



Dispatch No. 898 | 12 November 2024

# Mozambicans favour multiparty competition, increasingly feel distant from political parties

**Afrobarometer Dispatch No. 898 | Nyasha McBride Mpani**

## Summary

As its bloody and disputed general election in October revealed, Mozambique's electoral process continues to face significant challenges (Al Jazeera, 2024a, b; Amnesty International, 2024). Since the introduction of multiparty democracy in 1994, the country's elections have been marred by violence and allegations of manipulation, including ballot-box stuffing and intimidation of election observers. Foreign and civil society election monitors characterised the previous presidential election, in 2019, as the least fair since 1994 (Africa Center for Strategic Studies, 2024).

Municipal elections in 2023 were highly contentious as well. The National Election Commission declared the ruling Frelimo party the winner in 64 of 65 districts, including in traditional strongholds of the opposition Renamo party. Independent observers reported Renamo victories in several municipalities, including Maputo. These discrepancies sparked protests, which were met with a brutal police crackdown, resulting in dozens of arrests and at least four deaths (Africa Center for Strategic Studies, 2024; Nhamirre, 2023). Renamo appeals to district courts led to 12 rulings to either annul results or call for recounts, but these decisions were overturned by the Frelimo-appointed Constitutional Council (Nhamirre, 2023).

The results of last month's presidential elections, in which Frelimo presidential candidate Daniel Chapo was declared the winner, have drawn fierce protests amid allegations of fraud. A lawyer for opposition candidate Venancio Mondlane and a spokesperson for the opposition party Podemos were assassinated in Maputo nine days after the election (Al Jazeera, 2024a, b).

Critics say the country's electoral system, which features both closed-list proportional representation and single-member constituencies (International Foundation for Electoral Systems, 2024), has not effectively promoted political stability or inclusion, has failed to prevent the emergence of a de facto one-party system, and has not adequately addressed geographic imbalances in representation, with Frelimo dominating in some regions and Renamo in others, fostering conflict (De Brito, 2003; Onslow, 2016).

Additionally, the large size of electoral constituencies has limited the connection between members of Parliament (MPs) and their constituents, resulting in weak links that the party-list voting system has exacerbated by shifting focus from individual candidates to party leadership (De Brito, 2023). The political environment has been further strained by controversies surrounding the independence of electoral bodies, including issues with the National Election Commission's appointment process and repeated electoral irregularities (Africa Center for Strategic Studies, 2024; Nhamirre, 2023).

Despite these challenges, recent Afrobarometer survey findings show that support for multiparty democracy is strong and continuing to grow in Mozambique. At the same time, fewer citizens report feeling close to a political party, and the ruling party's advantage in popular trust has diminished as trust in opposition parties has increased. A majority of citizens

see elections as working well to ensure that MPs reflect the views of voters, though fewer think they are an effective tool for voting out non-performing leaders.

## Afrobarometer surveys

Afrobarometer is a pan-African, non-partisan survey research network that provides reliable data on African experiences and evaluations of democracy, governance, and quality of life. Nine survey rounds in up to 42 countries have been completed since 1999. Round 9 surveys (2021/2023) cover 39 countries. Afrobarometer's national partners conduct face-to-face interviews in the language of the respondent's choice.

The Afrobarometer team in Mozambique, led by Ipsos, interviewed a nationally representative sample of 1,120 adult Mozambicans in October, November, and December 2022. A sample of this size yields country-level results with a margin of error of +/-3 percentage points at a 95% confidence level. Previous surveys were conducted in Mozambique in 2002, 2005, 2008, 2012, 2015, 2018, and 2021.

## Key findings

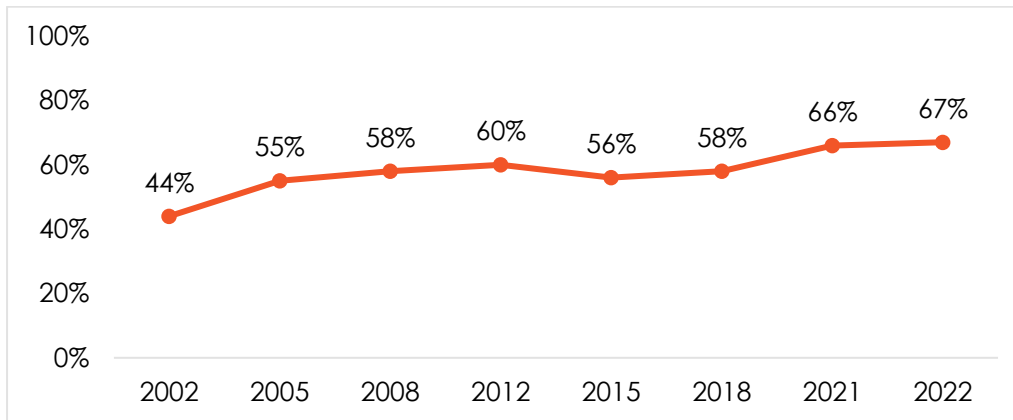
- Support for multiparty competition has increased by 23 percentage points over two decades, from 44% in 2002 to 67% in 2022.
  - Over the same timeframe, disapproval of one-party governance has risen by 22 points, from 42% to 64%.
- While 43% of Mozambicans think it is better for political power to change hands from time to time, half (51%) deem it acceptable for one party to dominate so long as it wins power in free and fair elections.
- Three-fourths (75%) of citizens say opposition parties should cooperate with the government rather than focus on holding it accountable.
- The share of Mozambicans who say they “feel close to” a political party has dropped from 82% in 2005 to 43% in 2022.
- Trust in the ruling party decreased from 64% in 2002 to 53% in 2022, while trust in opposition parties rose from 24% to 41%.
  - The trust gap between ruling party and opposition is now 12 percentage points, down massively from a peak of 58 points recorded in 2008.
- A majority (57%) of citizens think elections help to ensure that voters' views are represented in the National Assembly, but fewer than half (43%) believe that elections are an effective means for voters to remove unrepresentative leaders.

## Multiparty competition vs. one-party rule

Mozambicans increasingly value multiparty democracy. Between 2002 and 2022, the proportion of respondents who say that many political parties are needed to provide citizens with real choices grew from 44% to 67% (Figure 1). The data reflect a strong shift toward embracing a more pluralistic political landscape in Mozambique.

In parallel, rejection of one-party rule has increased markedly over the years, reaching a two-decade high of 64% in 2022, up from 49% in 2021 (Figure 2). These data underscore a clear preference among Mozambicans for political plurality.

**Figure 1: Support for multiparty competition** | Mozambique | 2002-2022



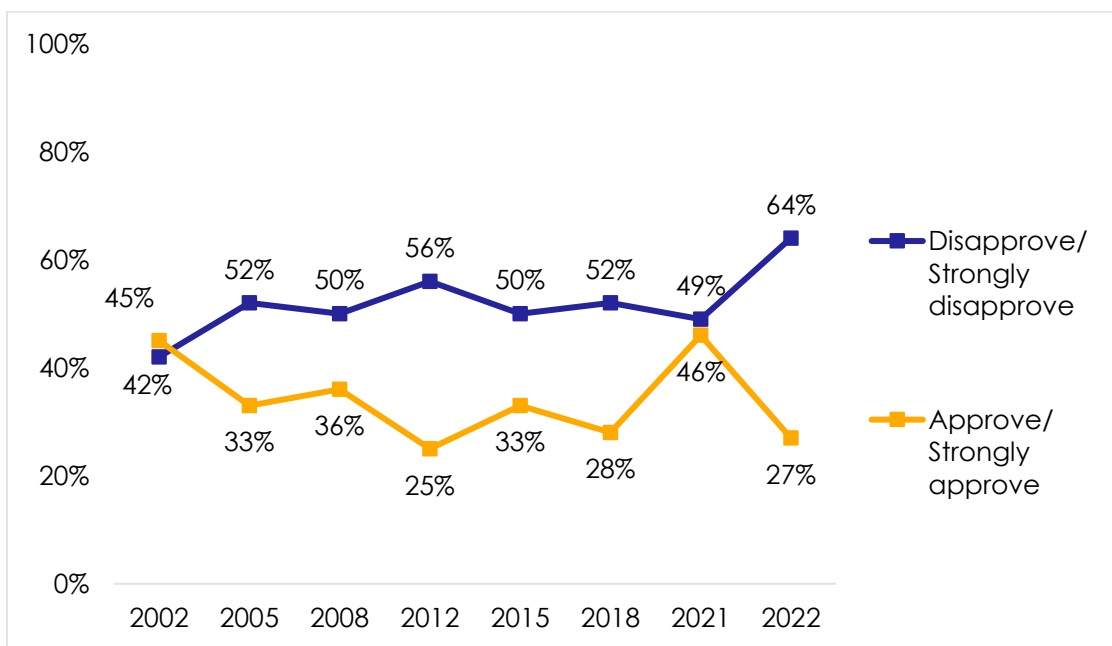
**Respondents were asked:** Which of the following statements is closest to your view?

Statement 1: Political parties create division and confusion; it is therefore unnecessary to have many political parties in Mozambique.

Statement 2: Many political parties are needed to make sure that Mozambicans have real choices in who governs them.

(% who “agree” or “strongly agree” with Statement 2)

**Figure 2: Views on one-party rule** | Mozambique | 2002-2022

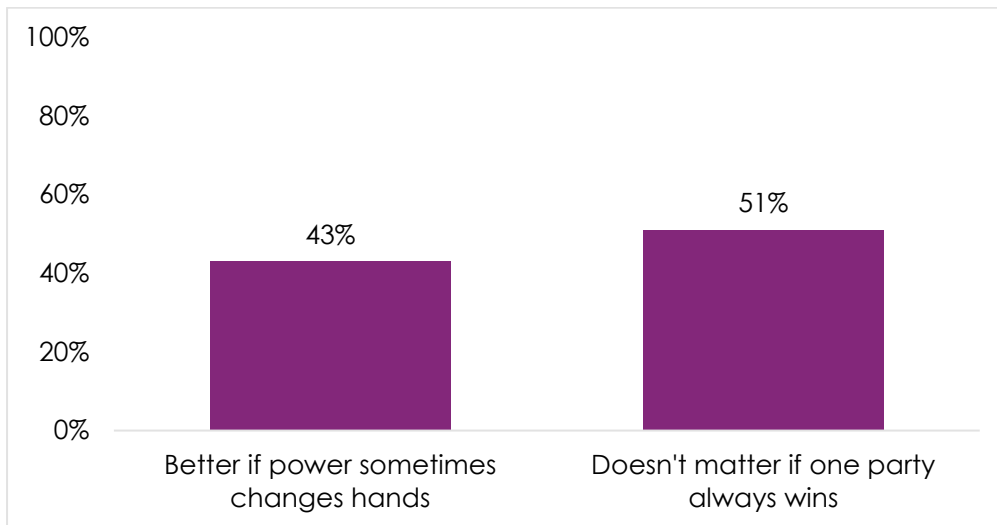


**Respondents were asked:** Would you disapprove or approve of the following alternatives: Only one political party is allowed to stand for election and hold office?

But on the question of electoral turnover of power, citizens are less emphatic: Half (51%) consider single-party dominance acceptable so long as elections are free and fair, while only 43% say it is better if power sometimes changes hands (Figure 3).

Survey findings also suggest that many Mozambicans prioritise stability over accountability: Three-fourths (75%) of respondents want the losing side in elections to cooperate with the government to develop the country, whereas only one-fifth (21%) believe that the opposition should instead focus on criticising the government and holding it to account (Figure 4).

**Figure 3: Views on political party turnover | Mozambique | 2022**



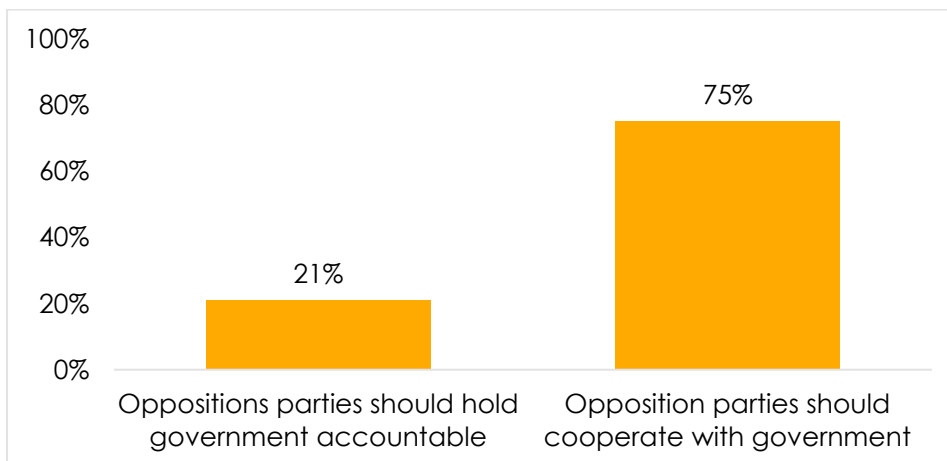
**Respondents were asked:** Which of the following statements is closest to your view?

*Statement 1: In a democracy, it is better if power sometimes changes hands in elections from one political party to another.*

*Statement 2: In a democracy, as long as a government is elected by the people in a free and fair election, it doesn't matter if one party always wins and continuously governs the country.*

(% who "agree" or "strongly agree" with each statement)

**Figure 4: Role of opposition parties after elections | Mozambique | 2022**



**Respondents were asked:** Which of the following statements is closest to your view?

*Statement 1: After losing an election, opposition parties should monitor and criticise the government in order to hold it accountable.*

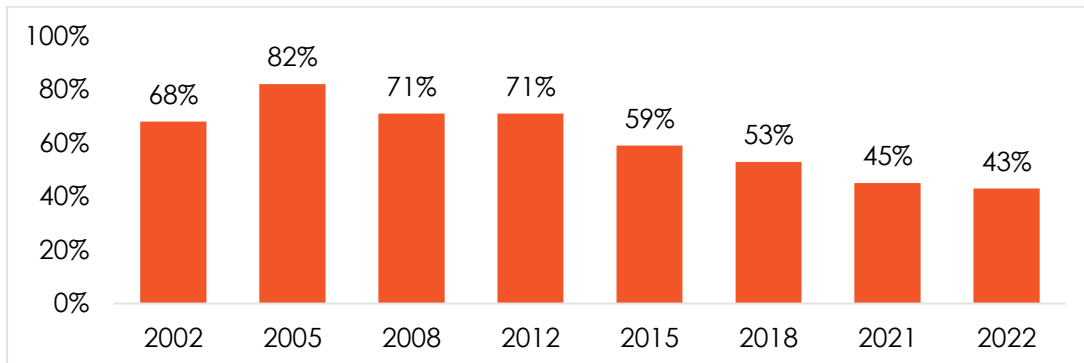
*Statement 2: Once an election is over, opposition parties and politicians should accept defeat and cooperate with government to help it develop the country.*

(% who "agree" or "strongly agree" with each statement)

### Political party affiliation

The share of Mozambicans who report feeling close to a political party has declined significantly over the past two decades, dropping from 82% in 2005 to just 43% in 2022 (Figure 5). The drop was particularly notable between 2012 (71%) and 2021 (45%). This trend may reflect a move toward less partisanship or a desire for alternatives to the existing parties.

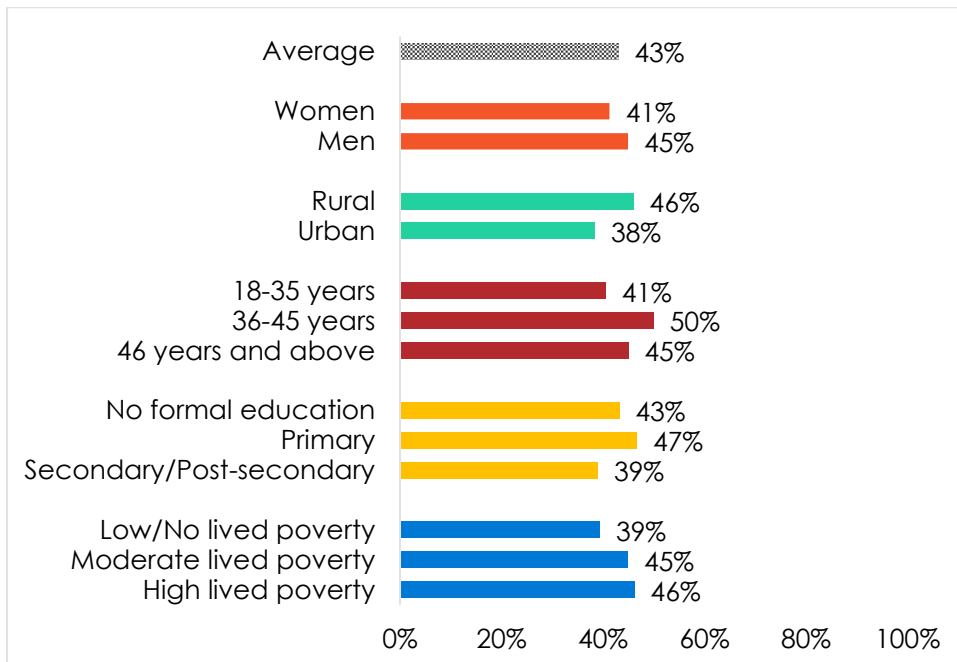
**Figure 5: Feel close to a political party | Mozambique | 2002-2022**



**Respondents were asked:** Do you feel close to any political party? (% who say “yes”)

Identification with a political party is somewhat higher in rural areas than in cities (46% vs. 38%) and increases with respondents' experience of poverty, ranging from 39% among better-off citizens to 46% among those experiencing high lived poverty<sup>1</sup> (Figure 6). Respondents with secondary or post-secondary education (39%) are less likely to feel close to a political party than those with less schooling (43%-47%), as are youth (41%) compared to their elders (45%-50%).

**Figure 6: Feel close to a political party | by demographic group | Mozambique | 2022**



**Respondents were asked:** Do you feel close to any political party? (% who say “yes”)

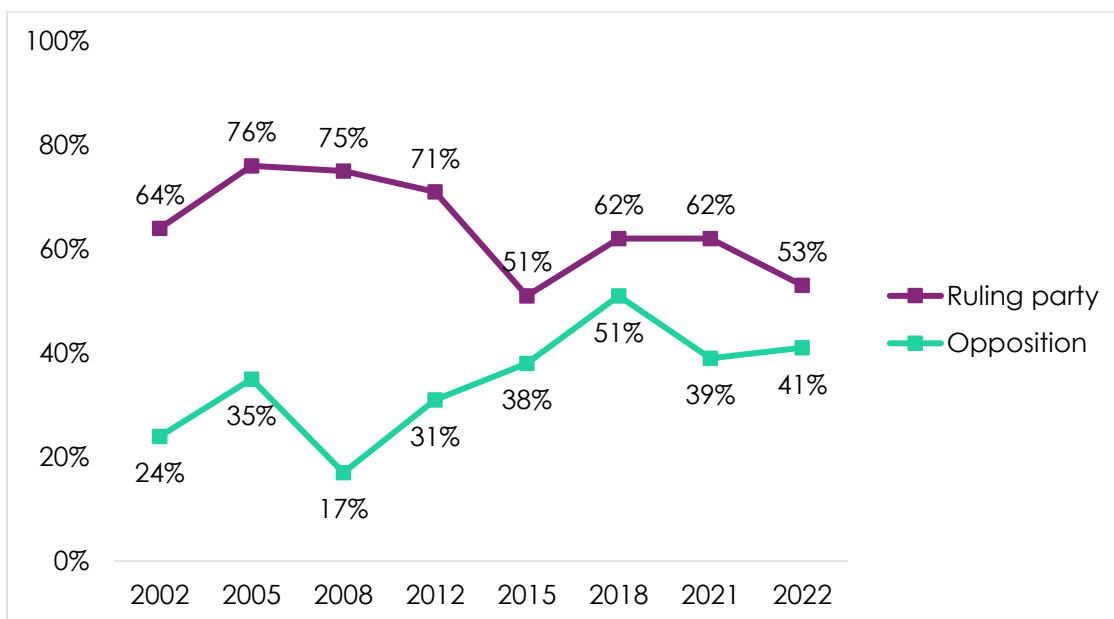
<sup>1</sup> Afrobarometer’s Lived Poverty Index (LPI) measures respondents’ levels of material deprivation by asking how often they or their families went without basic necessities (enough food, enough water, medical care, enough cooking fuel, and a cash income) during the preceding year. For more on lived poverty, see Mattes and Patel (2022).

## Trust in political parties

Historically, popular trust in the ruling party has been far stronger than trust in opposition parties. In 2002, nearly two-thirds (64%) of respondents said they trusted the ruling party “somewhat” or “a lot,” compared to only one-fourth (24%) who expressed trust in the opposition, a gap of 40 percentage points (Figure 7). This gap widened to 58 points in 2008, when trust in the opposition reached its nadir (17%).

However, trust levels have converged since then. As of 2022, trust in the ruling party is down to a narrow majority (53%) of respondents, while four in 10 Mozambicans (41%) espouse faith in opposition parties.

**Figure 7: Trust in political parties | Mozambique | 2002-2022**



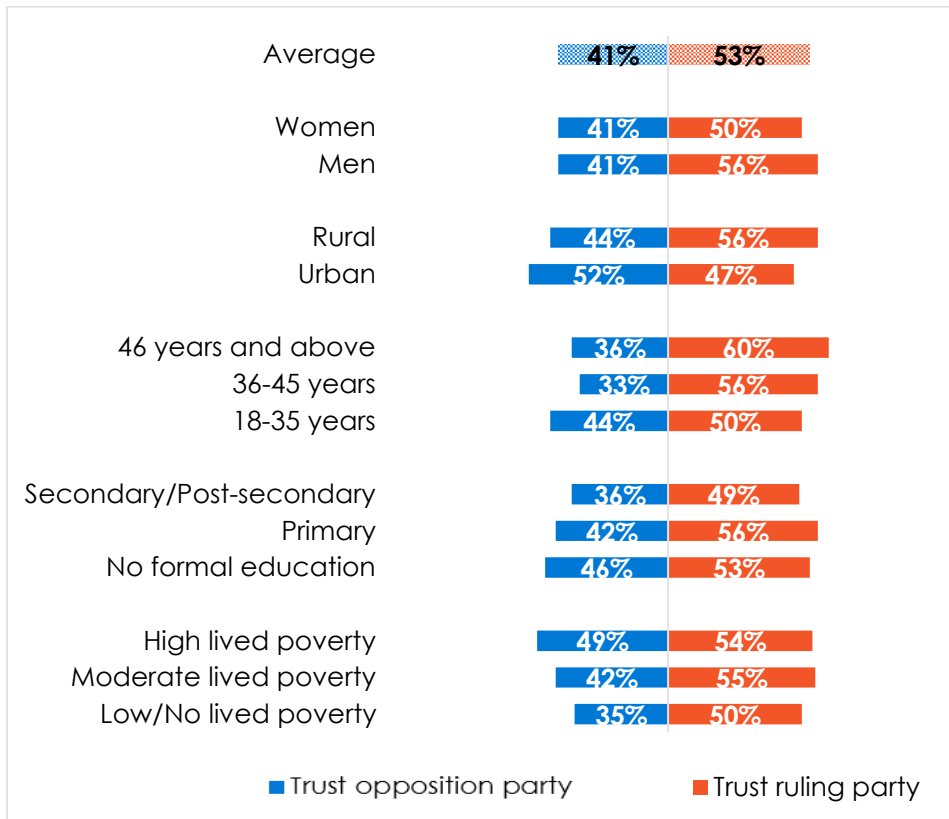
**Respondents were asked:** How much do you trust each of the following, or haven't you heard enough about them to say: The ruling party? Opposition political parties? (% who say “somewhat” or “a lot”)

Men and women express similar levels of trust in the opposition, but men are slightly more trusting of the ruling party than women (56% vs. 50%) (Figure 8). Urban residents tend to trust the opposition (52%) more than the ruling party (47%), while the opposite is true for rural residents (56% trust the ruling party, 44% the opposition).

Trust in the ruling party increases with age; in contrast, the youth are most likely of all age cohorts to trust the opposition. Among the best-off Mozambicans, the gap in trust between the ruling party (50%) and the opposition (35%) is 15 percentage points.

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**Figure 8: Trust in political parties** | by demographic group | Mozambique | 2022

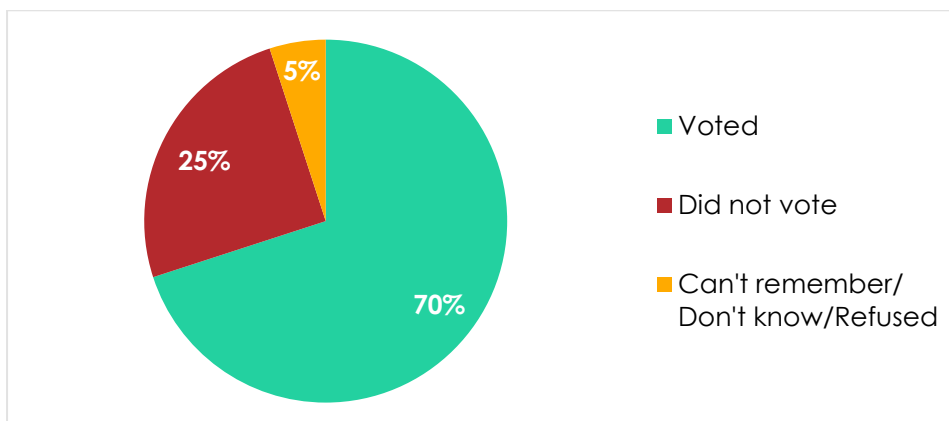


**Respondents were asked:** How much do you trust each of the following, or haven't you heard enough about them to say: The ruling party? Opposition political parties? (% who say "somewhat" or "a lot")

### Citizens' participation and views on elections

Seven in 10 Mozambicans (70%) say they voted in the 2019 election, while one-fourth (25%) indicate that they did not vote and 4% say they cannot remember whether they participated (Figure 9).

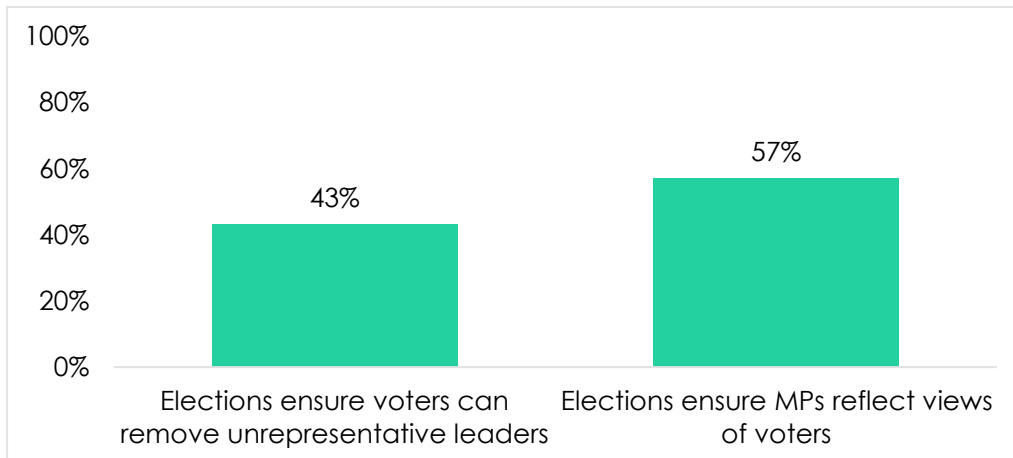
**Figure 9: Voted in most recent election** | Mozambique | 2022



**Respondents were asked:** In the last national election, held in 2019, did you vote, or not, or were you too young to vote? Or can't you remember whether you voted? (Respondents who were too young to vote were excluded.)

Perceptions are mixed on the efficacy of elections. While nearly six in 10 (57%) believe that elections ensure that MPs reflect the views of voters, fewer than half (43%) are confident that elections enable voters to remove leaders who don't do what the people want (Figure 10). So although many citizens recognise the value of elections as a means of having their interests represented, there is considerable scepticism about their ability to prevent politicians they don't want from getting into power.

**Figure 10: Efficacy of elections** | Mozambique | 2022



**Respondents were asked:** Thinking about how elections work in practice in this country, how well do elections: Ensure that representatives to the National Assembly reflect the views of voters? Enable voters to remove from office leaders who do not do what the people want? (% who say "fairly well" or "very well")

## Conclusion

Despite long-standing challenges with their elections, Mozambicans express growing support for multiparty democracy, perhaps signalling a shift toward political pluralism. Nearly two-thirds of citizens now disapprove of one-party rule, the highest level of rejection that Afrobarometer has recorded in two decades of surveys in Mozambique.

Trust in the ruling party is declining, while confidence in opposition parties is increasing. At the same time, more citizens are disengaging from partisan affiliation.

Although Mozambicans see the value of elections to achieve representation, many are sceptical about their ability to remove unrepresentative leaders. This indicates both a commitment to democratic ideals and concerns about the efficacy of the current system in fostering accountability and representation.

As the country's new administration takes office, addressing issues such as political disengagement and electoral fairness will be key to nurturing the health of the country's democracy.



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Financial support for Afrobarometer is provided by Sweden via the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency, the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) via the U.S. Institute of Peace, the Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation via the World Bank Think Africa Project, the Mo Ibrahim Foundation, the Open Society Foundations - Africa, Luminate, the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation, the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, the Mastercard Foundation, the David and Lucile Packard Foundation, the European Union Commission, the World Bank Group, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Finland, the Embassy of the Kingdom of the Netherlands in Uganda, the Embassy of Sweden in Zimbabwe, the Global Centre for Pluralism, and GIZ.

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