



The emergence of post-civil war pluralist politics

Based on Working Paper no.23: Giovanni M. Carbone, 'Emerging Pluralist Politics in Mozambique: the Frelimo-Renamo Party System'. This is intended to provide a summary of the principal findings, and an indication of the implications these may have for debates over policy.

In 1992, the Mozambican civil war was brought to a close, marking the beginning of a 'pacted' and fundamentally successful process of democratic change. Despite the extreme poverty of the country, Mozambique has managed to introduce a formally competitive electoral regime, in which movements that were formerly in violent opposition to one another have moved towards fragile pluralist practices – in marked contrast to, for example, Angola, whose peace process quickly unraveled. This paper examines the emergence of a two party system in Mozambique, in which the former Renamo guerrilla fighters appear to have embraced the possibilities of peace. Ultimately, however, Carbone warns against undue optimism, and highlights the weaknesses of the system that are still to be resolved. For all that the country has adopted a formally competitive political system, it continues to fall short of fully democratic and liberal practices.

- **Political parties are unique instruments for the peaceful transfer of democratic political power**

The regularisation, stabilisation and legitimation of democratic politics hinge upon the presence of a stable and well-functioning party system. Political parties articulate government programmes, promote political stances, keep the executive under check. They help define the meaning of political competition by providing political identities that are recognizable over subsequent electoral periods. They contribute to linking a country's territory with its capital city by communicating upward demands and needs, as well as by legitimising downwards central decisions and policy directives.

- **A well-functioning democratic polity requires the institutionalisation of the party system**

The condition for political parties to actually help the establishment of democratic politics is their development as durable, socially-rooted, country-wide effective and legitimate organisations. Party system institutionalisation depends on four elements: stability in inter-party competition; stable roots in society; perceived to be legitimate institutions; and stable party organisations. An institutionalised party system reduces the space for populist appeals and candidates, keeps the personalisation of political power under check, helps restrain neo-patrimonial practices and potentially limits the marginalization of parliament.

- **Unequal political and organisational development of governmental and rebel parties**

The Mozambican case highlights the precariousness of a transition from armed conflict to peaceful political competition in which the ruling party is well-gearred towards the exercise of state power, with well-tested organisational structures and a long established and stable presence on the ground; whereas the rebel-turned-into-opposition party may have political structures that are still fragile, untried internal procedures, an unorganised presence on the ground, poorly articulated policies and total inexperience in the administration of political power.

- **No necessary change in political balance through turning from bullet to ballot**

Because peace was agreed between the leaderships of the two principal warring groups, the political settlement marginalized other voices, in particular those of unarmed political oppositions. As a result, the emergent party system in Mozambique has not altered who the main contestants for power are, and elections continue to be as much a Frelimo/Renamo confrontation as the civil war was. There has also been a tendency to electorally maintain the geographical division of the country between these two forces.

- **Underlying party organisations maintain tendencies developed during pre-pluralist period**

The transition to peaceful competitive politics, when led by pre-established political organisations, leads to the preservation on both sides of the organisational culture to which they are respectively accustomed. Thus in Mozambique, Frelimo continues to operate as though it still were the only party, with only limited change to the hierarchical and strictly ordered culture. Meanwhile, Renamo as a party continues to reflect its origins as a disciplined military organisation, personally dominated by its leader, as a result of which it finds it difficult in practice to operate within the new democratic institutions.

- **Public legitimisation of party system can coincide with lack of mutual legitimisation between the competing parties**

For all that the democratic system, and its parties, may be generally approved of by the population, pre-peace animosities and suspicions persist between the two parties. The former rebels attack the established governmental party for its monopolisation of political power, its centralising and undemocratic attitudes, and its alleged manipulation of electoral results. The governing party claims a 'natural right' to rule, and questions the fitness of the rebel party to govern the country.

- **Low party fragmentation both a legacy of civil war, and a source of stability**

Dominance by the two principal contenders to the exclusion of other political actors is not necessarily a negative feature of the system. Party fragmentation is often associated with instability of political regimes, and therefore low levels of fragmentation may have a positive effect.

- **Dynamics of inter-party relations influenced by legacy of civil war**

In Mozambique, political conflict is deep-rooted, and as a result there is little evidence of parliament being used as a locus of dialogue and socialisation between the opposing political forces. However, while Renamo members, as former rebels, have found it hard to adjust to a culture of parliamentary participation, and to articulate policy programmes or systematically scrutinize government activities; Frelimo members have been able to use the parliamentary arena to occasionally challenge government policy, potentially giving them a new influence over the leadership.

- **Underlying fragility of the emergent pluralist system**

With the introduction of multi-party politics following civil war, the emergent political system – for all its apparent stability and peaceful operation – remains deeply affected by previous conflict. Since the principal parties, whose roots were in the earlier conflict, cannot easily distance themselves entirely from their past, the system is likely to remain weak, and potentially fragile, until both sides develop a deeper pluralist political culture. In Mozambique, the governing party has never been out of power. Ultimately, a key test for the country's formal democracy will be when there is a successful turnover of power, first from Frelimo to Renamo, and then back again.

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