in the old block. He has formerly been a radio host and a law lecturer and is a newcomer in the political scene. Although FRELIMO’s dominance in Mozambique’s political scene make Chapo the favourite to win the election, several challenges persist.

His government will have to deal with the fallout of the ‘tuna bond’ corruption scandal which triggered Mozambique’s worst economic crisis.⁷ The Commonwealth Observer Group (COG), leaders of opposition parties, and Mozambique’s National Electoral Commission (CNE) have all previously criticised the lack of transparency and irregularities in the electoral process. However, the biggest challenge for the new administration will be to address the jihadist insurgency, particularly in northern Mozambique.

⁴ Abhishek Mishra, “[SADC Mission Withdrawal from Mozambique: Implications for the Fight against Insurgency in Cabo Delgado](#)”, *Africa Trends*, Vol. 13, No. 1, January–June 2024.

⁵ “[Cabo Delgado: ‘Structural and Systemic’ Poverty Behind Four Years of Insurgency – Analysts](#)”, Club of Mozambique, 5 October 2021.

⁶ Kang-Chun Cheng, “[In Mozambique’s Cabo Delgado, Extraction and Insurgency Without End](#)”, *The New Humanitarian*, 8 October 2024.

⁷ Joseph Cotterill, “[Mozambique to Recover \\$825mn from ‘Tuna Bonds’ Fraud](#)”, *The Financial Times*, 29 July 2024.

Following SAMIM’s withdrawal of troops, insurgents have taken advantage of the security vacuum leading to an uptick in violence and displacement of people. The attack on the town of Mocomia on 10 May 2024 resulted in almost 700 people fleeing and 10 soldiers losing their lives.⁸ The threat of violence from insurgents continues to disrupt daily life. Therefore, Mozambique’s new president must take few necessary steps.

Since Rwanda is currently leading the counter-insurgency efforts, it is necessary to provide more transparency about the terms of the arrangement between Mozambique and Rwanda which is not available in the public domain. Mozambique’s new government must also take into account army reforms more seriously if it wants its security forces to eventually to take over from Rwanda.⁹ Finally, the drivers of conflict, including the Cabo Delgado province’s enduring socio-economic problems, must be addressed.

Whoever wins the President election will inherit an Islamist insurgency in the country’s north, which has halted multi-billion-dollar gas projects and displaced thousands of people. Whether Daniel Chapo’s administration demonstrates continuity in its approach to solving security challenges or makes any noteworthy changes remains to be seen.

Implications for India’s energy security

In many ways, India’s quest for resource and energy security is a primary driver of growing engagement with countries such as Mozambique. The Indian government is attempting to diversify its sourcing of LNG and subsequently reduce its energy reliance on the Middle East. Mozambique’s strategic location along the Indian Ocean and the fact that it’s only a three-day journey from India makes Mozambique an ideal candidate to meet India’s growing fuel needs. Three Indian Public Sector Undertakings (PSUs) led by ONGC Videsh Ltd (OVL) hold 30 per cent stake in the marquee Rovuma Offshore Area 1 project.¹⁰ With investments amounting to US\$ 20 billion, it represents India’s single-largest investment in Africa.

⁸ [“Mozambique’s President Says Northern Town ‘Under Attack’ by Armed Groups”](#), *Al Jazeera*, 10 May 2024.

⁹ Meron Elias and Pauline Bax, [“What Future for Military Intervention in Mozambique?”](#), International Crisis Group, 8 May 2024.

¹⁰ [“OVL, OIL, BPCL and Others to Invest \\$20 billion in Mozambique LNG Project”](#), *The Financial Times*, 20 June 2019.

However, the venture has been beset with difficulties after the suspension of operations in April 2021 following attacks by Islamist insurgents in the coastal town of Palma. Rwandan troops along with its Mozambican counterparts have been able to normalise the security situation in the region to an extent although pockets of violent incidents continue to take place. Political uncertainty is the primary risk to the project. Additionally, there are speculations as to whether major extractive contracts will be revised, which has spooked investors. Despite the setback, it seems the project is set for resumption with TotalEnergies head Patrick Pouyanne stating that “nearly 80 percent of the \$14 billion financial package underpinning the project has been confirmed by lenders”.¹¹

Reports in Indian media indicate that the project is likely to resume operations this year, following the election of possibly Daniel Chapo, as the new president.¹² He has clearly stated his intention to simultaneously work with Mozambique’s LNG investors and partners and combat the scourge of terrorism in Cabo Delgado province.¹³ For India, this is good news. Recent visits to Mozambique by External Affairs Minister Dr S Jaishankar and Minister of Petroleum and Natural Gas Hardeep Singh Puri is indicative of India’s interest in the early resumption and monetisation of the project by Indian PSUs.

¹¹ [“Patrick Pouyanne Confirms \\$14 billion Financing to Restart Rovuma LNG Project”](#), *360 Mozambique*, 3 October 2024.

¹² Utpal Bhaskar, [“India’s Wait for Mozambique’s LNG Gets Longer, At Stake \\$8 bn Investment”](#), *LiveMint*, 27 August 2024.

¹³ [“Mozambique Election: Daniel Chapo on LNG Projects, Combatting Terrorism”](#), *Bloomberg Television*, 6 October 2024.

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