

In Mozambique, strong regional differences mark fear of extremist and election violence

Afrobarometer Dispatch No. 370 | David Jacobs and Thomas Isbell

Summary

Although Mozambique's civil war ended in 1992, violence flared again in 2013 when the opposition RENAMO party renewed its insurgency against the FRELIMO government. Both sides stand accused of war crimes in a conflict whose death toll analysts estimate at near 1 million (France24, 2019). A peace agreed in August 2019 remains tentative as a small number of RENAMO rebels have vowed not to lay down their weapons (Mail & Guardian, 2019).

During this fragile period, another violent crisis has begun: the emergence of an Islamist insurgency. A group going by the name Ansar al-Sunnah recently made it clear in a video published online that it aims to replace the government of Mozambique with a *sharia* regime (Ewi & Louw-Vaudran, 2020; Habibe, Forquilha, & Pereira, 2019; West, 2018). While dealing with the COVID-19 pandemic, the Mozambican government thus confronts both Islamist violence and the fragile aftermath of the RENAMO insurgency.

Violence in Mozambique has been largely concentrated in the provinces of Zambezia and Inhambane, respectively RENAMO and FRELIMO bases of operations for decades in the central and southern parts of the country, and Cabo Delgado in the far North, the focal point of Ansar al-Sunnah's attacks. The government's response to the Islamist violence so far has been a predominantly military one, which risks alienating the local population and aggravating underlying grievances inherited from the RENAMO insurgency and the civil war (Matsinhe & Valoi, 2019).

In this dispatch, we use Afrobarometer survey data to look at Mozambicans' experiences and assessments at the onset of the Ansar al-Sunnah insurgency and the tentative peace accord with RENAMO. As of mid-2018, popular fears of violence were decreasing, trust in the armed forces was rebounding, and more citizens approved than disapproved of the government's handling of extremist violence. While these attitudes may have evolved along with the conflicts, they provide a baseline view of popular attitudes as the government struggles to confront multiple threats to peace and stability.

Afrobarometer survey

Afrobarometer is a pan-African, nonpartisan survey research network that provides reliable data on African experiences and evaluations of democracy, governance, and quality of life. Seven rounds of surveys were completed in up to 38 countries between 1999 and 2018, and Round 8 surveys are currently underway. Afrobarometer conducts face-to-face interviews in the language of the respondent's choice.

The Afrobarometer team in Mozambique, led by Ipsos Mozambique, interviewed a nationally representative, random, stratified probability sample of 2,400 adult Mozambicans between 13 June and 26 August 2018. A sample of this size yields country-level results with a margin of error of +/-2 percentage points at a 95% confidence level. Previous surveys have been conducted in Mozambique in 2002, 2005, 2008, 2012, and 2015.

Key findings

- About one-third of Mozambicans said they had feared extremist violence (33%) or violence at political events (35%) or public protests (33%) during the previous two years. Almost one in 10 said they had personally experienced such violence.
 - Both experience and fear of extremist violence were more common among the poorest respondents than among their better-off counterparts. The experience of extremist violence was most common in Inhambane (20%) and Cabo Delgado (14%), though fear (without experience of violence) was highest in Zambezia (49%) and Nampula (31%).
- Almost half (46%) of Mozambicans said the government was doing a good job of handling violent extremism, while 38% disagreed. Positive assessments of the government's performance were more common among the most-educated and economically best-off respondents.
 - In the northern provinces of Niassa and Cabo Delgado, where the Ansar al-Sunnah insurgency has been most active, a majority of citizens disapproved of the government's performance against armed extremists (59% and 53%, respectively).
- Popular trust in the army rebounded after a steep decline in 2016, climbing to 68% who said they trust the military "somewhat" or "a lot."
- Only four in 10 Mozambicans (40%) said the armed forces "often" or "always" operate in a professional manner and respect the rights of all citizens. In Cabo Delgado, only one in five respondents (22%) agreed.

Fear and experience of violence

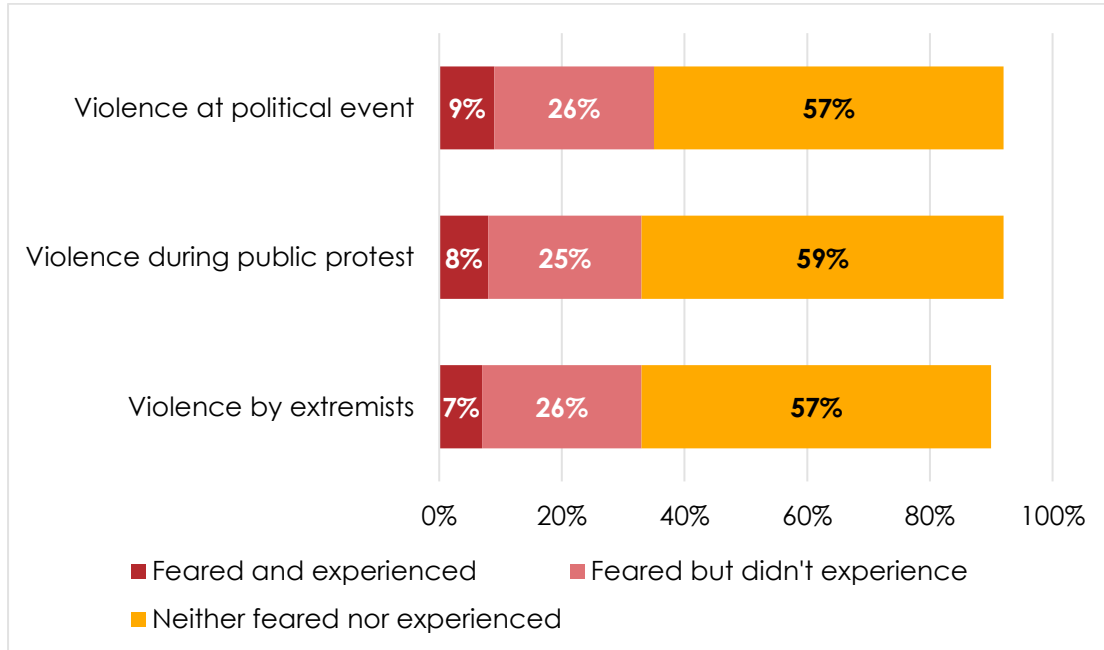
About one in three Mozambicans said they had feared violence at political events (35%) or public protests (33%) or through an attack by political or religious extremists (33%) during the two years preceding the survey, including almost one in 10 who said they had personally experienced such violence. About six in 10 reported neither fear nor personal experience of these types of violence (Figure 1).

Both experience and fear of extremist violence were more common among poor respondents than among their better-off counterparts. For example, those with high lived poverty¹ were more than twice as likely as those with no lived poverty to report having experienced extremist violence (11% vs. 4%) and almost twice as likely to say they had feared but not experienced such violence (28% vs. 15%) (Figure 2).

By contrast, fear of extremist violence increased with respondents' education level, though actual experience of such violence did not. Young and middle-aged respondents were more likely than their elders to say they had feared extremist violence but slightly less likely to report actually experiencing it.

¹ Afrobarometer's Lived Poverty Index (LPI) measures respondents' levels of material deprivation by asking how often they or their families went without basic necessities (enough food, enough water, medical care, enough cooking fuel, and a cash income) during the preceding year. For more on lived poverty, see Mattes (2020).

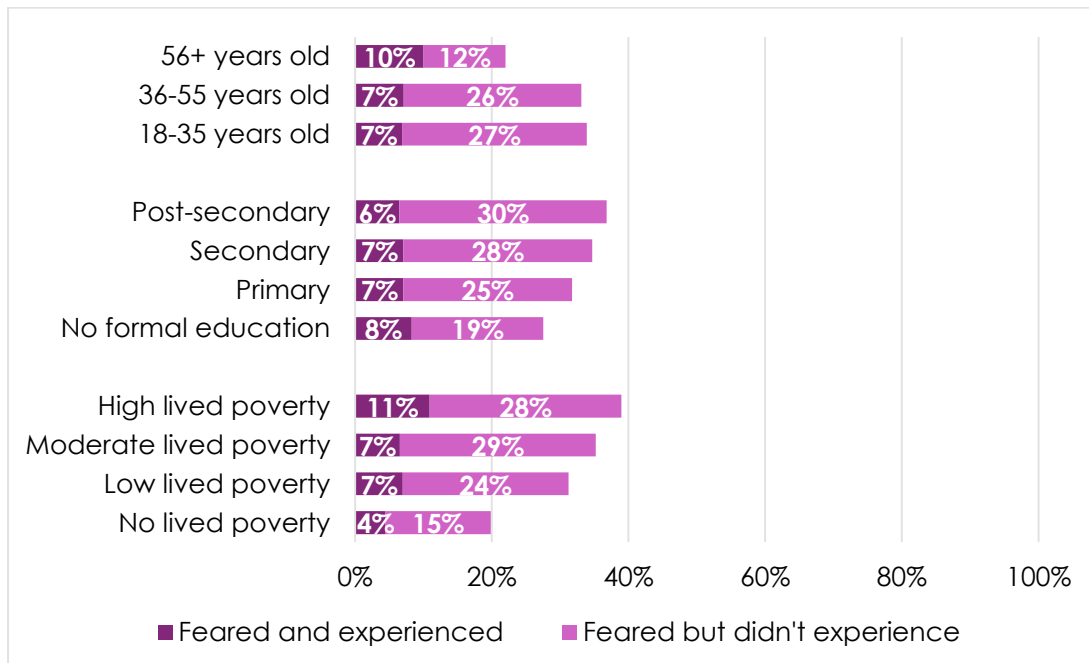
Figure 1: Fear and experience of violence | Mozambique | 2018



Respondents were asked: Please tell me whether, in the past two years, you have ever personally feared any of the following types of violence. [If yes:] Have you actually personally experienced this type of violence in the past two years?

- Violence at a political rally or campaign event?
- Violence occurring during a public protest or march?
- An armed attack by political or religious extremists?

Figure 2: Fear and experience of violence by extremists | by socio-demographic group | Mozambique | 2018

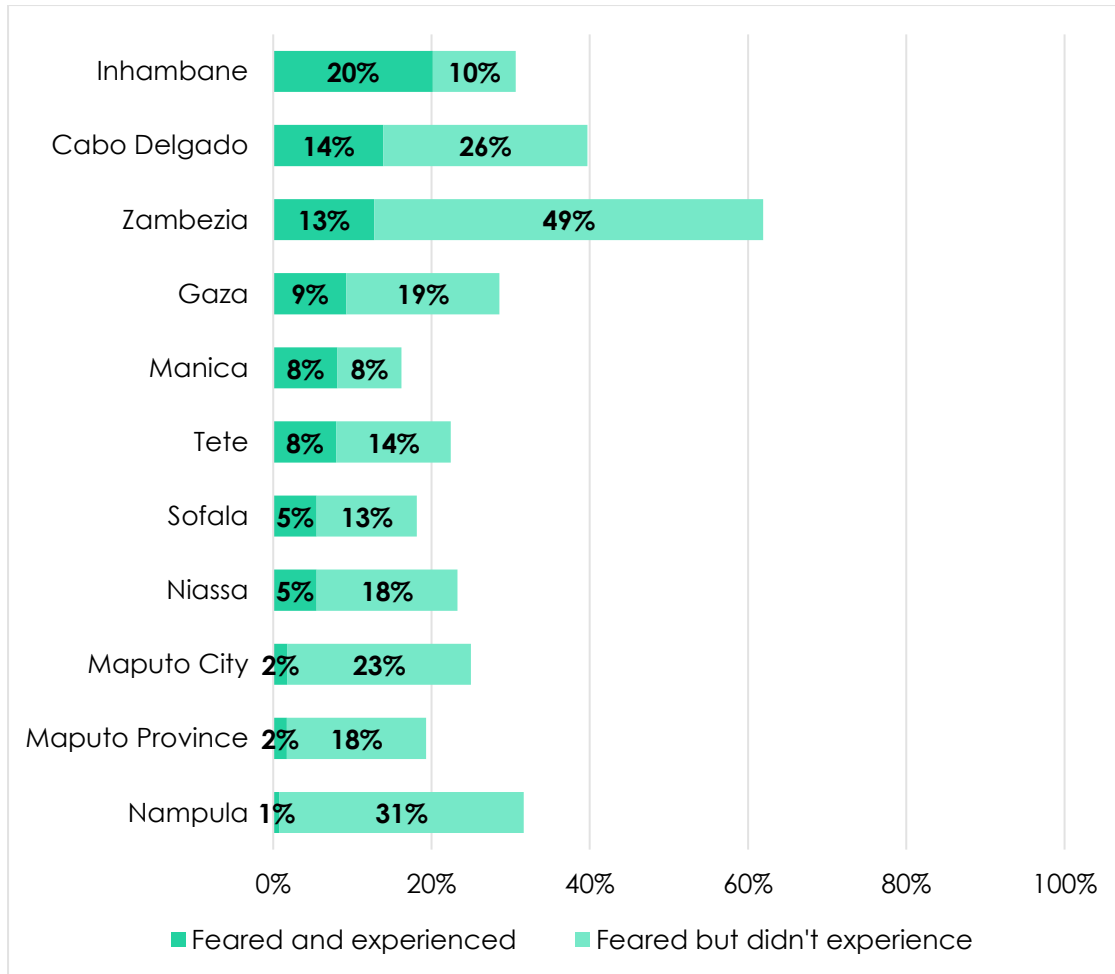


Respondents were asked: Please tell me whether, in the past two years, you have ever personally feared any of the following types of violence: An armed attack by political or religious extremists. [If yes:] Have you actually personally experienced this type of violence in the past two years?

Reported experience of extremist violence was highest in the provinces of Inhambane (20%), Cabo Delgado (14%), and Zambezia (13%) (Figure 3). In Zambezia, moreover, half (49%) of all respondents said they had feared (without experiencing) extremist violence, probably reflecting the province's history as a FRELIMO stronghold during the civil war.

But even in provinces where very few people said they had experienced extremist violence, such as Maputo (2%) and Nampula (1%), substantial proportions indicated fear of attacks.

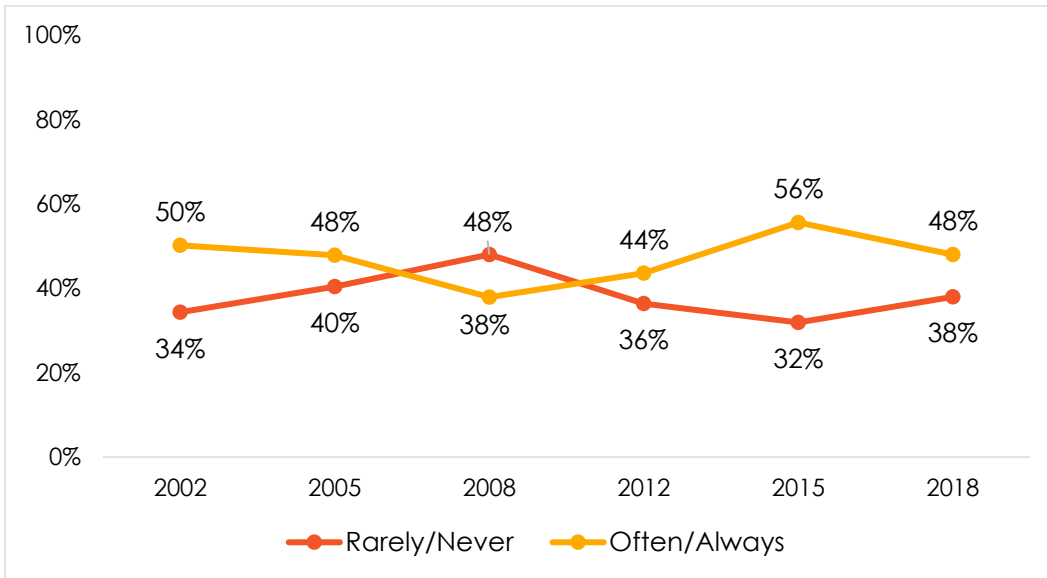
Figure 3: Fear and experience of violence by extremists | by province
 | Mozambique | 2018



Respondents were asked: Please tell me whether, in the past two years, you have ever personally feared any of the following types of violence: An armed attack by political or religious extremists? [If yes:] Have you actually personally experienced this type of violence in the past two years?

Given Mozambique's history of civil war and insurgency, it is perhaps not surprising that a plurality (48%) of respondents said that party competition "often" or "always" leads to violent conflict. This reflects an 8-percentage-point drop since 2016, though it's fairly consistent with views recorded since 2002 (Figure 4).

Figure 4: How often party competition leads to violent conflict | Mozambique
 | 2002-2018



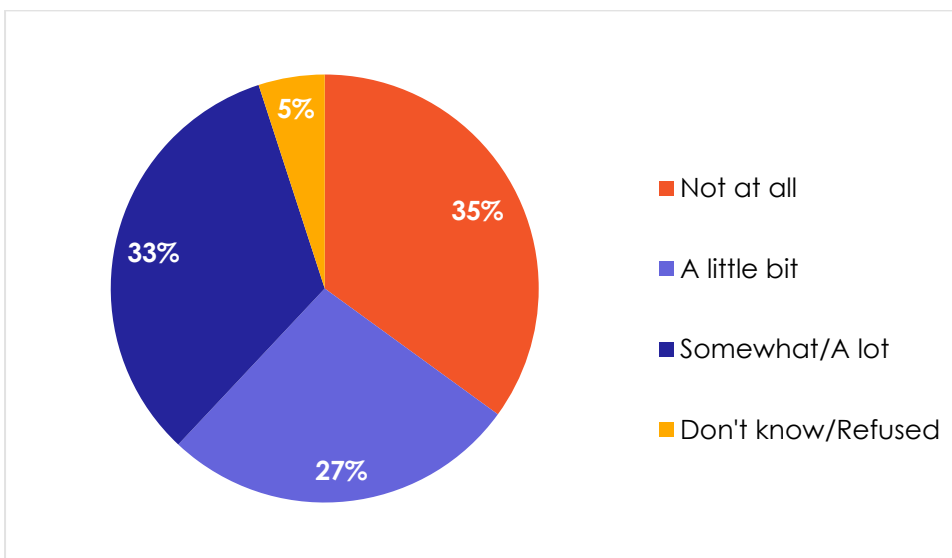
Respondents were asked: *In your opinion, how often, in this country, does competition between political parties lead to violent conflict?*

Violence during elections

When asked about violence during election campaigns, one-third (33%) of Mozambicans said they feared intimidation or political violence “somewhat” or “a lot.” About one-fourth (27%) expressed “a little bit” of fear, while 35% said they did not fear campaign-related violence (Figure 5).

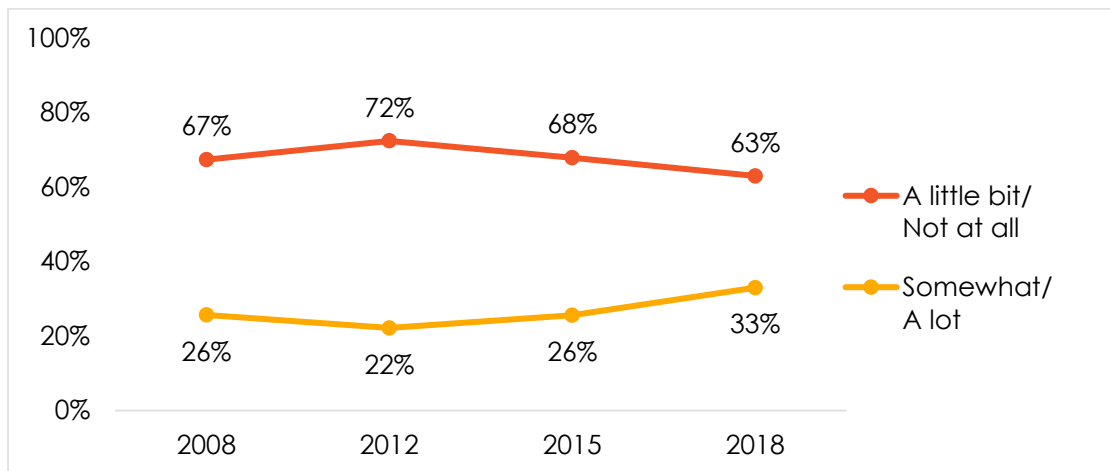
Fear of election-related intimidation and violence increased by 11 percentage points between 2012 (22%) and 2018 (33%) (Figure 6).

Figure 5: How much fear political intimidation or violence during election campaigns
 | Mozambique | 2018



Respondents were asked: *During election campaigns in this country, how much do you personally fear becoming a victim of political intimidation or violence?*

Figure 6: Fear political intimidation or violence during election campaigns
 | Mozambique | 2008-2018



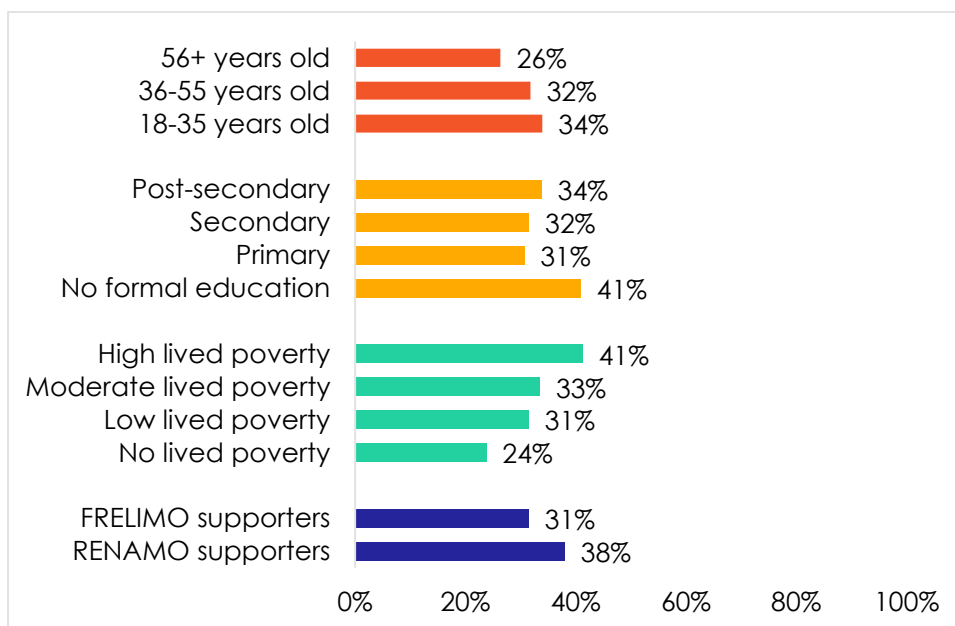
Respondents were asked: During election campaigns in this country, how much do you personally fear becoming a victim of political intimidation or violence?

Respondents with no formal education and high lived poverty were most likely (41% each) to say they fear election-related intimidation or violence. Senior citizens (26% of those above age 55) were less likely to express fear than younger respondents (Figure 7).

Supporters of RENAMO (38%) were more likely than FRELIMO adherents (31%) to say they fear election-related intimidation or violence “somewhat” or “a lot.”

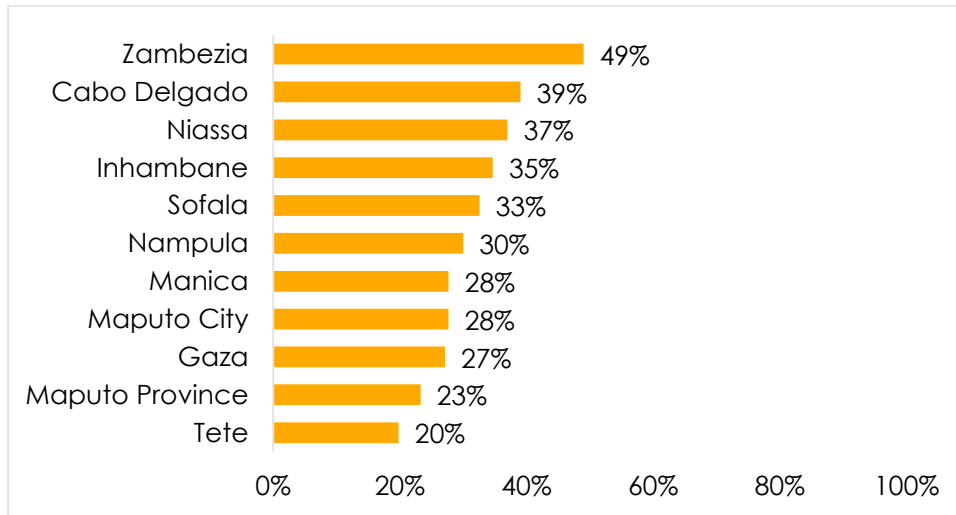
Half (49%) of residents in Zambezia expressed fear of election-related intimidation or violence, followed by more than one-third of respondents in Cabo Delgado (39%), Niassa (37%), and Inhambane (35%) (Figure 8).

Figure 7: Fear political intimidation or violence during election campaigns
 | by socio-demographic group | Mozambique | 2018



Respondents were asked: During election campaigns in this country, how much do you personally fear becoming a victim of political intimidation or violence? (% who said “somewhat” or “a lot”)

Figure 8: Fear political intimidation or violence during election campaigns
 | by province | Mozambique | 2018



Respondents were asked: During election campaigns in this country, how much do you personally fear becoming a victim of political intimidation or violence? (% who said "somewhat" or "a lot")

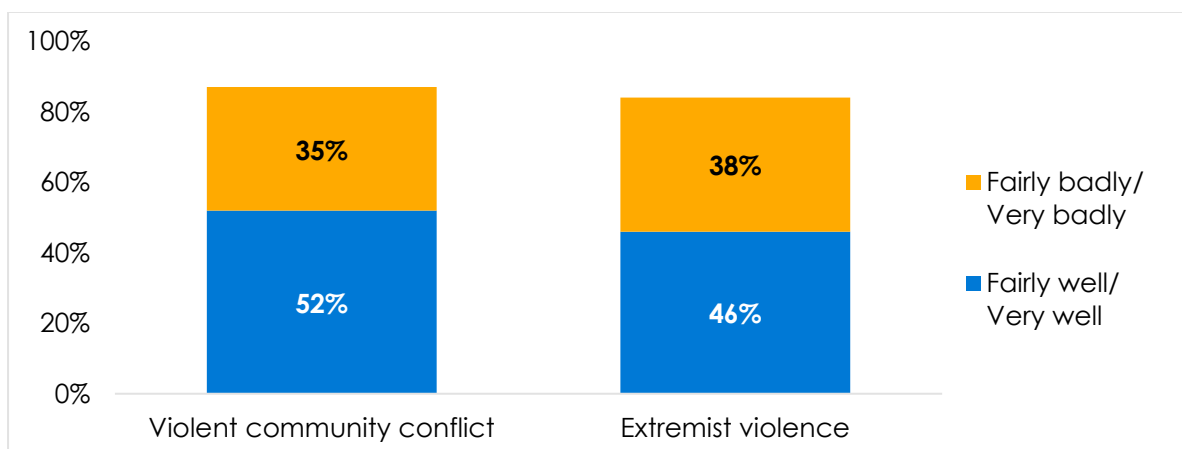
Government response to violence

In responding to incidents of political or extremist violence, the government has been accused of committing human-rights violations and severely limiting information. Human Rights Watch and the National Human Rights Commission have charged the government with committing torture and extrajudicial killings, and the military has been accused of haphazard counterinsurgency methods (Matsine & Valoi, 2019).

As of mid-2018, citizens were divided in their assessments of the government's response to violence. Not quite half (46%) said the government was doing "fairly well" or "very well" in countering political violence from armed extremists, but almost as many (38%) described its performance as "fairly" or "very" bad (Figure 9).

As for preventing violent community conflict, more than half (52%) of respondents gave the government a passing grade, while about one-third (35%) said it was doing a poor job.

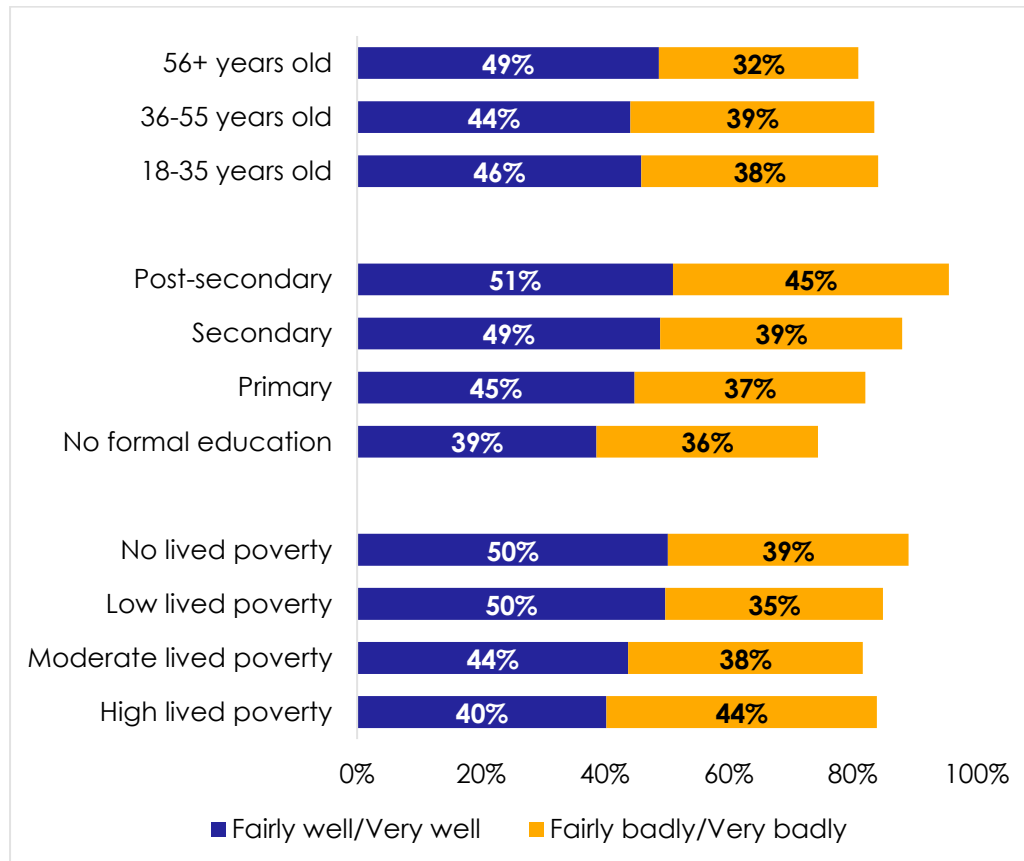
Figure 9: Assessment of government response to violence | Mozambique | 2018



Respondents were asked: How well or badly would you say the current government is handling the following matters, or haven't you heard enough to say: Preventing or resolving violent conflict between communities? Countering political violence from armed extremist groups?

Positive assessments of the government's performance in countering extremist violence were somewhat more common among older respondents (49% of those aged 56 or older), more-educated respondents (51% of those with post-secondary qualifications), and the economically better-off (50%) (Figure 10).

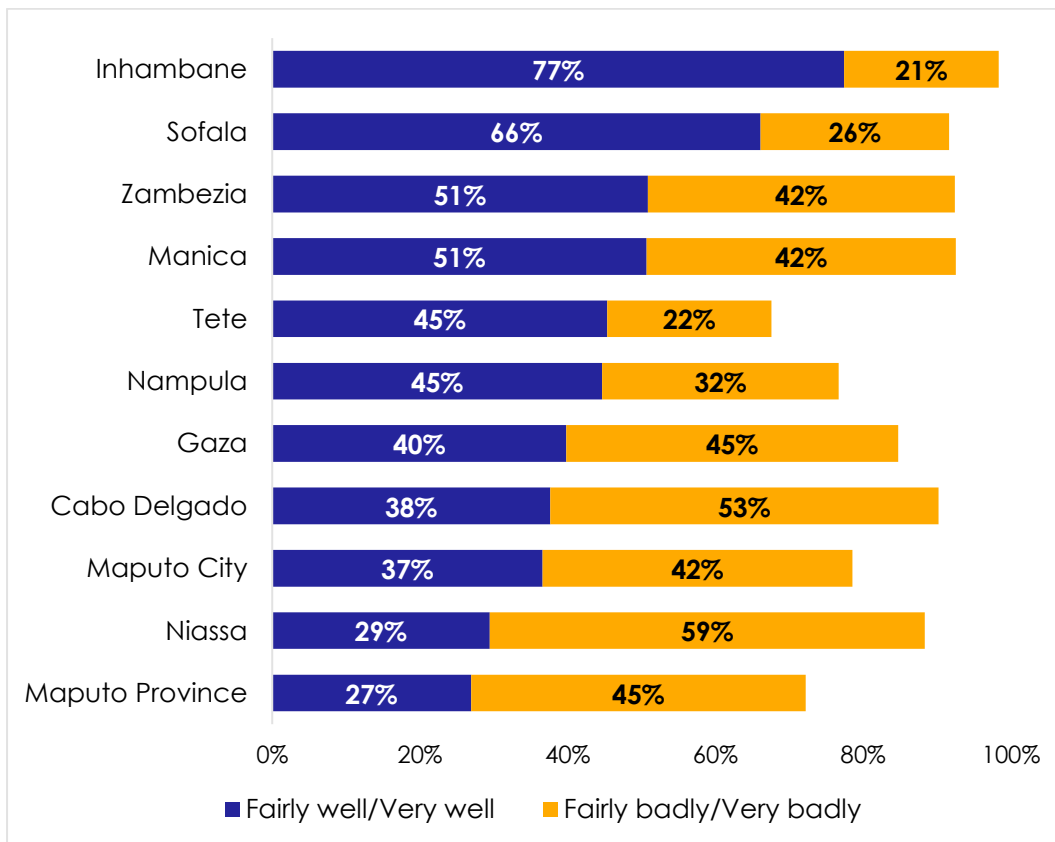
Figure 10: Government performance in countering violence from armed extremists
 | by socio-demographic group | Mozambique | 2018



Respondents were asked: How well or badly would you say the current government is handling the following matters, or haven't you heard enough to say: Countering political violence from armed extremist groups?

While the Inhambane province recorded relatively high levels of experienced violence and fear of election-related violence stemming from the RENAMO-FRELIMO conflict, more than three-fourths (77%) of respondents in this southern province said the government was handling extremist violence fairly/very well (Figure 11). In Niassa and Cabo Delgado provinces, on the other hand, a majority of respondents disapproved of the government's performance against armed extremists (59% and 53%, respectively). These are the two northernmost provinces, where the Ansar al-Sunnah insurgency has taken root and been most active.

Figure 11: Government performance in countering violence from armed extremists
 | by province | Mozambique | 2018



Respondents were asked: How well or badly would you say the current government is handling the following matters, or haven't you heard enough to say: Countering political violence from armed extremist groups?

Conduct of armed forces

The military has played a leading role in trying to maintain stability and countering the Islamist insurgency. Despite accusations of heavy-handedness (Matsinhe & Valoi, 2019), more than

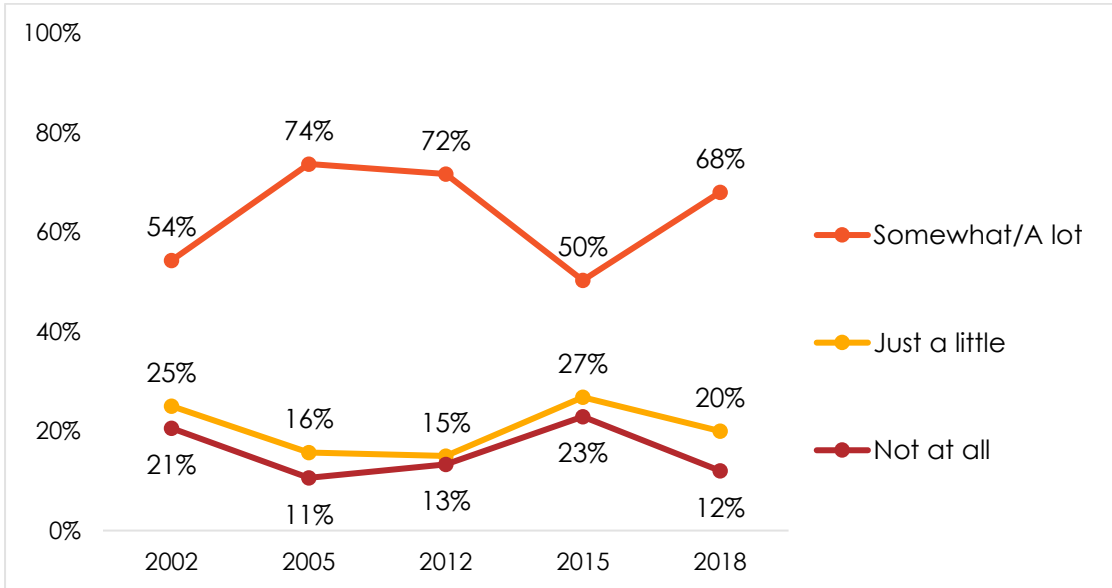
two-thirds (68%) of Mozambicans said they trust the army "somewhat" or "a lot," and only about one in eight (12%) said they didn't trust the military at all (Figure 12). Popular trust is an important resource because it affects the extent to which people are willing to work with security forces (Hills, 2012).

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Trust in the army has shown significant variation over the past 16 years, although

the proportion of citizens saying they trust the military "somewhat" or "a lot" has never dropped below half. The 2018 result reflects an 18-percentage-point increase from the low point of 50% in 2016.

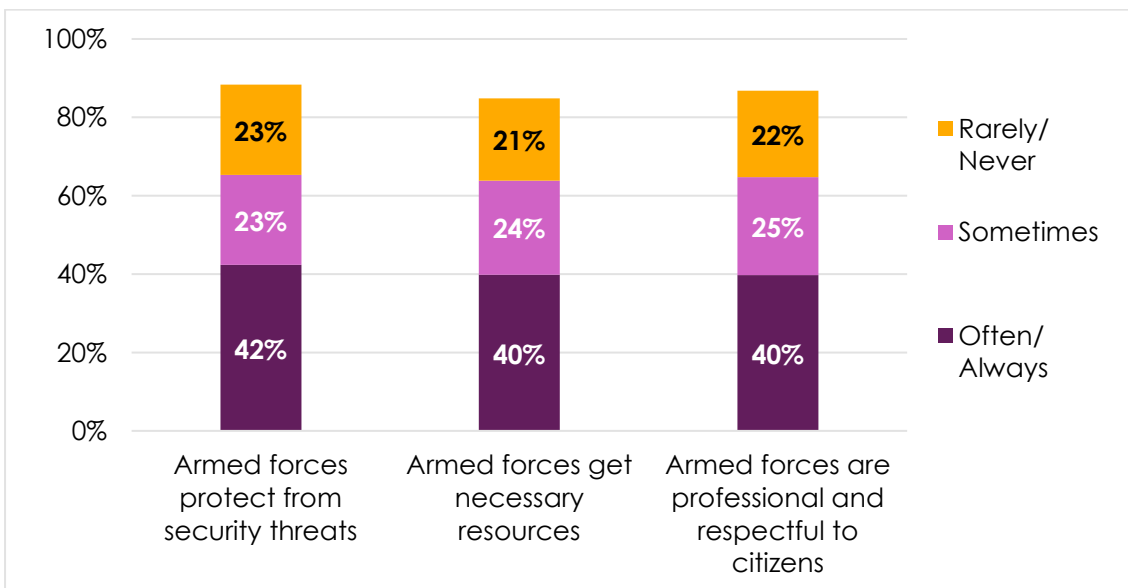
Figure 12: Popular trust in the army | Mozambique | 2002-2018



Respondents were asked: How much do you trust each of the following, or haven't you heard enough about them to say: The army?

A key variable in the civilian-military relationship is how citizens perceive themselves to be treated by the armed forces. In 2018, the first year of the Ansar al-Sunnah insurgency, about four out of 10 respondents said the armed forces “often” or “always” keep the country safe from external and internal security threats (42%), get the training and equipment they need to be effective (40%), and operate in a professional manner and respect the rights of all citizens (40%) (Figure 13). More than one in five respondents (22%) said the army is “rarely” or “never” professional and respectful toward citizens.

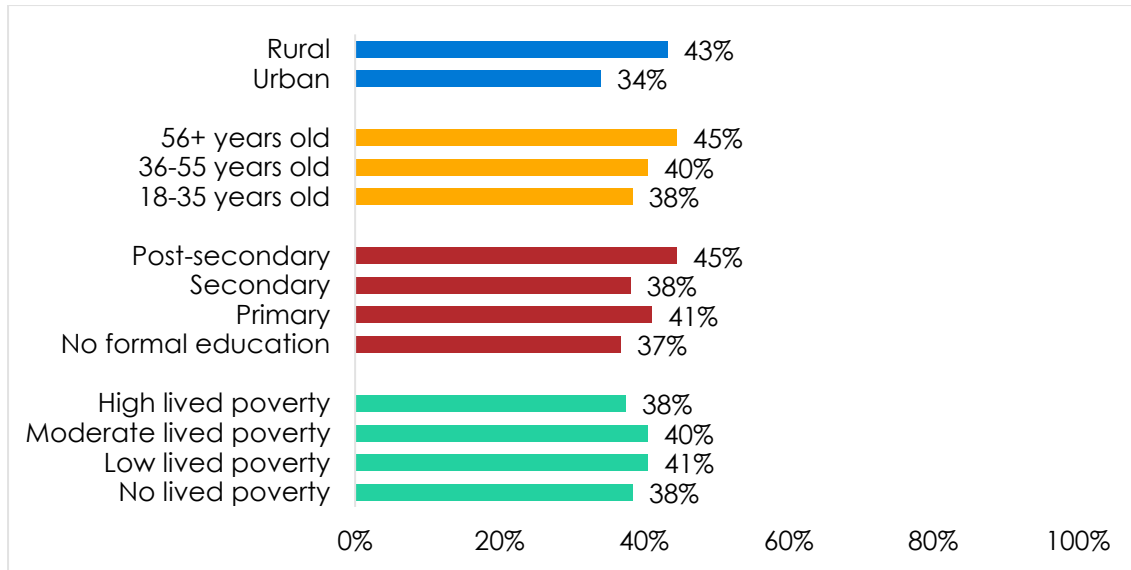
Figure 13: Perceptions of the armed forces | Mozambique | 2018



Respondents were asked: In your opinion, to what extent do the armed forces of our country:
 Keep our country safe from external and internal security threats?
 Get the training and equipment needed to be effective?
 Operate in a professional manner and respect the rights of all citizens?

The perception that the military operates in a professional manner and respects citizens' rights was somewhat more common among rural residents (43%), older respondents (45% among those over 55), and those with post-secondary education (45%) (Figure 14). Only one-third (34%) of urban residents shared this view. Across all levels of lived poverty, a majority of respondents considered it's at best "sometimes" that the armed forces act professionally and with respect for people's rights.

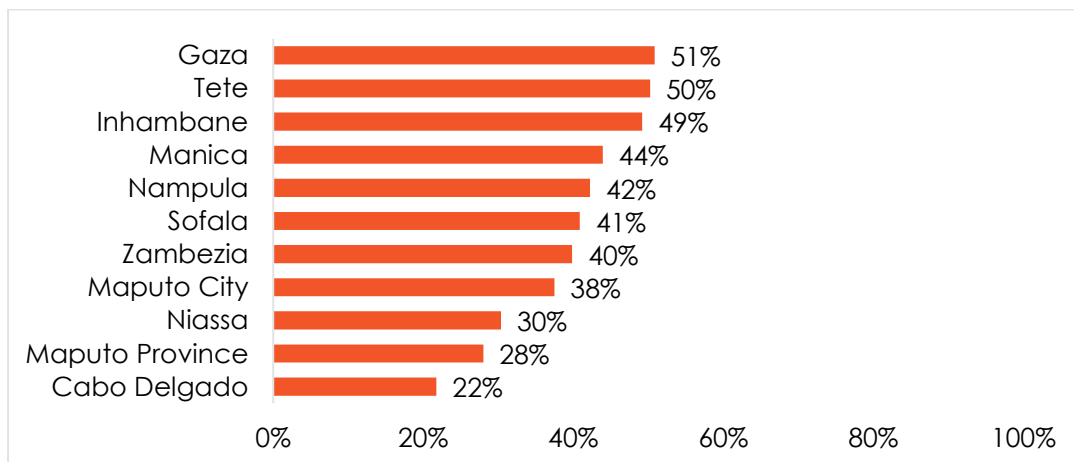
Figure 14: Armed forces professional and respectful of rights | by socio-demographic group | Mozambique | 2018



Respondents were asked: In your opinion, to what extent do the armed forces of our country operate in a professional manner and respect the rights of all citizens? (% who said "often" or "always")

Views of the military's professionalism and respect for rights varied strongly by province (Figure 15). Only in two of 11 provinces did at least half of respondents say the army consistently meets this standard: Gaza (51%) and Tete (50%). Fewer than one-third of respondents agreed in Cabo Delgado (22%), Maputo Province (28%), and Niassa (30%).

Figure 15: Armed forces professional and respectful of rights | by province | Mozambique | 2018



Respondents were asked: In your opinion, to what extent do the armed forces of our country operate in a professional manner and respect the rights of all citizens? (% who said "often" or "always")

Conclusion

Political violence in Mozambique is a complex issue, since fears and experience are related to both factional conflict and Islamist extremists. This snapshot of Mozambican attitudes in mid-2018, during the fragile post-RENAMO insurgency period and the onset of Ansar al-Sunnah violence, shows that popular fears of violence were decreasing and trust in the military was rebounding. Pluralities approved of the government's response to extremist violence and said the military usually acts professionally and respects citizens' rights.

Even so, citizens in areas with experience of political and extremist violence already showed above-average levels of fear and negative perceptions of the military and of government performance, and continued conflict between Islamist extremists and security forces may have reinforced these perceptions. And while we have no evidence that legitimacy might shift from the government to the insurgents, mishandling of the government response could lead to a continuation of the status quo, maintaining the problematic conditions that the insurgency can continue to exploit. This is an acute problem in Mozambique, where Islamist violence has overlapped with lingering fears, despite peace efforts, of violence from the RENAMO-FRELIMO rivalry.

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Financial support for Afrobarometer Round 8 has been provided by the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (SIDA), the Mo Ibrahim Foundation, the Open Society Foundations, the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation, and the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) via the U.S. Institute of Peace.

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Afrobarometer Dispatch No. 370 | 24 June 2020