



EXPEDITIONARY CULTURE **FIELD GUIDE**

Mozambique 



About this Guide

This guide is designed to prepare you to deploy to culturally complex environments and achieve mission objectives. The fundamental information contained within will help you understand the cultural dimension of your assigned location and gain skills necessary for success.

The guide consists of two parts:

Part 1 introduces “Culture General,” the foundational knowledge you need to operate effectively in any global environment.

Part 2 presents “Culture Specific” Mozambique, focusing on unique cultural features of Mozambican society and is designed to complement other pre-deployment training. It applies culture-

general concepts to help increase your knowledge of your assigned deployment location.

For further information, visit the Air Force Culture and Language Center (AFCLC) website at

www.airuniversity.af.edu/AFCLC/ or contact AFCLC's Region Team at AFCLC.Region@us.af.mil.

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PART 1 – CULTURE GENERAL

What is Culture?

Fundamental to all aspects of human existence, culture shapes the way humans view life and functions as a tool we use to adapt to our social and physical environments. A culture is the sum of all of the beliefs, values, behaviors, and symbols that have meaning for a society. All human beings have culture, and



individuals within a culture share a general set of beliefs and values.

Members of a culture also usually assign the same meanings to the symbols in that culture. A symbol is when one thing – an image, word, object, idea, or story – represents another thing.

For example, the American flag is a physical and visual symbol of a core American value – freedom. At the same time, the story of George Washington admitting to having chopped down a cherry tree is also symbolic, representing the importance Americans place on personal honesty and leadership integrity.

Force Multiplier

The military services have learned through experience the importance of understanding other cultures. Unlike the 20th-century bipolar world order that dominated US strategy for nearly half a century, today the US military is operating in what we classify as asymmetric or irregular conflict zones where the notion of cross-cultural interactions is on the leading edge of our engagement strategies.

We have come to view the people themselves, rather than the political system or physical environment, as the decisive feature in conflict areas. Our primary objective hinges on influencing constructive change through peaceful means where possible. We achieve this endeavor by encouraging local nationals to focus on developing stable political, social, and economic institutions that reflect their cultural beliefs and traditions.

Therefore, understanding the basic concepts of culture serves as a force multiplier. Achieving an awareness and respect of a society's values and beliefs enables deploying forces to build relationships with people from other cultures, positively influence their actions, and ultimately achieve mission success.

Cultural Domains

Culture is not just represented by the beliefs we carry internally, but also by our behaviors and by the systems members of a culture create to organize their lives. These systems, such as political or educational institutions, help us to live in a manner that is appropriate to our culture and encourages us to perpetuate that culture into the future.

We can organize these behaviors and systems into categories – what the Air Force refers to as “cultural domains” – in order to better understand the primary values and characteristics of a society. A cross-culturally competent military member can use these domains – which include kinship, language and communication, and social and political systems among others (see chart on next page) – as tools for understanding and adapting to any culture. For example, by understanding the ways different cultures define family or kinship, a deployed military member can more effectively interact with members of that culture.

Social Behaviors Across Cultures

While humankind shares basic behaviors, various groups enact or even group those behaviors differently across cultural boundaries. For example, all societies obtain food for survival, although agrarian societies generally produce their own food for limited consumption using very basic techniques.

Conversely, industrialized nations have more sophisticated market economies, producing foodstuffs for universal consumption. Likewise, all cultures value history and tradition, although they represent these concepts through a



variety of unique forms of symbolism. While the dominant world religions share the belief in one God, their worship practices vary with their traditional historical development. Similarly, in many kin-based cultures where familial bonds are foundational to social identity, it is customary for family or friends to serve as godparents, while for other societies this practice is nearly non-existent.

Worldview

One of our basic human behaviors is the tendency to classify others as similar or different according to our cultural standard.



As depicted in the chart below, we can apply the 12 cultural domains to help us compare similarities and differences across cultures. We evaluate others' behavior to determine if they are "people like me" or

"people not like me." Consequently, we assume that individuals falling into the "like me" category share our perspectives and values.

12 Domains of Culture



This collective perspective forms our worldview – how we see the world and understand our place in it. Your worldview functions as a lens through which you see and understand the world. It helps you to interpret your experiences and the values and behaviors of other people that you encounter. Consider your worldview as a way of framing behavior, providing an accountability standard for our actions and a logical explanation of why we individually or collectively act in a certain manner.

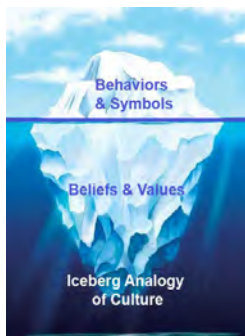
Cultural Belief System

An important component of a worldview is our belief system. A community's belief system sets its universal standards of what is good and bad, defines right and wrong behavior, and assigns a value of meaningful or meaningless. Our beliefs form the fundamental values we hold to be true – regardless of whether there is physical evidence to support these ideas. Beliefs are a central facet of human culture. They are shared views about world order and how the universe was physically and socially constructed.

While all people have beliefs, their specific components tend to vary depending upon respective world views. What people classify as good or bad, right or wrong depends on our deeply-held beliefs we started developing early in life that have help shape our characters. Likewise, these values are ingrained in our personalities and shape our behavior patterns and our self-identities. Because cultural beliefs are intensely held, they are difficult, though not impossible, to change.

Core Beliefs

Core beliefs shape and influence certain behaviors and also serve to rationalize those behaviors. Therefore, knowledge of individual or group beliefs can be useful in comprehending or making sense of their activities. We will use the iceberg model for classifying culture to illustrate two levels of meaning, as depicted. Beliefs and values, portrayed by the deeper and greater level of the submerged iceberg, are seldom visible, but are indicated / hinted



at / referenced by our behaviors and symbols (top level). It is important to recognize, though, that the parts of culture that are not visible (under the waterline) are informing and shaping what is being made visible (above the waterline).

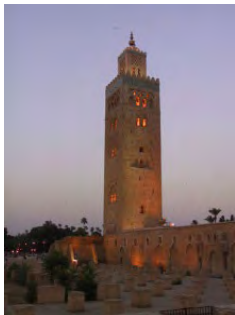
In many cases, different worldviews may present behaviors that are contrary to our own beliefs, particularly in many regions where US forces deploy. Your ability to suspend judgment in order to understand another perspective is essential to establishing relationships with your host-nation counterparts. The ability to withhold your opinion and strive to understand a culture from a member of that culture's perspective is known as cultural relativism. It often involves taking an alternate perspective when interpreting others' behaviors and is critical to your ability to achieve mission success.

As you travel throughout the African Continent, you will encounter cultural patterns of meaning that are common among most African countries. What follows is a general description of 12 cultural domains which are used to frame those commonalities.

CULTURAL DOMAINS

1. History and Myth

History and myth are related concepts. History is a record of the past that is based on verifiable facts and events. Myth can act



as a type of historical record, although it is usually a story which members of a culture use to explain community origins or important events that are not verifiable or which occurred prior to written language.

Africa has a history that spans the entire existence of humankind. In ancient times prior to the emergence of written languages, history and wisdom were preserved across generations and ethnic boundaries through oral folk legends or myths. Most early human evolution

began as hunting and gathering cultures in East and South Africa, with countries such as Ethiopia, Kenya, Tanzania, and South Africa renowned for their early human sites. In the last several millennia, the development of agriculture and pastoralism (animal herding) replaced hunting and gathering lifestyles.

Ancient civilizations evolved in all corners of Africa, inspired in part by peoples from the Middle East bringing trade, beliefs, customs, language, and on occasion, colonization. Far from being isolated empires, the African civilizations were intimately connected by commerce and marriage throughout various regions of the continent, and when confronted by outsiders, managed to adapt to their influences. Eventually, Arab traders introduced Islam to Africa and also instituted the Trans-Saharan African slave trade that lasted from the 7th to 19th Centuries.

The “golden age” of European exploration, which lasted from the 18th to mid-20th century, prompted the wholesale exploitation of Africans resources – first human assets through slavery, followed by natural resources such as minerals, precious gems and metals, and wildlife, thereby diminishing most of what was traditional and African.

The introduction of the European Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade altered the slave trade through both the sheer number of



Africans enslaved and through the cementing of a racist ideology of Black inferiority to legitimize the institution of slavery. Slavery decimated the African continent for over 400 years through the forced relocation of an estimated 25 to 30 million Africans worldwide. This figure does not include those Africans who died aboard ships or during capture. While abolition of the slave trade dissolved the institution of slavery, it did not end the European presence on the African continent nor did it drastically alter their attitudes towards Africans.

Starting in the mid-19th century, European colonialism served to redefine African ethnic relations on a large scale; however, as African societies began to resist colonial rule and seek their independence, widespread ethnic conflict and genocide occurred. Sustained westernization and globalization continue to shape the continent through poverty, disease, and social reform. A history still to be recorded, Africa's future identity faces many challenges in critical areas such as environmental change, ethnic strife, women's health and security, and education.

2. Political and Social Relations

Political relations are the ways in which members of a community organize leadership, power, and authority. Social relations are all of the ways in which individuals are linked to others in their community. Traditional African political organizations in the form of bands, tribes, and chiefdoms have existed for several millennia and continue to influence contemporary African governments. Uncommon in modern society, bands are limited to hunting and gathering economies, such as the !Kung of the southern African Kalahari Desert and foragers of central African forests.

Tribes are still represented today across the African political landscape, although the use of the word "tribe" is sometimes misinterpreted due to its western notion of "primitiveness" and oftentimes substituted with the term "ethnic group." Lacking centralized authority, tribes are organized around segmented descent groups or in some cases age groups.



Everyday governance is discharged through councils of respected elders and sanctioned through ritual and other means. East African pastoralist groups such as the Maasai, along with some West African tribes and the Berbers in North Africa, represent this type of organization.

Chiefdoms or kingdoms are ruled by kings or queens from a royal clan and generally incorporate millions of subjects. Kingdoms such as the Zulu or Swazi in southern Africa developed through conquest, while others like Ghana's Ashante developed through an association of related traditional states. However, colonialism eventually diluted the power and reach of

these empires, whose leaders were often retained as indirect rulers or figureheads.



Today, all three of these political organizations still exist, although in the confines of modern African

nation-states created by colonial powers who had little regard or understanding of African cultures. This juxtaposition of modernity with tradition has caused severe conflict throughout the continent.

Challenged to construct their respective “national” identities, regional leaders attempt to do so by diluting the traditionally cohesive power of ancestry. These national ruling elites, who derive their power from wealth and commerce rather than tribal affiliation, feel threatened by loyalty to these traditional organizations, labeling their rule as “tribalism.”

This “class versus descent” scrimmage for power has resulted in conflicts across the continent and a dramatic divergence of interests. As a means to overcome these and other issues on the continent, a 55-nation federation, the African Union (AU), was formed in 2002. AU's charter is to promote “greater unity and solidarity between African countries and peoples” by building partnerships in all segments of “civil society.”

3. Religion and Spirituality

Religion is a cultural belief system that provides meaning to members of a community. Religious and spiritual beliefs help preserve the social order by defining proper behavior. They also create social unity by defining shared identity, offer individuals

peace of mind, and explain the causes of events in a society. Prior to the arrival of Islam and Christianity, the African continent consisted of orally transmitted indigenous religious practices. As in many societies, African indigenous beliefs influenced diet, subsistence patterns, family structures, marriage practices, and healing and burial processes. In essence, Africans constructed



their worldview through their indigenous religions.

Today, the African continent is primarily either Muslim or Christian. Other faiths such as Judaism and Hinduism exist as pockets in different regions of the continent, primarily in urban areas. The historical

trajectories of Islamic and Christian expansion in Africa offer intriguing commonalities in how Africans across the continent initially reacted to the introduction of each of those religions. For example, it is common throughout the continent to find a blending of many elements of indigenous religious practices with local Islam and Christianity.

Consequently, many African native religions share similarities with religions such as Christianity, Islam, and Judaism in their understanding of God as the creator and ruler of all life, although He is considered untouchable by humans.

However, unlike Christianity and Islam, many African indigenous religions believe that God is not directly involved in people's lives. To them there is a spirit world populated with former good and bad human beings. The good spirits intercede with God on behalf of their living families to whom they then relay God's will through dreams and acquired possessions. The bad spirits work to bring misfortune through



sickness, death, or natural disasters to those who behave inappropriately.

Many indigenous African religions revere "nature" spirits living in the sky, water, and forests. These impersonal spirits help protect people from harm and provide them with life's essential ingredients such as water, sun, and wildlife. This belief system is commonly referred to as animism.

Just as spirits mediate relations between God and humans, religious specialists act as mediators between spirits and humans to provide protection from harm.

4. Family and Kinship

The domain of family and kinship refers to groups of people related through blood ties, marriage, or through strong emotional bonds that influence them to treat each other like family members (often called "fictive kin"). The traditional African family with respect to marriage, family structure, and descent is a much different arrangement than is found in most American families.

Likewise, there are several components of the traditional African family that are common to all African cultures.



First, perhaps the most difficult feature to reconcile to Americans is that of polygyny – the practice of a husband having more than one wife. A benefit of this arrangement is that it promotes societal alliances through marriage, procreation, and family wealth through female labor.

Second, due to polygyny, the family in most African cultures has historically consisted of an expanded set of kin or relatives that extends well beyond the American notion of a nuclear family. This arrangement created a family environment where children considered all siblings as "brothers and sisters" and all of the wives/mothers as "mother."

Third, the extended African family traces descent through either the male or female side of the family, a practice which differs considerably from the American family. Patrilineal descent (through the male side of the family) is the more common approach and usually features polygyny. The matrilineal (through the female bloodline) marriage pattern is more uncommon and almost always features monogamy – it is rare to encounter a wife having more than one husband.

Lastly, it is common for two or more blood lines (lineages) to share a common ancestor and collectively form a clan, which is the largest social unit. Clans do not have formal leaders or organizational structures. Membership is transferred from father to child and cuts across ethnic and social boundaries.

The dramatic social changes in Africa during and after colonialism in the last 4 decades have obviously affected the traditional family, and variations on these 3 features can be found across the continent.

5. Sex and Gender

Sex refers to the biological/reproductive differences between males and females, while gender is a more flexible concept that refers to a culture's categorizing of masculine and feminine behaviors, symbols, and social roles. Gender roles in Africa

follow no single model nor is there a generalized concept of sex and common standard of sexual behavior.

Prehistorically, gender role differentiation in Africa's hunting and gathering cultures was based on a division of

labor featuring different, yet complementary, sets of responsibilities for males and females, adults and children. Females gathered over half the caloric needs from natural vegetation, while also reproducing and raising offspring. Males were primarily hunters but also assisted with gathering.



These gender patterns continued as agricultural practices advanced. Females shared in farming while continuing to provide for the family's subsistence, and males produced the cash crops. Pastoralists like the Maasai of Kenya traditionally have featured males involved in cattle-raising and females in food production.

The 19th-century European colonial period introduced a cash economy into Africa, with female labor used to produce the cash crops. By inserting male authority over females, colonial administrators disrupted the distinct yet complementary male/female relationship that had been traditionally African.

More recently, western influence across the continent has dramatically altered the traditional gender roles. Educational and professional opportunities for females, along with increased family migrations to urban areas, have radically altered traditional male and female gender roles.

Likewise, the number of single parents and even child- or other relative-led families has increased with the predominance of HIV/AIDS-related deaths and warfare, further altering traditional gender responsibilities. Additionally, ethnic conflicts involving abuse of women are prevalent in many unstable countries, and while the rubric of traditional African gender generally remains, the forces of change are gradually ripping it away.

6. Language and Communication

Language is a system for sharing information symbolically, whereby words are used to represent ideas. Communication is



defined as the cultural practice of sharing meaning in interaction, both verbally and non-verbally. America is predominantly a monolingual society, where traditionally, fluency in a second language has been considered a luxury

rather than a necessity. Conversely, national survival for many societies in Africa required them throughout their existence to

adopt multilingual practices, if for no other reason than to preserve their native heritage.

You may find it challenging to comprehend the scope of Africa's linguistic diversity. There are over 2,000 African languages (many spoken-only) from 6 major language families, and perhaps 100 of these languages are used to communicate among the more dominant ethnic groups such as Berber, Swahili, Yoruba, and others.

Official languages of African nation-states are few, yet the linguistic diversity expressed across the continent (Nigeria has 250 languages) has prompted an awareness of the value of Africa's linguistic traditions. While most areas of the continent speak the adopted language of their colonial past – such as French and Portuguese in West Africa, French and Arabic in Morocco, and English in Kenya and South Africa – the majority of people also speak one or more traditional “indigenous” languages of their and other ethnic groups. As African independence spread throughout the continent, ethnic groups continued to depend on their indigenous identifiers, such as language, to celebrate their “release” from colonial rule and to

preserve a sense of indigenous identity.



While communication styles tend to vary by ethnic or social groups, Africans generally are friendly and outgoing people although they tend to communicate with reserve to avoid

confrontation. As in most kin-based societies, Africans believe that saving face or protecting one's honor and dignity are of utmost importance; therefore, they avoid public criticism and controversial topics at all costs – even to the extent of withholding their honest opinion or modifying the truth.

Africans admire and even expect extended greetings and small talk, and to attempt to rush or avoid social graces is considered disrespectful. Similarly, Africans avoid direct eye contact when communicating with new acquaintances and people of status,

particularly elders. They also are fond of non-verbal gestures, and it is common throughout African societies for members of the same gender to hold hands or touch while conversing.

7. Learning and Knowledge

All cultures require that the older generation transmit important information to the younger generation. This information can be strictly factual (for example, how to fulfill subsistence and health requirements) and culturally traditional (the beliefs, behaviors, and symbols that have meaning to the community). This knowledge transfer may occur through structured, formalized systems such as schools or through informal learning by watching adults or peers.



The contemporary African educational system hardly resembles the traditional pre-colonial structure, whereby community elders were primarily responsible for preparing youth for adulthood. Their instruction included fundamentals of ethnic ritual and ceremony, along with customary protocol for their distinctive gender roles. A rite-of-passage commemorating their successful journey from childhood to adulthood served as a form of graduation.

European colonialism brought a more structured, formal educational system that catered to a small group of African elite who demonstrated potential to administer expanding colonial territories. Following independence, many African nations adopted the European system because they believed it would prepare them to be more competitive in intra-continental and global marketplaces, thereby enhancing their quality of life.

However, progress in developing and maintaining reliable educational institutions has been slow for a variety of reasons. Since most Africans live in rural environments, they continue to rely heavily on child labor for family survival, resulting in decreased school enrollments or early withdrawals. Likewise, widespread HIV/AIDS epidemics, ethnic conflict, teacher and resource deficits, and inaccessibility to remote rural areas also

hamper progress. According to 2023 statistics, about 100 million African children and youth were out of school, of which 35 million were of primary school age.

8. Time and Space

In every society, people occupy space and time in ways that are not directly linked to physical survival. In low-context western cultures, people tend to be preoccupied with strict time management, devoting less effort to relationship-building. Conversely, most African cultures are traditionally high-context societies, whereby people center their activities on socializing and establishing close associations, having little regard for the passage-of-time.

Only after establishing trust and honor will your typical African counterpart agreeably proceed with business. In his worldview, time is a precious commodity used to establish relationships and



form alliances. Any attempt to accelerate the tempo at the expense of social pleasantries will likely result in deadlock.

To an African, close physical proximity between individuals encourages cooperative trust, and for centuries they have viewed human linkage as a core

element to survival. This closeness is best represented in a traditional African village where strong kinship connections are evidenced by a display of close interpersonal relations among family members.

While conventional African concepts of time and space remain intact, throughout the continent western influence and globalization have stepped up the pace of African living, mostly in urban areas. Consequently, rural-to-urban migrations have reshaped traditional social and subsistence patterns.

9. Aesthetics and Recreation

Every culture has its own forms of creative expression that are guided by aesthetic principles of imagination, beauty, skill and

style. Prior to 19th-century European colonization of Africa, recreation served a vital subsistence role, whereby adolescents and adults alike participated in intellectually stimulating leisurely activities that concurrently served to develop essential hunting and pastoral skills.

Games of chance and skill were important to early childhood development, providing social outlets within and outside their community. Featuring wrestling, jumping and running; traditional African sport was steeped in religious ritual.



Along with colonialism came the introduction to Africa of western sports such as soccer, cricket, rugby and track and field. This emphasis on western sport continued to thrive with African independence and globalization, as seen in sporting events such as the Olympics and the World Cup.

Leaders such as Nelson Mandela skillfully employed sport to promote a unified South African nation. Importing the predominantly “white” game of rugby, Mandela used it to fuse a racially divided country following his election in 1992. This event is the theme of the motion picture “Invictus,” exemplifying how sport can serve to create national identities and overcome ethnic division. His efforts have inspired many other African nations to follow suit.



Likewise, East African countries such as Kenya and Ethiopia have produced the world's dominant male and female distance runners, and South Africa, Cameroon and Nigeria emerged as strong contenders in the 2010 World Cup. African nations are now competing in leagues such as the International Basketball Association (FIBA) World Championships, and there

is also a growing number of African basketball players on US college campuses and in the National Basketball Association (NBA).

10. Sustenance and Health

Societies have different methods of transforming natural resources into food. These methods can shape residence patterns, family structures and economics. Theories of disease and healing practices exist in all cultures and serve as adaptive responses to disease and illness.



Despite having only 18% of the global population, Africa is a victim of many of the world's debilitating health disorders. According to the World Health Organization, 65% of the global HIV/AIDS cases and 95% of malarial diseases occur in Africa.

These and other medical conditions are attributed primarily to viral infection and widespread poverty caused by extreme climatic conditions and civil unrest, coupled with inadequate preventative measures. While extensive drought generates widespread famine, civil disturbances generate millions of displaced persons. Likewise, with only 65% of the Sub-Saharan

African population having access to basic drinking water, water-borne bacterial diseases such as cholera and schistosomiasis are common.



Many people in Africa lack access to western medicine, and as a result depend on traditional health practices to combat disease. In addition, some traditional beliefs run counter to western medical practice and perhaps discourage individuals from utilizing those services even

when they are available. This problem is further intensified by lack of federal regulatory healthcare management.

While modern healthcare procedures are more common in urban areas, many rural people rely on traditional practitioners who use a variety of plants and herbs to treat patients. Similarly, many families have their own secret remedies. While in some cases traditional medicine proves effective with fewer side effects than modern drugs, traditional practices do not adequately treat many of the more serious conditions.

On a positive note, western influence has stimulated some progress in combating Africa's health crisis. More resources are devoted to achieving basic human security by assessing disease symptoms early and with scientific accuracy.

11. Economics and Resources

This domain refers to beliefs regarding appropriate ways for a society to produce, distribute, and consume goods and services. Traditionally having an agrarian-based economy, Africa today remains predominantly agricultural, featuring less industrialization than most other parts of the world. Post-colonial adversities such as civil war, disease, poverty, and unstable dictatorships posed unusual hardship on several young African nations; however, Africa currently stands at the cross-roads of economic development with many nations becoming some of fastest growing regions in the world.



Colonialism institutionalized the exploitation of Africa's mineral resources, resulting in today's oil industry dominating the economic market in several coastal regions. A surge in global oil prices; a growing African middle class; and reduction in civil wars, foreign aid, and inflation collectively promise a more positive outlook for the future.

Countries such as Botswana, Tunisia, Morocco, Egypt, and South Africa are economically the wealthiest on the continent, with regions such as East Africa showing signs of economic stability. Despite the economic upswing, much of sub-Saharan

Africa's future economic prosperity is held hostage by devastating diseases such as AIDS, particularly in areas of southern Africa, and the growing effects of climate change and man-made environmental degradation throughout the subcontinent.

12. Technology and Material

Societies use technology to transform their physical world, and culture heavily influences the development and use of technology. Africa lags far behind most of the world in manufacturing capacity and output. Even the more economically-developed nations such as South Africa are competitively weak when compared to non-African industrialized nations. During the 1970s and 1980s, Africa experienced some growth in raw exports although this increase did little to boost long-term manufacturing capacity.

Today, Africa is experiencing an actual decline in manufacturing capacity due primarily to a lull in the global economy, along with other indigenous issues such as environmental stress, poor physical and organizational infrastructure, and a shortage of skilled personnel.

Likewise, African manufacturing capacity is no match against global powers such as China and significant Southeast Asian markets.



International aid from both governmental and non-governmental organizations has helped African nations establish preliminary economic footholds. For example, many of them have dedicated industrial developmental zones to attract foreign investment and increase export-related manufacturing capacity, although Africa is far removed from having a significant role in the global marketplace in the foreseeable future.

Now that we have introduced general concepts that characterize African society at large, we will now focus on specific features of Mozambican society.

PART 2 – CULTURE SPECIFIC

1. HISTORY AND MYTH

Overview

Occupying a long strip along Africa's southeastern coast, Mozambique has been home to diverse peoples for centuries. After Portugal consolidated control of the region in the 19th century, residents endured exploitation and poverty until Mozambique gained independence in 1975. Between 1976-92, the country experienced civil war, and hostilities have continued to flare following a 1992 peace accord. Since holding its first free elections in 1994, Mozambique has prioritized building strong institutions and developing its economy.



Early History

The first humans likely arrived in the region of present-day Mozambique around 10,000 years ago, though these nomadic hunter-gatherers left few archeological records. The region's first large settlement developed around the 3rd century AD, when Bantu-speaking (see *Language and Communication*) peoples from western and central Africa settled along the Mozambican coast. Besides herding cattle along the central and southern coastal plains, these people engaged in small-scale mining of gold, iron, and copper in the South.

The Arrival of Arab Traders

While the Bantu communities inhabited the region for several hundred years, around 700, Muslim merchants from the Arabian Peninsula (see *Religion and Spirituality*) began to establish settlements on the northern coast of present-day Mozambique.

Over time, these outposts grew wealthy through trade in gold and other natural resources between Africa and Asia. Concurrently, the new Swahili culture and language emerged as a result of interaction, intermarriage, and cultural exchange between the Arabs and Bantu-speakers in the North (see



Language and Communication) that soon spread southward. During this period, the most prominent Swahili trade center was Sofala in central Mozambique, which was founded in 915 and reached its commercial apex during the 15th century.

The Karanga Kingdoms

Meanwhile, other groups rose to prominence in inland regions. Between the 12-15th centuries, the Karanga people of southern Africa founded several kingdoms that expanded to include parts of present-day Mozambique, Zimbabwe, Zambia, and South Africa, and eventually controlled much of the region's gold and copper mines. The Mutapa (also known as Monomotapa) Kingdom was the prominent Karanga Kingdom in Mozambique, and remained a significant political and commercial power until its collapse in the 17th century.

The Arrival of the Portuguese

In the 15th century, technological advances in Europe led to an age of exploration for many of Europe's kingdoms, which were in search of new trade routes to acquire spices, gold, and other quality goods from African and Asian merchants. Portugal was one of the first countries to send explorers along the African coast in search of new markets. One such explorer, Vasco da Gama, rounded the southern tip of Africa and landed on Mozambique Island (off the north-central coast) in 1498, before continuing his journey to India.

The success of da Gama's voyage convinced the Portuguese to attempt to exert control over trade routes between South Asia, the Arabian Peninsula, and East Africa. In 1505, Portugal

established the ***Estado da India***, a colonial state comprised of fortified trade posts across the Indian Ocean region. Toward this end, in 1558, the Portuguese built a fort on Mozambique Island and gained control of Sofala. Over the next 250 years, these African holdings served as the western edge of the *Estado da India*, providing safe harbors for Portuguese to await the trade winds necessary for passage to Oman or India.



Portuguese Trade: The Portuguese expanded their control over important Swahili trade routes, and by 1530, dominated regional trade. Portuguese-held territories in present-day Mozambique and Tanzania supplied the Europeans with precious metals and ivory, which they exchanged for desirable Asian wares.

Nevertheless, Portuguese efforts to expand further inland largely failed, and the European presence was limited primarily to fortified trade outposts on the coast. Instead, the Portuguese negotiated trade agreements with local inland groups. As a result, the Mutapa and other groups retained control of mines and provisioned the foodstuffs required to maintain the Portuguese trade posts.

The Maravi

Meanwhile, a loose confederation of ethnolinguistic groups began to expand southward from present-day Malawi (see *Political and Social Relations*), destabilizing the region. Called the Maravi by the Portuguese, this confederation raided Portuguese, Swahili, and Karanga settlements in the late 16th century, before settling to the north of present-day Mozambique. Besides gaining control of the increasingly significant ivory trade, the Maravi also restricted Portuguese commerce with inland Africa for several centuries, only allowing Portuguese traders to venture up the Zambezi River Valley in exchange for a yearly tribute.

Integration and the *Prazos*

In the late 16th century, some Portuguese explorers sought to increase their profit from inland trade and began to venture farther from the fortified coastal trade centers. Encouraged by the possibility of extending its influence inland, Portugal promoted the development of ***prazos***, large estates located primarily near the Zambezi River.

For several decades, these Portuguese landholders (***prazeros***) retained control of the land and the local populations, sometimes adopting the customs and practices of local communities and intermarrying both with residents and traders from the Middle

East and Asia. Over time, the ***prazeros*** became a powerful landowning class of mixed European, African, and Asian origins.

The ***prazo*** system also changed the way some residents thought of themselves. Instead

of identifying with their ethnolinguistic group, many Mozambicans began to identify primarily with their ***prazo***, leading to the creation of the so-called ***chicunda*** identity. Subsequently, some ***prazeros*** used ***chicundas*** in their trained private armies. Upon serving as soldiers for the ***prazeros***, some ***chicundas*** gained status, and eventually some wealth and independence under the nominal control of the Portuguese.

Limits to Portuguese Expansion

In their efforts to control Indian Ocean trade, the Portuguese antagonized many of the Muslim sultanates that served as intermediaries between Arab and Indian traders and eastern Africa's inland kingdoms. In the late 17th century, traders from present-day Oman conquered the Portuguese-held port of Mombasa (in present-day Kenya), cutting Portugal's access to trade in the northern Swahili territories and restricting any further expansion northwards.



The loss of Mombasa made Portuguese dominance of Indian Ocean trade nearly impossible. Blocked from the northern trade routes, Portuguese officials had to depend on southern routes that the Maravi managed, the rapidly declining Karanga kingdoms, and military protection from *prazos*. Although ultimately unsuccessful, a series of Dutch attempts to invade the region also had weakened Portuguese control. By the late 17th century, diminished Portuguese power had enabled groups from present-day South Africa, Zimbabwe, and Eswatini to gain territories in the region.

The Gaza Kingdom

After a series of severe droughts in the 1820s, the Nguni, an ethnolinguistic group associated with the Zulu Empire to the south of present-day Mozambique, began to move northward and settled by the Limpopo River in southern Mozambique. Unable to grow crops due to the ongoing drought, the Nguni began raiding *prazos*, trade outposts, and local villages, which destabilized trade routes that had existed since the arrival of the Portuguese some 3 centuries earlier.



Consolidating control, the Nguni then established their Gaza Kingdom in southern Mozambique. Independent of the Portuguese, the Gaza Kingdom collected tribute from local groups and posed a serious threat to Portuguese regional dominance. However, ongoing Portuguese attacks and political instability weakened the Kingdom, and it collapsed within 50 years.

Prazeros and the Slave Trade

Meanwhile, the early 19th-century droughts and associated crop failures forced many *prazeros* to permanently leave for other Portuguese colonies in Brazil and Goa (in present-day India). The few remaining *prazero* families consolidated control over much of the abandoned land, constructing fortifications and acting largely as autonomous political entities.

Searching for new sources of income, some *prazeros* began to participate in the slave trade. While enslaved people had been trafficked from Mozambique for centuries, the practice grew significantly in the 19th century, when a British ban on slavery forced the Portuguese to move their operations from West Africa to their less heavily monitored colonies of East Africa.

With the help of local groups, such as the Yao, who had connections to the African interior (see *Political and Social Relations*), many *prazeros* began to sell enslaved Mozambicans



to French plantation owners in Madagascar and to slave markets in Brazil and the Caribbean. The Cabo Delgado settlement in northern Mozambique became a major slave trading port, and over a million enslaved Africans were shipped from Mozambican lands throughout the 19th century.

While Portugal outlawed the slave trade in 1842, it continued in some regions until the 20th century. Further, some *prazeros*

ignored the ban, purchasing enslaved Mozambicans to work their land.

Consolidation of Portuguese Mozambique

In the second half of the 19th century, southern and eastern Africa became a focus of European colonial ambitions. Competition from the British and German Empires, which took an interest in the region after the discovery of large deposits of gold, copper, and diamonds, forced the Portuguese to exert direct control over Mozambique for the first time. Hoping to unite their holdings in present-day Angola (on Africa's West Coast) with Mozambique, the Portuguese penetrated the center of southern Africa. However, after pressure from British financiers, to whom Portugal was heavily indebted, the Portuguese abandoned plans for a geographically unified colony and agreed to fix Mozambique's current borders in 1891 (see *Political and Social Relations*).

Nevertheless, the Portuguese government was unable to establish centralized control across all of Mozambique. Consequently, it ceded significant territory to corporations, which received the rights to exploit the land and its residents in exchange for the development of basic infrastructure. Companies like the Mozambique Corporation, Niassa (or Nyassa) Corporation, and Zambezi Corporation won such contracts in the 1890s, giving each control of vast swaths of Mozambican land.



Chibalo Labor: With support from the government, these Portuguese corporations began to develop Mozambique's agricultural and industrial sectors, notably establishing sugar plantations in the Zambezi River Valley on land once controlled by the *prazeros*. In southern Mozambique, South African and Rhodesian (present-day Zimbabwe) companies held the rights to recruit labor for mining. Throughout Mozambique, Portuguese colonial administrators imposed forced labor policies (called **chibalo** labor) on residents. In 1899, the Portuguese formalized this practice of free or low-paid labor, subjecting Mozambicans to the practice until 1960.

The use of *chibalo* labor, especially for dangerous infrastructure projects like the construction of roads and railroads, which had high death tolls as the norm, led to an uprising in 1917 during World War I (WWI – fought between Britain, France, Russia, the US, and others against Germany, Austria-Hungary, Bulgaria, and the Ottoman Empire). Portugal had little control over its colony in Mozambique and depended on allied British troops to quell the protests. Portuguese command of the region remained weak for several years after WWI ended in 1918.

The Estado Novo Military Government

In 1926, a military coup in Portugal established the authoritarian **Estado Novo** (New State). This new regime subsequently

reformed Mozambique's colonial government, establishing Mozambique as a single unified state in 1930 and giving Portuguese citizenship to all inhabitants, though without political rights. Further, the new regime allowed the colonial corporations' charters to expire without renewal, giving the *Estado Novo* full control of Mozambique.

The *Estado Novo* encouraged European migration to the country, especially to Zambezi River Valley plantations and the



southern port city of Lourenço Marques (the present-day capital Maputo), which had become the colonial capital at the end of the 19th century. During the worldwide Great Depression of the 1930s, Portugal

depended on low-cost agricultural goods from Mozambique, encouraging settlers to establish cotton, sugar, and tea plantations (see *Economics and Resources*). An increase in world demand for such products during and after World War II brought further growth to the agricultural sector.

Nevertheless, the repressive labor policies of previous governments continued under *Estado Novo* rule. Regime administrators strictly enforced *chibalo* labor policies and restricted African residents' free movement within Mozambique. The new commercial plantations displaced many subsistence farmers from their lands and disrupted traditional agricultural practices. Further, the regime heavily taxed Mozambicans working at mines abroad, causing financial hardship. As a result, many Mozambicans resented Portuguese rule, compelling some to flee to the British colonies in neighboring Malawi, Zimbabwe, and South Africa, where pay and working conditions were generally better.

The Mozambican War for Independence

In response to the *Estado Novo*'s repressive policies, some Mozambicans living abroad took inspiration from other African

independence movements and began to organize. In 1962, a coalition of Mozambican workers and students met in Tanzania to organize the ***Frente de Libertação de Moçambique*** (Mozambican Liberation Front–FRELIMO), a socialist, anti-colonial independence movement led by former professor Eduardo Mondlane. In 1964, FRELIMO began engaging in armed resistance against the Portuguese, with help from other countries sympathetic to the socialist cause.

FRELIMO relied on guerilla tactics to destabilize the Portuguese military, which was already burdened by similar independence struggles in its other African colonies. While Portuguese troops launched a counter-offensive that killed FRELIMO leader Mondlane in 1969, the group's ability to retreat to its bases in Tanzania allowed it to continue its campaigns under new leader, Samora Machel. Subsequent successes brought areas of northern and central Mozambique under FRELIMO control, while the Portuguese *Estado Novo* retained command of most cities, coastal areas, and the South. While neither side proclaimed victory nor admitted defeat, the conflict continued for several years.



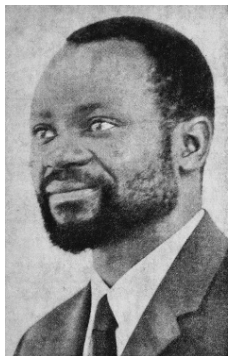
Independence

The war for independence between FRELIMO and the Portuguese ended in 1974, when a military coup in Portugal removed the *Estado Novo* from power. With no desire to continue this costly war, the Portuguese government negotiated a ceasefire with FRELIMO, which declared itself the legitimate representative of the Mozambican people. After a transition period, Mozambique attained its independence on June 25, 1975, today celebrated as Independence Day (see *Time and Space*). As the leader of FRELIMO, Machel became independent Mozambique's first President the same day.

FRELIMO Rule

President Machel and FRELIMO, the only legal political party, faced significant challenges. By this time, most Portuguese had

fled Mozambique for Portugal, leaving the new country with few trained government administrators and no established private sector, as both had largely excluded native Mozambicans from their ranks. Further, the Portuguese had neglected the healthcare and education systems. Following his socialist ideology, President Machel prioritized healthcare and education (see *Learning and Knowledge*) and adopted anti-religion policies (see *Religion and Spirituality*), while nationalizing all land and introducing collective ownership. These latter policies proved



particularly unpopular with many rural Mozambicans, who had hoped to return to the traditional agricultural practices that the Portuguese had forced them to abandon decades before.

Under Machel, Mozambique's foreign policy primarily focused on supporting other independence movements and toppling the **apartheid** ("apartness," referring to a system of legal racial segregation) governments of neighboring Rhodesia and South Africa. In response, these *apartheid* governments began to support

FRELIMO opponents and defectors, many of whom sought to overthrow Machel's socialist government. With support of the Rhodesian government, some of these defectors formed the **Rêsistencia Nacional Moçambicana** (Mozambican National Resistance – RENAMO) in Rhodesia in 1975. A year later, RENAMO began an armed campaign against the FRELIMO government, launching Mozambique into a decades-long civil war.

Civil War

Led by Alfonso Dhaklama, RENAMO engaged in various brutal tactics to destabilize the Mozambican government, such as recruiting minors, plundering villages, attacking healthcare centers and schools, and mutilating captives. After the Rhodesian government transitioned from *apartheid* in 1980, its support for RENAMO ended. As a result, South Africa's support for RENAMO increased. Although the South African government

promised Machel that it would stop harboring RENAMO guerillas, its security forces provided RENAMO with training and equipment (see *Political and Social Relations*).

To bolster support among Mozambicans, FRELIMO began to enact various reforms in the early 1980s, notably distancing itself from some socialist policies, embracing religious institutions, abandoning many communal



landowning programs, and becoming a member of the World Bank and International Monetary Fund (see *Political and Social Relations*). Following Machel's 1986 death in a plane crash, his Minister of Foreign Affairs, Joaquim Chissano, assumed the Presidency. Constitutional amendments in 1990 further distanced the government from socialism and introduced the possibility of multiparty elections (see *Political and Social Relations*).

Nevertheless, the civil war continued to devastate Mozambique. RENAMO attacks on infrastructure delayed economic development, and ongoing violence compelled many Mozambicans to emigrate. Experts estimate that the 1976-92 civil war caused some 100,000 casualties, with about 30% of the population displaced or forced into exile. Further, RENAMO attacked some 2,500 primary schools and 800 hospitals and clinics, while FRELIMO placed some 171,000 landmines throughout the country.

The Peace Accord

The political openness signaled by the constitutional changes, combined with international pressure, resulted in peace talks between FRELIMO and RENAMO in 1992. After prolonged negotiations, and with assistance from the Catholic Church (see *Religion and Spirituality*), RENAMO agreed to a ceasefire and transition from a guerrilla group to a political party in order to participate in the 1994 presidential and parliamentary elections, effectively ending the civil war. While the 1994 elections resulted

in President Chissano retaining the Presidency, RENAMO won a large share of parliamentary seats (see p. 5 in *Political and Social Relations*). Although RENAMO objected to the policy of centralized control of local governments, international insistence that the elections were legitimate helped the group to accept the new political order. President Chissano won reelection in 1999.

The 21st Century

Heavy rainfall in 2000-01 caused massive floods and the Zambezi and Limpopo rivers to overflow, killing hundreds and displacing some 500,000 from their homes. The floods damaged or destroyed much of the agricultural infrastructure, severely impacting the sector (see *Political and Social Relations*), and



exposed many landmines, putting local populations at risk of severe injury.

After President Chissano announced he would not seek another term, his FRELIMO successor, Armando Guebuza, won the 2004

presidential election by a wide margin. RENAMO's repeated electoral defeats led to political tensions, which further increased when the party again lost by wide margins in the 2009 election, which returned Guebuza to the Presidency.

Renewed Violence

In 2013, RENAMO boycotted local elections, causing underlying tensions to erupt into violence. Many RENAMO leaders retreated to rural bases in central Mozambique, where they organized armed guerilla units with new and former RENAMO fighters. The insurgents armed themselves and began conducting raids and attacking government forces and vehicles on highways close to the city of Beira, causing dozens of casualties. In late 2013, RENAMO formally abandoned the 1992 peace accord, though after several months, the group agreed to a ceasefire and pledged to participate in the 2014 presidential election. Yet once again, the FRELIMO candidate Filipe Nyusi

emerged victorious, and in response, RENAMO again rearmed and engaged government forces. As a result, the renewed conflict caused largescale migration to neighboring Malawi.

Disarmament and New Challenges

Violence continued to plague Mozambique for the next 5 years, due both to the ongoing FRELIMO-RENAMO conflict and the activities of extremist groups (see *Political and Social Relations*). Further, the country faced serious economic challenges. In 2016, the government announced that the Guebuza administration had illegally borrowed some \$2.2 billion, causing international donors to withdraw funding and negatively impacting Mozambique's credit (see *Economics and Resources*). Meanwhile, after another round of peace talks, the FRELIMO-led government and RENAMO signed a peace accord in August 2019. The government promised RENAMO leaders positions in the military and a certain level of decentralization for municipal governments (see *Political and Social Relations*).

In elections held later that year, President Nyusi won another 5-year term, and FRELIMO won a majority in the National Assembly. Likewise, FRELIMO won electoral majorities in every



region, retaining its unified control of the government (see *Political and Social Relations*) and doing little to calm tensions with RENAMO.

Meanwhile, the violent activities of extremist groups in the North have continued (see *Social and Political Relations*). ***Al-Shabaab*** (unrelated to the Somali extremist group of the same name and also known as ***Ansar al Sunnah*** or ***Al Sunnah wa Jama'ah***), has carried out an escalating series of attacks in the region. In recent years, *al-Shabaab* has exploited government weaknesses, and armed attacks have spread south into central Mozambique. *Al-Shabaab* and other insurgent groups also have

committed acts of violence and terror against civilians and the military in an attempt to control territory and depose the FRELIMO government. In early 2021, *al-Shabaab* briefly captured cities in northern Mozambique, displacing thousands and continuing to threaten the stability of the region. Although the clashes continued in 2022 and 2023, a resurgence of attacks, in 2024, have displaced an additional 100,000 residents.

Myth Overview

In contrast to history, which is supposed to be an objective record of the past based on verifiable facts, myths embody a culture's values and often explain the origins of humans and the natural world. Myths are important because they provide a sense of unique heritage and identity. Many Mozambican myths originate from traditional religious practices (see *Religion and Spirituality*), which often vary significantly between communities. Others detail the origins of peoples or places.

The Origins of the Makonde People: This ethnolinguistic group (see *Political and Social Relations*) traditionally inhabits the Mueda Plateau in northern Cabo Delgado Province (see *Political and Social Relations*). A renowned myth explains both their presence there and the importance of woodworking in their culture.



According to myth, a man lived lost and alone in a forest, often behaving like a wild animal. To end his solitude, the man carved the figure of a beautiful woman from a tree. One night, the figure transformed from wood into a real human.

The forest dweller and woman subsequently fell in love, then left the forest to live and raise a family at a nearby riverbank. However, the woman's first two children died during childbirth, compelling the couple to move to a high plateau to have their third child. This time, the child survived. The couple interpreted this sign to mean that their descendants, the Makonde, should always live on the high ground of the Mueda Plateau and should maintain their ancestors' woodworking traditions.

2. POLITICAL AND SOCIAL RELATIONS

Official Name

Republic of Mozambique

República de Moçambique (Portuguese)

Political Borders

Tanzania: 522 mi

Coastline: 1,535 mi

South Africa: 308 mi

Eswatini: 67 mi

Zimbabwe: 871 mi

Zambia: 273 mi

Malawi: 931 mi

Capital

Maputo



Demographics

Mozambique's population of about 33.35 million is growing at an annual rate of 2.54%. Some 39% of the population lives in urban areas, and population density is highest in the southern Maputo Province, along the Zambezi River, in the central cities of Beira and Chimoio, and in the northern Nampula and Cabo Delgado provinces. Both the Northwest and Southwest are sparsely populated.



Flag

Adopted in 1983, Mozambique's flag consists of three horizontal green, black, and yellow bands of equal width, with white

edges around the black band. On the hoist side, a red triangle features a yellow five-pointed star bearing an open book under a crossed rifle and hoe. Green represents Mozambique's rich land and agriculture, black the African continent, the white borders peace, yellow the country's minerals, and red the struggle for independence. The yellow star denotes Marxism, the open book expresses the importance of education, and the hoe and rifle signify agriculture and defense.

Geography

Mozambique occupies a large portion of Africa's southeastern coast along the Indian Ocean. Tanzania and Malawi lie to the north, Zambia and Zimbabwe to the west, and South Africa and Eswatini to the southwest. The northwestern border includes part of the Great Rift Valley, which some experts contend is the origin of humanity, as well as 5,000 sq. mi. of Lake Niassa (also known as Lake Nyasa and Lake Malawi), one of Africa's Great Lakes. Mozambique's total land area is about 303,623 sq. mi., slightly less than twice the size of California.

Mozambique is geographically diverse and features low coastal plains in the South and along the Indian Ocean, highlands in the North, and mountainous areas near its western and northern borders. Located on the border with Zimbabwe, Mount Binga is Mozambique's highest mountain, standing 7,992 ft. In the North, isolated granite mountains (*koppies*) dot the elevated plateaus.

Several rivers flow eastward from the mountains and empty into the Indian Ocean. Mozambique's longest and Africa's fourth-longest river, the Zambezi, bisects the country. Mozambique's largest lake, Cahora Bassa, was formed following the construction of a dam on the Zambezi in 1974. Other major rivers include the Ruvuma, which marks the border with Tanzania, and the Lúrio, Save, and Limpopo rivers, which define the boundaries between several provinces.



Climate

Mozambique experiences a two-season tropical climate with a damp, hot summer (October-April) and a dry, cooler winter (April-September). Summer temperatures average 71°-86°F and winter 52°-66°F. Inland mountainous regions are typically milder than the coastal plains. Northern regions have a hot and humid climate, with rainfall of over 39 in. per year. The wettest region is the highlands on the Malawi border, which experience nearly 78 in. of rain per year. Southern Mozambique tends to be drier, with some areas annually receiving less than 20 in. of rain.

Natural Hazards

Mozambique's location on the ocean and high levels of humidity make flash floods and cyclones common. Between 2000-01, heavy rains caused the Limpopo and Zambezi rivers to flood, killing hundreds of people and leaving thousands homeless.

Destructive cyclones typically occur between January-March. In 2019, the two most devastating cyclones in Mozambican history struck the northern and central coasts. In March, Cyclone Idai killed over 200 people, displaced more than 400,000, and destroyed up to 90% of the infrastructure in the central coastal city of Beira. Just 6 weeks later, Cyclone Kenneth struck the northern Cabo Delgado Province, destroying 95% of the homes in the city of Ibo and displacing thousands. In January 2021,



Cyclone Eloise hit central Mozambique, destroying thousands of homes and flooding Beira.

Environmental Issues

Climate change, industrial activities, and a fast-growing population significantly strain

Mozambique's natural environment. Air pollution is widespread, caused by the hydrocarbon (oil and gas), textile, aluminum, and cement industries (see *Economics and Resources*), vehicle emissions, and burning garbage.

In rural areas, intensive farming and reliance on wood fires for cooking, heating, and water purification cause deforestation. Pollution and resource misuse due to the fishing industry have degraded much of Mozambique's offshore environment. In the North, some mining operations illegally dump waste, damaging the environment and occasionally causing devastating floods.

Government

Mozambique is a presidential republic with a parliamentary government. The country divides into 10 provinces, each led by a directly elected governor, which further divide into cities or villages led by directly elected mayors. Adopted in 2004 and amended in 2007 and 2018, Mozambique's Constitution separates power among the executive, legislative, and judicial

branches, while outlining the basic rights and freedoms of Mozambican citizens.

Executive Branch

Executive power is vested in the President, who serves as both head-of-government and chief-of-state and is supported by a Council of Ministers and a Prime Minister. The President is elected by majority vote to serve up to two 5-year terms. If no candidate wins an outright majority, a runoff determines the winner. Current President Daniel Francisco Chapo and current PM Maria Benvinda Delfina Levi both took office in January 2025.



Legislative Branch

Mozambique's legislature is the single-chamber Assembly of the Republic, composed of 250 members serving 5-year terms. The members are elected through proportional representation, with two seats reserved for members representing Mozambicans living abroad. The Assembly controls most legislative power, including drafting and passing legislation, approving the state budget, and ratifying executive orders.

Judicial Branch

Mozambique's judicial system is based on a combination of Portuguese civil and customary law, though some rural and primarily Muslim communities also recognize Islamic (**sharia**) law. The Mozambican court system is comprised of a Supreme Court (**Tribunal Supremo**), Court of Appeals, Constitutional Council, Administrative Court, provincial courts, district courts, customs courts, community courts, and labor courts. As the highest court, the Supreme Court is the final court of appeal for both civil and criminal cases. The Assembly of the Republic and the President, in consultation with the Higher Council of the Judiciary – a 16-member body appointed by the President, Assembly, and peer judges – appoint the Supreme Court's seven judges. Among the judges selected are the Court's President and Vice President, all of whom serve 5-year

renewable terms. Although the Constitution guarantees an independent judiciary, international observers have accused judges of corruption. In addition, judges are often undertrained, further reducing judicial effectiveness.

Political Climate

Mozambique's political climate under President Nyusi has been marked by instability and increasing authoritarianism. President Nyusi's party, the former socialist and anti-colonialist **Frente de Libertação de Moçambique** (Mozambican Liberation Front – FRELIMO), has maintained a monopoly on state power since the country gained independence in 1975 (see *History and Myth*). While Mozambique has many registered political parties, only FRELIMO, the right-wing **Rêsistencia Nacional Moçambicana** (Mozambican National Resistance – RENAMO), and the center-right **Movimento Democrático de Moçambique** (Democratic Movement of Mozambique – MDM) parties hold seats in the legislature.

Since 1975, RENAMO has been the primary opposition to FRELIMO, and the two parties fought a violent civil war that ended only in 1992 (see *History and Myth*). MDM formed in 2009 as a breakaway party from RENAMO and first won legislative seats in 2013, when RENAMO members boycotted the election (see *History and Myth*). International observers note that political activity often is funded through illicit means, such as trafficking

and other black-market activities.



Marred by widespread violence, the 2019 elections resulted in FRELIMO winning some 75% of the presidential vote and

72% of the legislature, with 52% voter turnout. While FRELIMO attributed this victory to aggressive campaigning and citizen outreach efforts, opponents accused it of widespread voter suppression, ballot stuffing, and voter intimidation. As a result of the 2024 elections, the Mozambican legislature is comprised of all three major parties, with 171 FRELIMO, 43 PODEMOS, 28 RENAMO, and 8 other members.

Despite the constitutional guarantees of freedom of speech and expression, citizens' freedoms are limited. The government sometimes prevents residents from assembling for protests and demonstrations and restricts their access to information (see *Technology and Material*). In the North, governmental security forces occasionally engage in arbitrary arrest, torture, and executions related to the government's fight against extremist insurgent groups (see "Terrorism" below).

Defense

The Mozambican Armed Forces (MAF) are a unified military force consisting of ground, maritime, and air branches with a joint strength of 12,050 active-duty troops. While both men and women aged 18-35 can be conscripted for 2 years, selection criteria are rigorous, and registration is inconsistently enforced. The MAF are charged with maintaining territorial integrity, domestic stability, and fighting human trafficking and piracy. Although the government pledged to begin integrating former RENAMO fighters into the MAF as part of the 2019 peace accord (see *History and Myth*), progress has been minimal. Most of the MAF's arsenal is obsolete, and the government is unable to acquire many replacements due to the country's budget crisis (see *Economics and Resources*).



Army: The Mozambican Army consists of some 10,000 active-duty troops organized into 13 battalions (including infantry, special operation forces, engineer, and logistics) and 3 artillery batteries.

Navy: Comprised of 1,050 active-duty troops, the Navy is organized into one naval infantry battalion, which includes personnel, military information distribution, operations, logistics, doctrine, communications, finance, medical, naval, and naval engineering units.

Air Force: The Mozambican Air Force includes about 1,000 active-duty troops organized into 3 squadrons, including fighter/ground attack, transport, and attack helicopter.

Mozambique Air Force Rank Insignia



Colonel
General



Lieutenant
General



Major
General



Colonel



Lieutenant
Colonel



Major



Captain



Lieutenant



Second
Lieutenant



Sergeant
Major



First
Sergeant



Second
Sergeant



Third
Sergeant



Corporal



Private
First
Class

Security Issues

Regional Terrorism: In the northern Cabo Delgado Province, the Islamist extremist group **al-Shabaab** (see *History and Myth*) conducts frequent and brutal terrorist attacks against the local population, typically using simple weapons like machetes. Between October 2017-June 2023, *al-Shabaab* had killed 6,500 people. A surge in violence between December 2023 – March 2024 resulted in over 100,000 displacements, multiple civilian deaths, and abductions of youths.

Further, clashes between security forces and *al-Shabaab* militants have left over 700,000 civilians displaced as of July 2024. While *al-Shabaab's* leadership



and goals are unknown, it has expressed allegiance to the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS, also known as Daesh, ISIL, and IS), a terrorist group active in Iraq, Syria, and Afghanistan.

Internal Conflict: In central Mozambique, RENAMO-affiliated guerilla groups like the Military Junta, an insurgent group led by a former RENAMO official, commit vehicle ambushes that caused the deaths of some 30 people in 2019-20 (see *History and Myth*). Groups like the Military Junta rejected the 2019 peace accord (see *History and Myth*) and sought to overthrow FRELIMO and then-President Nyusi. While the Military Junta agreed to a ceasefire and negotiations to permanently end the attacks in late 2020, the last of its members did not surrender until late 2021.

Narcotics Trafficking: Mozambique has become a hub for traffickers moving illicit drugs and chemicals used in synthetic drug production into southern Africa. Mozambican forces receive international assistance in combatting trafficking, although widespread government corruption, insufficient domestic resources, porous land borders, and large swaths of ungarded coastline have hindered progress.

Foreign Relations

Mozambique strives to cultivate positive relations primarily with countries in southern and eastern Africa, notably Malawi, South Africa, Tanzania, Zambia, and Zimbabwe. Mozambique's foreign policy goals center on maintaining regional stability and seeking partners to aid in social and economic development.



In addition, large natural gas reserves and a rich mining industry in Mozambique's northern provinces make it an attractive trade partner for countries such as the US, Russia, and China. The US, Switzerland, the European Union (EU), Botswana, China, the

United Kingdom, and Norway have mediated disputes between FRELIMO and RENAMO, and maintain friendly relations with the Mozambican government.

Mozambique is a member of international peace and economic organizations such as the United Nations, International Monetary Fund, World Bank, World Trade Organization, and the Commonwealth of Portuguese Language Countries.

Relations with Portugal: After Mozambique gained independence from Portugal in 1975 (see *History and Myth*), the two countries quickly established diplomatic ties. Today, they are loyal allies, with Mozambique the site of significant Portuguese investment, and Portugal providing a gateway to the lucrative EU market. In 2019, then-President Nyusi reaffirmed his commitment to Portugal as an ally, emphasizing the importance of maintaining business, political, and economic ties.

Relations with South Africa: Ties between Mozambique and South Africa became strained during the civil war, due to South Africa's support of RENAMO (see *History and Myth*). The two countries reestablished and have maintained positive interactions in the late 20th century. South Africa has supported Mozambican anti-piracy efforts and, in 2020, South African forces began assisting Mozambican counter-terrorism efforts in

Cabo Delgado Province. Mozambique and South Africa also share significant economic ties, primarily due to Mozambicans working in South Africa and the Mozambique-South Africa Gas Pipeline (see *Economics and Resources*).

Relations with Russia: Mozambique has maintained military and economic ties with Russia since the 20th century, when the then-USSR (Soviet Union) provided military and diplomatic aid to FRELIMO during the war for independence (see *History and Myth*). Today, Mozambique receives Russian arms and military aid. In 2019, Russia deployed military officials to northern Mozambique to support the fight against extremists in Cabo Delgado Province. Russia and Mozambique also share significant trade ties. While a Russian state-owned bank was implicated in the 2016 Mozambican budget crisis for issuing Mozambique fraudulent loans (see *History and Myth*), prosecutors did not charge any Russian nationals in the scandal.

Relations with China: China and Mozambique share significant diplomatic, military, and economic ties. China has supplied Mozambique with weapons since the 1970s, when it armed FRELIMO, and between 2000-18, Mozambique sourced some 90% of its arms imports from China. Further, China sponsors largescale development projects, and Chinese companies account for a large part of Mozambique's modern construction industry (see *Economics and Resources*). One of the largest Chinese-operated companies in Mozambique, the Haiyu Mozambique Mining Co. mines heavy sand minerals such as ilmenite, titanium, and zircon in the northern Nampula Province.



Some observers have accused Chinese companies operating in Mozambique of committing human rights violations. For example, environmental degradation caused by the Haiyu Mozambique Mining Co. contributed to heavy flooding in 2015 that left hundreds homeless. The Mozambican government has

allowed these and other harmful practices to continue, prompting international observers to accuse the government of prioritizing economic gain over citizens' rights and well-being.

Relations with the US: The US and Mozambique established diplomatic relations in 1975. Since 1984, the US has provided aid toward improving economic growth, poverty reduction, food security, public health, education, and government transparency. In 2023, the US provided Mozambique over \$664 million in assistance. The US also provides funding and other assistance to help the Mozambican government counter regional extremist forces and drug trafficking. Further, the US has provided humanitarian aid and economic assistance in the



wake of natural disasters, most recently sending aid workers to rebuild after cyclones Idai and Kenneth.

Due to its rich natural gas reserves (see *Technology and Material*), US oil

companies are some of the largest private investors in Mozambique.

Ethnic Groups

While some 99% of residents identify broadly as African or Mozambican, other residents also identify with a particular ethnolinguistic group. Broadly, the Zambezi River Valley marks a division between northern and southern groups. Although groups within each region have distinct characteristics, they tend to share broad cultural similarities and ancestries. For example, groups residing north of the Zambezi are traditionally matrilineal, whereby inheritance, property, and the family name pass from mother to daughter. By contrast, southern groups are primarily patrilineal (pass from father to son), though some northern groups adopted a patrilineal social structure under Portuguese rule (see *History and Myth*). Many of these groups have their own languages, though most belong to the Bantu language

family and a few are mutually intelligible (see *Language and Communication*).

Comprising over 30% of the population and traditionally residing in the Northeast, Mozambique's largest ethnolinguistic groups are the Makua and Lomwe, who speak Bantu languages of the same name. Other notable northern groups include the Makonde and Yao, who traditionally live near the Tanzanian and Malawian borders.



In the Northwest, the Sena and Nyanja (also known as Chewa) traditionally congregate near the Zambezi River and along the borders with Malawi, Zambia, and Zimbabwe.

The largest southern group, the Tsonga (or Shangaan), comprise some 23% of Mozambique's population and mainly reside south of the Save River. Tsonga speak a southern Bantu



language of the same name, and many also live in South Africa. Other notable southern ethnolinguistic groups include Karanga, Chopi, and Tonga, and are mostly farming communities. In central Mozambique, the Ndau and Shona comprise a

large segment of the local population and share links with other related groups living in Zimbabwe.

Mozambique's once-large European (primarily Portuguese) population reduced significantly following independence (see *History and Myth*). Today, less than 1% of the population identifies as **mestiço** (people of mixed heritage), European, or Asian.

Social Relations

Mozambique has significant economic inequality, with deep social divides that are particularly evident in urban areas (see *Economics and Resources*). In cities, Mozambican society tends to divide along male-female and rich-poor lines. Generally, males and the wealthy hold the most social prestige and have greater access to educational opportunities. In rural areas, wealth is often measured by agricultural resources such as land or cattle rather than monetary capital. Despite the geographic and ethnolinguistic division of various groups, most Mozambicans coexist peacefully.



Social divisions also occur along racial and ethnic lines and are still in part a product of the colonial era (see *History and Myth*), when society divided into two main classes: **indígenas** (“indigenous,” or Mozambique’s native population) and **não indígenas** (“non-indigenous,” a category that included colonizers and settlers of mainly European descent). Considered the superior class, **não indígenas** held full citizenship and controlled the country’s economic resources,



while the native population had few rights and were often subjected to forced labor (see *History and Myth*). Further, **assimilados** (“the assimilated,” *mestiço* or black Mozambicans, who had adopted enough European customs and traits to be considered as having

surpassed the *indígena* status), were an intermediate group that received some of the societal benefits of *não indígenas*. While the FRELIMO government abolished this social structure after independence, remnants of it are still evident in Mozambican society today, with white and *mestiço* citizens tending to have greater wealth and social opportunities than other citizens.

3. RELIGION AND SPIRITUALITY

Overview

According to 2020 estimates, some 62% of Mozambicans are Christian, 19% Muslim, and 5% Jewish, Hindu, or Baha'i. The remaining respondents either claimed no religion or did not list an affiliation. Some Muslim leaders reject the census data, reporting the Muslim proportion of the population at 25-30%. In addition, some Mozambicans combine aspects of traditional beliefs with Christianity or Islam.

The Constitution proclaims Mozambique a secular state, recognizes freedom of religion, and stipulates that religious practices cannot deprive citizens of their rights. The law forbids religious instruction in public schools but permits private religious schools (see *Learning and Knowledge*). Religious groups must register with the government to receive certain privileges such as opening bank accounts. Mozambican political parties cannot use names or symbols based on religion.



Traditional Beliefs

The region's early inhabitants led rich spiritual lives, characterized by the veneration of deities and spirits. Residents attributed human-like characteristics to divine entities that constructed the universe, created the earth and humans, and influenced daily life. Some Mozambicans today prescribe to traditional religious beliefs. While practices vary among groups (see *Political and Social Relations*), most followers of traditional religions recognize ancestral spirits, who created many things on earth and whose wills manifest in natural events. For example, the Yao people traditionally believe that a Supreme Being sends mist to protect their crops. Other groups, including the Tsonga, Shona, and Venda, hold similar beliefs.

Traditional beliefs usually incorporate reverence for ancestors, who hold divine power and influence daily life. **Profetas** (spirit mediums) perform libations (a practice in which liquid or millet flour is poured on the ground as an offering) and other rituals to honor ancestors. Individual and collective prayers to ancestors are common during significant community events. Traditionally, spiritual leaders led religious rituals for new **régulos** (clan chiefs)



and during other ceremonies and rites of passage (see *Family and Kinship*).

Some traditional healers (see *Sustenance and Health*) use ancestral, theological, or animal spirit energy to better

understand and cure the underlying spiritual causes of a person's illness. To cure sickness, which some believe is caused by not honoring ancestral spirits, the healers use traditional spiritual healing techniques and local plants, sometimes alongside modern medical practices (see *Sustenance and Health*).

Witchcraft: Despite opposition by the authorities, belief in witchcraft and the powers of evil spirits continues to be widespread in some regions. Alleged witches, usually the elderly and often women, are sometimes killed by their supposed victims. In recent years, albinos and bald men have been killed for their body parts, which **feiticeiros** (traditional healer) reportedly use in rituals to bring good fortune. While Mozambicans throughout society hold these beliefs and practices, some observers suggest high levels of poverty and unemployment contribute to them.

Islam

Origins of Islam

Muhammad, who Muslims consider God's final Prophet, was born in Mecca in 570 in what is today Saudi Arabia. Muslims believe that while Muhammad was meditating in the desert, the Archangel Gabriel visited him over a 23-year period, revealing

the Qur'an, or "Holy Book," to guide their everyday lives and shape their values.

Meaning of Islam

Islam is a way of life to its adherents. The term Islam literally means submission to the will of God, and a Muslim is "a person who submits to God."

Muslim Sects

Islam is divided into two sects: Sunni and Shi'a. Sunnis are distinguished by their belief that the leader (**Caliph**) of the Muslim community (**Ummah**) should be elected. Conversely, Shi'a Muslims believe the religious leader should be a direct descendant of the Prophet Muhammad.

Five Pillars of Islam

There are five basic principles of the Islamic faith.

- **Profession of Faith (*Shahada*):** "There is no god but God, and Muhammad is His Messenger."
- **Prayer (*Salat*):** Pray five times a day while facing the Ka'aba (pictured) in Mecca, Saudi Arabia. The Ka'aba is considered the center of the Muslim world and a unifying focal point for Islamic worship.
- **Charity (*Zakat*):** Donate a percentage of one's income to the poor or needy.
- **Fasting (*Sawm*):** Abstain from food, drink, and sexual relations from sunrise to sunset during the holy month of Ramadan.
- **Pilgrimage to Mecca (*The Hajj*):** Perform the pilgrimage to Mecca, Saudi Arabia once in a lifetime.



Shared Perspectives

Many Islamic tenets parallel those of Judaism and Christianity. In fact, Muslims consider Christians and Jews "people of the

Book,” referring to biblical scriptures, because they also believe in one God.

Abraham: All three faiths trace their lineage to Abraham, known as *Ibrahim* in Islam. However, Christians and Jews trace their descent to Abraham, his wife Sarah, and their son Isaac; while Muslims trace theirs to Abraham and his Egyptian concubine, Hagar, and their son Ishmael.

Scriptures: Much of the content of the Qur'an is similar to teachings and stories found in the Christian Bible's Old and New Testaments, and Muslims view Islam as a completion of previous revelations to Jewish and Christian prophets.



However, Muslims believe Jews and Christians altered God's word and that Muhammad received the true revelation of God.

Jesus: The three religions differ significantly in their

understanding of the role of Jesus. While Christians consider him the divine Messiah who fulfills Jewish Scriptures, Jews are still waiting for the Messiah to come. Muslims recognize Jesus as a prophet but do not acknowledge his divinity or the Christian Trinity.

View of Death: Muslims believe that God determines the time of death and birth. While people grieve the loss of family members or friends, they do not view death as a negative event, as Muslims believe that a person who lived a good life goes on to live in Heaven.

Concept of Jihad

The concept of jihad, or inner striving, is a fundamental element within Islam. Traditionally, it is the principled and moral pursuit of God's command to lead a virtuous life. It should not be confused with the publicized violence often associated with jihad. Most Muslims are strongly opposed to terrorism and consider it contrary to Islamic beliefs.

Ramadan

Observed during the ninth month of the Islamic lunar calendar (see *Time and Space*), Ramadan is a month-long time for inner reflection, self-control, and focus on God. During this time, Muslims who are physically able fast from dawn to sunset. Many Muslims believe that denying their hunger helps them to learn self-control, appreciate the difficulties of the poor, and gain spiritual renewal – by fasting, a Muslim learns to appreciate the good in life. Muslims typically break their daily fast at sunset with a meal known as *iftar*. Ramadan includes several holidays:

- **Lailat al-Qadr:** This “Night of Power” marks Muhammad’s receipt of the first verses of the Qur’an.
- **Eid al-Fitr:** This “Festival of Fast-Breaking” celebrates Ramadan’s end.

Another important holiday is celebrated when the Hajj ends, about 70 days following the end of Ramadan.

- **Eid al-Adha:** This “Festival of Sacrifice” commemorates Abraham’s willingness to sacrifice his son, Ishmael (or Isaac, according to Christians), as proof of his loyalty to God.

The Arrival and Spread of Islam in Mozambique

Following Muhammad’s 632 death, his followers endeavored to spread the teachings of Islam beyond the Arabian Peninsula. Muslim Arab merchants began arriving in the region around 700 (see *History and Myth*). In subsequent centuries, Muslim leaders and healers known as



walimu helped spread the new religion partially by opening Qur’anic schools (see *Learning and Knowledge*).

Over time, some residents adapted Islamic religious practices to traditional customs and beliefs. Others converted to Islam to enhance their educational and economic opportunities. By the

20th century, Mozambique was home to several mosques and Islamic schools, primarily in the North (see *Learning and Knowledge*).

Sufi Tradition: Some Mozambicans follow the Sufi tradition of Islam, characterized by mysticism and ritualistic prayer. In the past, Islamic teachers believed to hold **baraka**, or special spiritual powers, were venerated as healers and saints. In the early 20th century, Sufism became particularly influential on Mozambique Island, where two prominent **turuq** (Sufi Orders), the Shadhiliyya and the Qadiriyya, flourished. Several Sufi scholars emerged from these communities and spread the Qadiriyya teachings elsewhere in Mozambique and to nearby countries.



Christianity

Shortly after Portuguese explorers arrived in 1498 (see *History and Myth*), the Portuguese Catholic Church began sending Dominican and Jesuit missionaries to Mozambique. However,

the Portuguese colonial administrators were focused more on commercial opportunity than religious conversion. Further, they often supported traditional religious rituals as a means of colonization, for example, by participating in succession rituals to promote their preferred *régulos* to positions of power. The first Mozambican converts to Christianity lived in Beira and on Mozambique Island.

Following the 1612 creation of the independent Catholic dioceses for Mozambique, the missionaries expanded their efforts. The Dominicans moved into the interior and the Jesuits along the Zambezi River Valley. Some missionaries participated in the transatlantic and



local slave trades (see *History and Myth*), assigning enslaved Mozambicans Christian names and forcibly baptizing them before they were sold.

Following turmoil within the Catholic Church, Portugal expelled all Jesuit missionaries from Mozambique in 1759. In subsequent years, the Catholic Church's influence began to decline. In the late 19th century, Protestant denominations from Europe and



South Africa arrived, founding schools and gaining converts (see *Learning and Knowledge*).

These Protestant churches were especially popular because they allowed the incorporation of traditional religious practices in worship and Mozambicans to

become congregational leaders. By the 20th century, Catholics and Protestants were opening schools across the country, enabling more Mozambicans to obtain a basic education and further entrenching Christianity in Mozambique.

Religion in the late 20th Century

During the mid-1960s struggle for independence (see *History and Myth*), the socialist, anti-colonial **Frente de Libertação de Moçambique** (Mozambican Liberation Front –FRELIMO) allowed religious freedom and assembly in areas under its control. Then, in the

1970s, FRELIMO adopted an anti-religion stance, nationalized many churches and mosques, outlawed public prayer, and disavowed traditional religious practices.



Further, FRELIMO confined many Christian leaders to reeducation camps, accusing them of pro-colonialist beliefs or collaboration with foreign intelligence agencies. FRELIMO also prohibited Muslims from attending Islamic schools and

celebrating Ramadan, while persecuting other religious groups such as Jehovah's Witnesses.

Amid the violence of the civil war (see *History and Myth*), many Mozambicans became members of the Christian Pentecostal Church, which offered war victims food, medical assistance, and counseling. Other Mozambicans returned to traditional religious practices, and some *profetas* established so-called peace zones to protect residents from violence.

Concerned that their anti-religious stance was costing them supporters, FRELIMO leaders began to change their policies in the 1980s. In 1985, President Samora Machel met with Pope John Paul II (the leader of the Roman Catholic Church in Rome, Italy), which resulted in the return of nationalized Church property. In 1992, Catholic leaders in Rome sponsored the peace accord that resulted in the formal end of the civil war. Subsequently, the government returned ownership of some churches and mosques to private religious organizations.



Religion Today

Today, small, often informal Protestant churches are Mozambique's fastest-growing religious institutions. Relations between religious groups are generally peaceful, and in 2019, Mozambican interfaith leaders welcomed Pope Francis to the country to discuss interreligious peacebuilding.

In response to recent Islamist extremists' terrorist attacks in northern Mozambique (see p. 8 of *Political and Social Relations*), the government has restricted the religious freedoms of certain Muslim residents. For example, the government has unlawfully arrested or detained individuals wearing traditional Islamic clothing.

Christianity

Some 27% of Mozambicans are Roman Catholic and about 35% Protestant. Among Protestants, some 16% belong to the Zion Christian Church (ZCC), while another 15% follow various

evangelical and Pentecostal denominations, and fewer than 2% of Mozambicans belong to the Anglican Church. Christians live throughout Mozambique but tend to concentrate in urban areas.

ZCC: Established in 1910 in South Africa, the ZCC emphasizes religious healing through faith, purification rites, prophesying, dancing, and night communion. Since arriving in Mozambique in the 1940s, the ZCC is now the country's most popular Protestant denomination.

Christian Council of Mozambique:

Formed in 1948 as a Protestant alliance among Methodist, Anglican, Presbyterian, and several other denominations, the Christian Council of Mozambique was particularly active during the civil war (see *History and Myth*). The Council aided refugees, managed relief services, and established a Peace and Reconciliation Commission in 1984. Following the war, the Council led a campaign called "Weapons for Spades," which allowed former combatants to trade weapons for farming equipment. Since the 1992 peace accord, the Council has facilitated local ceasefires, reconciliation initiatives, and reintegration programs.



Islam

Most Muslims live in northern Mozambique between the Lúrio and Rovuma Rivers. They are primarily Sunni and typically follow a generally tolerant school of thought that teaches the primacy of the Qur'an over later teachings and stresses the importance of community consensus. Nevertheless, many Mozambican Muslims tend to identify more with their local religious leader or sect than any particular variant of Islam.

4. FAMILY AND KINSHIP

Overview

Family is the foundation of Mozambican society, with members relying on each other for emotional, economic, and social support. Traditional beliefs and ceremonies remain a large part of Mozambican family life.

Residence

While Mozambique has experienced some urbanization in the 20th and 21st centuries, about 61% of the population still resides in rural areas. The country's infrastructure remains underdeveloped (see *Technology and Material*), with just 36% of the population living in dwellings connected to the electric grid. Law permits only the government to own land, which Mozambicans can lease for up to 50 years. Land leases are renewable and inheritable, and residents can buy and sell buildings and infrastructure on the land.



Urban: In urban areas, housing conditions tend to vary significantly by income level, with upper-class Mozambicans often residing in luxurious apartment buildings or single-family homes in suburban neighborhoods. By contrast, middle- and low-income families typically occupy apartment buildings made from materials such as cinderblock. These buildings usually feature a living room, kitchen, and bathroom. Many of the poorest urban Mozambicans lack adequate shelter, often living in makeshift homes of scrap wood and corrugated sheet metal.

Rural: Rural Mozambicans typically live on ancestral or inherited land, where families tend to share homes. Plots are often located by rivers and feature a large yard and space for farming and livestock. Housing materials usually depend on locally available materials such as mud, clay, bamboo, palm fronds, and wooden beams. Many homes do not have running water, so some families use curved metal roofs to collect rainwater for drinking, cooking, and hygiene.

Family Structure

Households typically include extended family members, with other relatives living nearby. Relatives frequently spend time together over meals, help to raise children, and farm or work the land in rural areas. Adult children often live with and care for their parents as they age and tend to place great emphasis on respecting elders, who are considered pillars of the family and living links to ancestors (see *Religion and Spirituality*). In most Mozambican families, the father is the head of household and primary breadwinner, while the mother is responsible for all domestic work and childcare. Some northern groups are matrilineal, whereby the mother has increased authority and inheritance, property, and the family name pass from mother to daughter (see *Sex and Gender* and *Political and Social Relations*).

Polygyny: This term refers to the practice of a man having multiple wives simultaneously. In accordance with Islamic law, Muslim men may have up to four wives if they can treat them all equally. Due to the immense social stigma against being childless, polygyny has been historically acceptable and sometimes encouraged if a man's first wife is unable to have children. Although the practice is illegal today, it still occurs in some rural areas, with secondary marriages performed in unofficial ceremonies.



Children

On average, Mozambican families have about 4-5 children. While some urban children choose to live independently after marrying, most continue to live with relatives or their spouse's family. Urban families historically socialized children by gender, teaching girls homemaking and boys work ethics. Today, this division is less prevalent, and all urban children typically assist with housework. In many rural groups, parents begin preparing their children for marriage at a young age. Girls typically learn cooking, homemaking, childcare, and storytelling, while boys learn herding, hunting, warfare games, and traditional trades.

Children living in poverty face hardships such as malnutrition, restricted access to education, child abuse, and exploitation. Although the legal working age is 16, some 16% of children aged 5-14 had jobs in 2023. Child trafficking occurs in some urban areas, as smugglers from neighboring countries seek young victims for forced labor or prostitution (see *Sex and Gender*).

Birth: Due to Mozambique's high infant mortality rate (see *Sustenance and Health*), babies are often kept isolated for 30 days after birth. Following this period, families typically hold a party with relatives and friends. Many Mozambicans practice rituals to ensure a baby's success in life. In the North, some parents place a piece of gold in a baby's bath water, which they hope will bring him riches. In central and southern Mozambique, some groups tie a button on a string around a baby's wrist, hoping to prevent vision problems.



Among Muslims (see *Religion and Spirituality*), the father typically whispers the **adhan** (call to prayer) into his baby's right ear and the profession of faith in the left ear immediately following birth. Among Christians, babies are often baptized within a few weeks of birth.

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Names: Some Mozambicans rename a baby who frequently cries to bring him relief. A **n'anga** (traditional healer – see *Sustenance and Health*) typically asks the family's ancestors to choose a new name, a ritual believed to soothe the baby. While some family members may continue to call the baby by his original name, older relatives usually use the new name. Many Mozambicans are named after Portuguese Catholic saints (see *Language and Communication*).

Rites of Passage

Some Mozambicans, particularly in rural communities, engage in elaborate rituals marking children's passage into puberty. Among some northern groups such as the Makonde, girls aged

10-12 participate in a rite known as ***cipitu***, in which a village elder woman teaches the girls the importance of hard work, obedience, and how to be good mothers and wives. After this initiation, the girls are daubed with oils and dressed in new clothes to represent their passage into womanhood. In some areas, primarily in northwestern Mozambique, adolescent girls undergo a procedure to lengthen their labia, which is intended to increase sexual pleasure. Several other rites of passage involve



ceremonies that link children with ancestral spirits, who reportedly guide them into adulthood.

Circumcision: In many communities, circumcision is the final indication of a boy reaching adulthood.

Among some northern groups, elder men teach boys aged 10-16 about hard work, respect, discipline, and endurance in a rite known as ***jando***. With encouragement from male family members, the boys dress in traditional ceremonial attire (see *Aesthetics and Recreation*) and go to the countryside to perform various rituals before undergoing a circumcision ceremony. While some southern groups, such as the Tsonga, traditionally perform similar circumcision rites, others such as the Chewa, Sena, and Nguni do not.

Weddings: Marriage is generally a joyous event celebrated by the entire community, and specific practices vary by group. Although the law recognizes civil and religious marriages, a government representative must witness the ceremony to legalize the marriage. Traditional Mozambican marriage ceremonies are held at the bride's home, where gifting of ***lobolo*** (or ***lobola***, so-called bridewealth) is followed by feasting, singing, and dancing. Traditional ceremonies are not legally binding, and if the couple chooses, they may later hold a civil or religious ceremony to establish the marriage under the law. Some couples in rural areas, often in the South, forego government-recognized ceremonies, seeing little value in a legal union.

Among Christians, wedding festivities often include a religious church ceremony, followed by a reception at a hotel or banquet hall, where guests feast and dance. Muslim weddings typically include a small event at the bride's home or a mosque, where the couple signs a ***nikah*** (official marriage contract), followed by a large celebration.

Bridewealth: In some rural communities, payment of *lobolo* (often money, clothing, jewelry, alcohol, or livestock) to the bride's family consummates the marriage. While most of the *lobolo* typically goes to the bride's father, some also include gifts for other family members. Many couples delay their weddings until the groom can afford the *lobolo*.

Divorce

While divorce rates are largely unknown, according to a 2022 estimate, Mozambique's crude divorce rate was less than 1 per 1,000 marriages. Men and women have equal rights to divorce, and some women use the threat of initiating divorce to prevent their husbands from taking another wife.

Death

In rural areas, some groups believe that death, regardless of manner, is caused by malevolent spirits or witchcraft (see *Religion and Spirituality*). Mozambicans typically plan funerals with their entire community, though traditions vary by group. Among the Makua people, a village elder usually gives a black chicken to the spouse of the deceased as a condolence gift. Christian funeral services are typically held in a church and feature prayers, hymns, and incense, followed by burial in a cemetery.



In accordance with Islamic tradition, Muslims bury their loved ones as soon as possible after death, usually within 24 hours. The deceased is bathed, dried, and wrapped in a shroud or clean white cloth. Relatives then transport the deceased to a mosque, where family members and friends visit to pay their respects, while a cleric reads from the Qur'an (see *Religion and Spirituality*) and leads prayers before the burial.

5. SEX AND GENDER

Overview

The Mozambican social system is primarily patriarchal, meaning men hold most power and authority, although women in some northern groups have more influence over daily matters (see *Political and Social Relations*). The government has instituted some measures to promote gender equality by expanding women's legal rights and access to employment. In a 2024 study, Mozambique ranked 27 of 146 countries in gender equality, higher than the US rank of 43. It scored especially well in health outcomes and political empowerment. Even so, women still experience significant obstacles to attaining equality.



Gender Roles and Work

Domestic Work: While women traditionally hold responsibility for household chores such as cooking, cleaning, and caring for

children and elders, many also work outside the home. Rural women often perform additional tasks like collecting water and firewood. Women also typically manage the household budget, and in some northern rural groups, the family property.

Labor Force: In 2024, some 78% of Mozambican women worked outside the home, similar to Tanzania (77%), and higher than the US (57%), Zimbabwe (60%), and South Africa (53%). As few women possess post-secondary degrees (see *Learning and Knowledge*), they primarily occupy jobs that require physical labor and about 79% of women are employed in Mozambique's agricultural workforce (see *Economics and Resources*). Mozambican law does not require equal pay, and on average, women make just over half of men's wages for similar work. Further, women's work is sometimes unpaid.

Gender and the Law

While Mozambique's constitution guarantees gender equality in land rights, inheritance, assets, and citizenship, women continue to face unequal treatment under the law, particularly in rural

areas. Customary laws (unofficial laws that govern some rural groups) often take precedence over federal law, and some customary laws are discriminatory and reduce women's status in society. In communities that follow customary laws, authorities rarely intervene to reinforce the constitution. For example, some customary laws prohibit women from inheriting land even though the constitution guarantees equal property and land ownership rights between spouses. Further, while a woman may legally register her child's birth, custom requires the father's presence. For this reason, some rural women have trouble obtaining citizenship for their children.

Gender and Politics

Women first gained the right to vote after Mozambique won its independence in 1975 (see *History and Myth*), and they have since been active in politics. In the country's first free election in 1994, women were elected to some 24% of the seats in the Assembly of the Republic (see *Political and Social Relations*). As of mid-2025, Mozambique's parliament is one of the world's most gender-diverse, comprised of 39% women, a higher rate than the US (28%), as well as neighboring Malawi (21%), Zimbabwe (33%), and Zambia (15%).



Gender-Based Violence (GBV)

GBV is prevalent in Mozambique. Although the law criminalizes most forms of GBV, such as rape (including spousal rape), domestic violence, and child marriage, these practices remain common, and perpetrators are rarely prosecuted. Historically, domestic violence against women was considered normal, and sometimes encouraged as a way of maintaining male dominance over women. Today, these beliefs are less widespread, but domestic violence remains an issue.

Although Mozambique officially outlawed child marriage in 2019, the practice remains common. Many underage couples wed in unofficial traditional ceremonies (see *Family and Kinship*) to avoid legal violations. In some rural groups, women are

expected to marry when they reach puberty, often in their early teens, though husbands are typically several years older. As of 2023, 41% of Mozambican girls were married before age 18.

In urban areas, and particularly along Mozambique's borders with Eswatini and South Africa, trafficking and forced prostitution



of young girls sometimes occurs. Some traffickers lure girls and women into prostitution under the guise of offering them education or jobs, while others target girls in bars, nightclubs, or restaurants.

Sex and Procreation

Between 1960-2024, Mozambique's fertility rate decreased moderately from 6.4 births per woman to 4.7, higher than Eswatini (2.4), known in English as Swaziland, South Africa (2.3), Malawi (3.2), and Tanzania (4.3). Many young

women and girls have children, especially in rural areas. Mozambique's adolescent birth rate is 153 births per 1,000 women, over 10 times the US rate (13). Mozambique's abortion law is one of Africa's least restrictive. Abortion is legal during the first 12 weeks of pregnancy, and later in the case of a birth or pregnancy from rape or incest.

Homosexuality in Mozambique

While homosexual acts were decriminalized in 2015, same-sex marriage remains illegal. Although homosexual couples cannot legally adopt children and face social stigmas, Mozambicans are some of Africa's most tolerant of homosexuality. A 2020 survey reported that about 51% of Mozambicans are tolerant of same-sex relationships and homosexual couples. However, the government has not supported homosexual rights consistently, and repeatedly ignores the ***Associação Moçambicana para a Defesa das Minorias Sexuais*** (LAMBDA, or Mozambican Association for the Protection of Sexual Minorities) requests for official recognition as a non-governmental organization. At this time, the US State Department does not have a Status of Forces Agreement in place for Mozambique. Service members will be subject to local laws with regards to this topic.

6. LANGUAGE AND COMMUNICATION

Language Overview

Mozambique is home to over 40 indigenous languages, though none of them is spoken as a first language by a majority of the population. Portuguese became the official language after independence in 1975 (see *History and Myth*) and serves as a *lingua franca* for some, though it is most commonly spoken in urban areas and in business.



Bantu Languages

Most Mozambicans speak languages that belong to the Bantu branch of the Niger-Congo language family. These Bantu languages typically include several dialects that had no written form until recently. Most ethnolinguistic groups (see *Political and Social Relations*) speak Bantu languages specific to their ethnic identity, and the most widely spoken are Makua, Tsonga, Lomwe, and Sena.

Makua: Makua is Mozambique's most widely spoken Bantu language, with some 3.96 million speakers primarily in the northeastern Nampula Province. Notable dialects of Makua include Makua-Meetto (with 1.2 million speakers), Makua-Shirima (729,000), Makua-Marrevone (438,000), Makua-Saka (432,000), and Makua-Moniga (440,000). Several radio and television stations offer Makua-language programming (see *Technology and Material*).

Tsonga: It is the second most common Bantu language, spoken by some 4.2 million Mozambicans primarily in the southern Maputo, Gaza, and Inhambane provinces. Radio and television programming in Tsonga are available in these areas.

Lomwe and Sena: In many parts of central and northwestern Mozambique, Lomwe and Sena are the predominant languages. About 2.5 million Mozambicans speak Lomwe, which is similar to Makua, and some 2 million speak Sena.

Portuguese

Colonists introduced this language in the early 16th century (see *History and Myth*), and as of 2022, about 26% of Mozambicans speak Portuguese as a second language, while only 16% speak it as their first. Consequently, only 10% of Mozambican children can speak Portuguese when they start school, which has led to the development of bilingual schools in recent years (see *Learning and Knowledge*). Since many Mozambicans do not speak Portuguese, some politicians and businesspeople have



advocated changing the official language to English or Swahili to facilitate trade and business.

Other Languages

Mozambique is also home to many less prevalent Bantu languages and dialects, including Chopi, Tswa,

Chuwabu, Nyanja, and Ndaou, among others. Around 617,000 Mozambicans speak Ronga, primarily in and around the capital, Maputo. Some Mozambicans along the northern coast and near the border with Tanzania speak Swahili or related languages, which originated from cultural exchanges between Arabic and Bantu speakers (see *History and Myth*) in coastal East Africa. Much smaller numbers of residents speak Korean, Chinese, Greek, Russian, or German.

English: Few Mozambicans speak English, although some businesspeople, tourism sector workers, and residents with higher education have some knowledge of the language.

Communication Overview

Communicating competently in Mozambique not only requires knowledge of Portuguese or a Bantu language, but also the ability to interact effectively using language. This broad notion of competence includes paralanguage (rate of speech, volume, intonation), nonverbal communication (personal space, touch, gestures), and interaction management (conversation initiation, turn-taking, and termination). When used properly, these forms of communication help to ensure that statements are interpreted as the speaker intends.

Communication Style

Mozambicans' communication style underscores their respect for social hierarchies and regard for tradition and hospitality, as they tend to value formal greetings and acknowledge everyone's presence in business or social settings, especially in rural areas. Respect for elders and building trust are important components of Mozambicans' communication style. To convey respect and deference while speaking with elders, youths often avoid direct eye contact and sit, as standing is considered rude. Further, to convey respect, some Mozambicans only address the oldest male in a group or household, particularly while visiting relatives or neighbors and in rural areas. Among friends and family, Mozambicans often make jokes or make fun at others.

The emphasis Mozambicans place on politeness is evident in a widely held preference for indirect or non-specific answers. To avoid causing others embarrassment, some Mozambicans respond "yes" to a request if they think the speaker would be disappointed by "no." However, this "yes" answer is not necessarily a promise of action. Similarly, foreign nationals should not interpret a noncommittal answer to a request as neutral. Instead, such an answer might actually be negative.

Greetings

Mozambicans typically are respectful when extending greetings, which are critical to making a good first impression. In formal settings, Mozambicans typically shake hands, sometimes supporting the right elbow with the left hand to signify admiration (see *Time and Space*). Some Mozambican women prefer to exchange cheek kisses to greet friends and colleagues of both genders, while men typically shake hands or nod their heads. Sometimes Mozambicans complement a typical handshake by linking fingers followed by another handshake.



Verbal greetings often vary by ethnolinguistic group (see *Political and Social Relations*) and location. For example, in the

North, Nyanja typically greet each other by clapping three times and saying “**Moni**” (hello). When visiting family or friends, some Mozambicans in the North say “**Odi! Odi!**” (May I come in?) at the entrance of the home or locale, to which the occupants respond “**Héé!**” In the South, Mozambicans respond “**Hoyo! Hoyo!**” to welcome the guests. In cities, greetings are often short or consist of only a wave. Many younger Mozambicans say

hello and goodbye with a simple “thumbs up.”

Upon entering a room, shop, or public space, some Mozambicans say **bom dia** (“good morning”), **boa tarde** (“good afternoon”), or **boa noite** (“good evening”), common



Portuguese greetings often used between groups that speak distinct languages. Some Mozambicans extend such greetings to all present.

Names

Mozambican names for both genders typically comprise one or two first names and two last names. First names usually represent Portuguese Christian figures (see *Family and Kinship*). A Mozambican's two last names often indicate family heritage, a practice influenced by the Portuguese tradition of preserving both paternal and maternal surnames. In Zambezia Province, it is common for the father's first name to be used as one of his descendants' last names.

Forms of Address

Titles depend on age, social status, and relationship but are generally formal and courteous. Mozambicans often use titles of respect such as **senhor** (“Mr.”) and **senhora** (“Mrs.”). To demonstrate deference, some younger Mozambicans address elders as **tio** (uncle) or **tia** (aunt). In rural areas, adults greet elders as **papa fulano** (“dear father”) or **mama fulana** (“dear mother”). Due to the low rate of official civil marriages (see *Family and Kinship*), Mozambicans often refer to others' partners as their husband or wife, even if the couple is not legally

married. Friends and relatives of the same sex and age usually address one another more informally, often by first name.

Conversational Topics

After initial greetings, Mozambicans typically engage in polite conversation about work and family. Mozambicans also appreciate inquiries about the health of their family and will likely reciprocate. Making positive observations about the country and its food (see *Sustenance and Health*) can help establish rapport. Other suitable topics include Mozambican culture and soccer. To avoid offense, foreign nationals should not discuss politics or Mozambicans' involvement in the civil war (see *History and Myth*). When confronted with such sensitive topics, foreign nationals should endeavor to change the subject rather than refuse to discuss the matter outright.

Gestures

When accepting gifts from Mozambicans, foreign nationals should take the gift with both hands to signify appreciation for the offering. Mozambicans typically pass items and greet others with the right hand, placing the left hand under the right elbow to signify respect, as with greetings. Foreign nationals should avoid using the index finger to point or placing their hands in their pockets during a conversation, as both gestures are considered impolite. To beckon to someone, Mozambicans form their hands into a T-shape. When foreign nationals are describing someone's height, they should gesture with the palm perpendicular to the ground, as gesturing with one's palm facing downwards is typically used to refer to animals.



Language and Training Sources

Please view the Air Force Culture and Language Center website at <http://www.airuniversity.af.edu/AFCLC/> and click on "Resources" for access to language training and other resources.

Useful Words and Phrases

English	Portuguese
Hello	Olá
Hello/Good morning	Bom dia
Hello/Good afternoon	Boa tarde
Hello/Good evening	Boa noite
Goodnight (Leaving)	Boa noite
Goodbye (Informal)	Adeus/Tchau
How are you?	Como está?
I am fine	Estou bem(boa)
What is your name?	Como se chama?
My name is __	Meu nome é __
I am very pleased to meet you	Muito prazer em conhecê-lo(a)
Yes/No	Sim/ Não
Please	Se faz favor
Thank you	Obrigado (m)/Obrigada (f)
You're welcome	De nada
Sorry/Excuse me	Desculpe-me
I do not understand	Eu não compreendo
Do you understand?	Entendeu?
Please speak more slowly	Fale mais devagar se faz favor
I do not speak Portuguese	Eu não falo português
Do you speak English?	Fala inglês?
Is there someone here who speaks English?	Há alguém aqui que fala inglês?
Who?	Quem?
What?	O quê?
When?	Quando?
Where?	Onde?
Why?	Por quê?
How?	Como?
Help!	Socorro!

7. LEARNING AND KNOWLEDGE

Literacy

- Total population over age 15 who can read and write: 63.4%
- Male: 74.1%
- Female: 53.8% (2021 estimate)

Early Education

Before the development of formal education, Mozambicans informally transmitted values, beliefs, historical knowledge, and a sense of community to younger generations through stories, proverbs, fables, myths, and legends (see *History and Myth*). Rites of passage were also an important means of perpetuating morals and values (see *Family and Kinship*).



With the spread of Islam to northern Mozambique after the 7th century (see *History and Myth*), instruction for children was formalized. **Walimu** (Muslim teachers) gave lessons in Qur'anic verses, Islamic rituals and duties, and Arabic to the children of Muslim families. The *walimu* educated Mozambican youth in religious Qur'anic schools, where pupils learned to write local languages in Arabic script (see *Language and Communication*) and often adapted Islam to traditional practices and beliefs (see *Religion and Spirituality*).

Following the arrival of the Portuguese in the late 15th century (see *History and Myth*), Catholic missions founded schools to educate and convert locals to Christianity. Although the missionary teachers typically had no formal training in education, the Portuguese supported and funded the schools. Lessons consisted of basic skills, and the schools promoted strict adherence to Catholic doctrine, leaving no room for traditional beliefs. By the 19th century, Protestant churches from Europe and South Africa founded schools that became increasingly popular because they embraced some traditional Mozambican

religious practices (see *Religion and Spirituality*). Further, many Protestant schools had better educational offerings than the Catholic missions.

Formal Education in Colonial Mozambique

After the Portuguese government formally established a colony in Mozambique in the late 19th century (see *History and Myth*), it allowed only **assimilados** (“the assimilated,” local Mozambicans, who had mastered Portuguese language and culture) (see *Political and Social Relations*) to enroll in separate state-run schools established for Portuguese students. With reliable access to educational materials and better facilities than many Christian schools, the Portuguese schools focused on European history and culture. The curriculum did not cover



Mozambican history, and local languages were typically prohibited (see *Language and Communication*).

Meanwhile, by the early 20th century, the Sufi tradition of Islam (see *Religion and Spirituality*) spread from Mozambique

Island across the North, and **turuq** (Sufi Orders) significantly expanded the number of Qur’anic schools in the region. Although Sufi education was similar to earlier Islamic instruction, some Sufi **shaykhs** (religious scholars) undermined the traditional beliefs that many *walimu* permitted their adherents to hold. Although these *shaykhs* considered those beliefs to be inconsistent with Sufi principles, Islamic instruction remained prevalent across much of the North.

In 1930, the Portuguese modified the enrollment policy for state-run schools, allowing **indigenas** (“indigenous,” Mozambique’s native, non-assimilated population) to enroll if they completed a 3-year preparatory program. However, many students were unable to pass the final preparatory school exam, ultimately limiting their access to formal education. Further, the Portuguese considered Mozambicans over age 13 too old to start primary school, denying access to a large portion of the population.

In the mid-20th century, the Portuguese began investing more in education. In 1962, they established the country's first university, the General University Studies of Mozambique, in Maputo. By 1964, the colonial government ended the segregated school system and opened additional state-run schools. Nevertheless, tuition costs were high, and many Mozambicans remained illiterate.



Around the 1964 start of the Mozambican War for Independence (see *History and Myth*), some pro-independence groups sought to increase educational opportunities. These groups established the Mozambican Institute in neighboring Tanzania and developed educational exchanges with allied countries including Algeria, China, and Cuba. They also established local schools, founding over 100 across northern Mozambique by 1967.

Post-Independence Education

By the time Mozambique gained independence in 1975 (see *History and Myth*), most trained educators had fled to Portugal. At that time, the national literacy rate was around 10%. To improve educational attainment, the government nationalized education, outlawing private schools and building others, which doubled enrollment to 1.2 million students in 1979. The government also invested in girls' education, and from 1975-80, girls' primary school enrollment increased from 33% to 43%. In addition, the government launched a national literacy campaign, which helped increase the literacy rate to 30% in 1980.

Nevertheless, the 1976-92 civil war (see *History and Myth*) reversed progress, as some 58% of schools either closed or were destroyed. Rural schools were particularly impacted, with around 95% of schools in the rural northwestern Tete Province ruined. As a result, many Mozambicans moved to cities, causing a rural-urban educational divide. While the government built secondary schools in cities to meet increasing demand, many rural areas had only primary schools.

Modern Education System

Following the war, the government allowed private schools to open and further promoted girls' education. In 2003, it made primary education free and later instituted distance learning and bilingual education to permit instruction in local languages (see *Language and Communication*). As a result, between 2003-22, total primary and secondary school enrollment nearly doubled to some 9.1 million students. While the government permits private religious and international schools, as of 2022, notably 98% of primary and secondary schools are public.

Educational progress has continued to improve in recent years. In 2018, free, mandatory education increased from 7 to 9 years, and in 2022, education spending accounted for about 6.2% of GDP, compared to 3.3% in Tanzania, 3.3% in Malawi, and around 5.4% in the US.



Despite this progress, educational achievement remains poor, due in part to low-quality teaching and under-resourced institutions. Some schools run three shifts due to severe teacher

shortages. Other challenges include lack of school equipment, teacher tardiness, and high primary and secondary school dropout rates. Despite compulsory enrollment at these levels, lax enforcement results in many children of the appropriate age not attending school.

As of 2021, less than 50% of grade 3 and grade 4 students were able to recognize simple words, while less than 20% were able to read a paragraph in Portuguese. While the educational gender gap has narrowed in recent years, female students continue to face challenges in completing their studies, partially due to child marriages and teen pregnancies (see *Sex and Gender*). Some girls also face sexual abuse at school, as some teachers threaten to lower girls' grades to force them to participate in sexual activity.

Pre-Primary: Children aged 2-5 can attend fee-based private programs, as there is no public option. Few children attend, as

the cost is often prohibitive. In 2019, some 3.5% of children of the appropriate age were enrolled in pre-primary programs.

Primary Education: *Ensino primário* (primary education) begins at age 6 and lasts 6 years. It consists of two stages, lower primary (grades 1-3) and upper primary (grades 4-6). Instruction focuses on Portuguese, mathematics, social studies, and natural sciences. Students begin learning in their native language and learn Portuguese as they advance through primary school (90% native-language instruction in grade 1 eventually becomes 80% Portuguese by grade 6). In 2022, almost 99% of students of the appropriate age enrolled in primary school, up from 90% in 2014.



Secondary Education: *Ensino secundário* (secondary education) is 6 years and comprised of two stages, lower secondary (grades 7-9) and upper secondary (grades 10-12), though only the former is free and mandatory. Students either attend the general education track to prepare for university or the technical education or teacher training tracks. As of 2022, only 50% of students of the appropriate age were enrolled in secondary education.

Post-Secondary: Few students continue to post-secondary education. Provided they pass an entrance exam, most students attend university in Maputo or another large city, such as Beira or Nampula. Following 3-4 years of studies, students obtain a *licenciatura* (Bachelor's degree).

As Mozambique's oldest university, the public Eduardo Mondlane University (formerly General University Studies of Mozambique) in Maputo enrolled some 48,300 students in undergraduate and graduate programs in 2024. The university has faculties of science, technology, the arts and humanities, medicine, and law, among others. The private Catholic University of Mozambique in Beira was established during the civil war peace negotiations (see *History and Myth*) to provide higher education beyond Maputo, and today has campuses across the country.

8. TIME AND SPACE

Overview

Mozambicans consider strong interpersonal connections and respect for authority as vital to conducting business. In general, public displays of affection are inappropriate, though social touching among close friends and family is common.

Time and Work

The Mozambican work week runs from Monday-Friday, and business hours vary by establishment type. Many shops open Monday-Friday from 8am-6pm and 8am-12pm on Saturdays. Most banks are open Monday-Friday from 8am-3pm and may open on Saturday mornings. While post office hours tend to vary by region, they generally operate between 8am-3:30pm. Government offices are open Monday-Friday from 7:30am-3:30pm. Generally, offices close for lunch between 12pm-1pm, and some stores close from noon-2pm. In rural areas, operating hours tend to be informal and vary according to the owners' preferences.



Working Conditions: Mozambican labor laws establish an 8-hour workday and maximum 48-hour workweek. Mozambicans receive 50% additional pay for overtime during the day and 100% for night work. Although the law sets health and safety standards, stipulates paid time off, and sets minimum wages that vary by business sector, lax enforcement often results in unsafe working conditions, extended workdays, and low wages. In addition, as of 2023, some 85% of the working population labors in the informal sector (see *Economics and Resources*), typically earning well below the government-mandated minimum wages. Further, violations such as workplace discrimination, unsafe labor practices, and child labor are common.

Time Zone: Mozambique adheres to Central Africa Time (CAT), which is 2 hours ahead of Greenwich Mean Time (GMT) and 7

hours ahead of Eastern Standard Time (EST). Mozambique does not observe daylight savings time.

Lunar Calendar: Mozambican Muslims use the *Hijri* (Islamic) calendar to track Muslim holidays. Since it is based on lunar phases, dates fall 11 days earlier each year in relation to the Western calendar. The Islamic calendar's 12 months each have 30 days or fewer. Days begin at sunset on what the Western calendar would show as the previous day. For example, each new week begins at sunset on Saturday, and the Muslim holy day of Friday begins on Thursday evening.

National Holidays

- January 1: New Year's Day
- February 3: Mozambican Heroes' Day
- April 7: Women's Day
- May 1: Labor Day/Workers' Day
- June 25: Independence Day (see *History and Myth*)
- September 7: Victory Day
- September 25: Armed Forces Day
- October 4: Reconciliation Day
- December 25: Family Day/Christmas Day

Variable dates according to the lunar calendar:

- **Eid al-Fitr:** End of Ramadan
- **Eid al-Adha:** Festival of Sacrifice
- **Awal Muharram:** *Hijri* New Year
- **Mawlid al-Nabi:** Birth of the Prophet Muhammad

Time and Business

Mozambicans tend to have a relaxed approach to time, considering schedules and deadlines less important than social obligations and relationships. Lengthy introductions, small talk, and interruptions may delay meetings. Workplaces are typically hierarchical, and subordinate staff usually require management approval of decisions resulting from. Similarly, Mozambicans tend to seek consensus in business and prefer discussions and negotiations to outright refusals of requests.

Personal Space

As in most societies, personal space in Mozambique depends on the nature of the relationship. Friends and family generally observe less personal space than acquaintances or strangers.

Touch: In business settings, greetings typically include little touching beyond the initial handshake, and some women refrain from shaking men's hands. Some men shake by clasp hands and grabbing forearms or supporting the right elbow with the left hand as a sign of respect. Women who are acquainted with each other sometimes greet with a kiss on each cheek. Mozambicans typically reserve physical affection for family and close friends. While close friends of the same sex might touch or hold hands, public displays of affection between romantic partners are rare.

Eye Contact: Mozambicans typically make brief eye contact during greetings among peers. During longer conversations, and particularly among elders or members of the opposite sex, many Mozambicans divert eye contact to indicate respect.

Photographs

Some churches, museums, landmarks, and military installations prohibit photography. Foreign nationals should acquire a Mozambican's consent before taking his photo, as a 2019 law prohibits taking and sharing images of citizens without prior agreement. Explicit permission is particularly important when photographing children.



Driving

Unlike in the US, Mozambicans drive on the left side of the road. Poor road conditions and lax enforcement of traffic laws make driving hazardous, particularly at night. Many roads lack

clear markings, lighting, and have large potholes and other hazards. Roads in rural areas are often unpaved and prone to mudslides and flooding. In 2021, Mozambique's rate of traffic-related deaths was 20 per 100,000 people, almost double the US rate (14), but comparable to neighboring Tanzania (16) and South Africa (25).

9. AESTHETICS AND RECREATION

Overview

Mozambique's clothing, music, dance, and art reflect its African traditions, Islam and other religions, history of colonization, former socialist government, and recent transition to democracy.

Dress and Appearance

Mozambicans dress in a variety of clothing styles that reflect both African traditions and Western influences. In business settings, Mozambicans tend to wear Western-style formal dress, often in dark colors. Generally, standards of dress are conservative. Consequently, male and female visitors should dress conservatively, avoiding revealing shorts, mini-skirts, and sleeveless tops, except when visiting private beaches or pools.

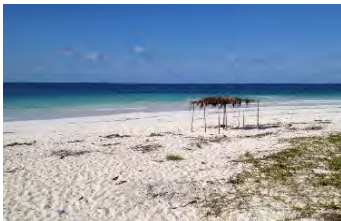
Women: Traditional women's clothing features **capulanas**, 2-meter-long rectangular pieces of colorful, geometric patterned fabric wrapped around the body and tied at the waist or shoulder. Some women, particularly in urban areas, wear Western-style clothing, usually blouses with skirts or dresses. In rural areas, many women wrap their hair with fabric, while in cities and among wealthier Mozambican women, intricate hairstyles have become a marker of social status. Some Muslim women wear long, flowing black cotton robes, often with a **hijab** (headscarf), or less commonly a **niqab** (face veil).



Men: Men traditionally wear **dashikis**, long, loose cotton garments that fall to the knees, often decorated with colorful elaborate patterns. Alternatively, many men dress in Western-style clothing, such as a t-shirt and jacket with pants or jeans. Some Muslim men dress in the traditional **kanzu**, a collared, loose white robe, paired with a **kofia** (skullcap).

Traditional Appearance: Historically, some groups adorned their bodies with tattoos, scarification, facial piercings, and lip

plates (increasingly large discs inserted in a lip piercing to stretch the skin). These practices are less prevalent today but still occur. For example, among the northeastern Makonde,



elaborate face tattoos and piercings are still common.

Recreation and Leisure

Urban Mozambicans tend to spend their leisure time with friends and family, eating together, listening to

music, socializing, and visiting beaches, cafes, and music venues. Rural residents also spend time with family, telling or listening to stories, practicing traditional art forms such as painting or woodcarving, and among men, hunting.

Holidays and Festivals: Several national holidays (see *Time and Space*) commemorate important dates in Mozambican history. Three notable celebrations recognize liberation from Portuguese colonial rule (see *History and Myth*): Heroes' Day, Independence Day, and Victory Day. Mozambicans typically mark each day with parades and political speeches. Among Christians, religious holidays include Christmas, Good Friday, and Easter, most often celebrated with a special mass or service and dinner with family.

Many non-Christians also celebrate these holidays and typically incorporate elements of traditional Mozambican ceremonies, such as music and dancing. Many Muslims celebrate Eid al-Fitr and Eid al-Adha (see *Religion and Spirituality*), which usually include feasting, gift-giving, and charitable donations.

Many other Mozambican celebrations and festivals mark the changing seasons, such as the beginning of summer or winter. For example, Makonde celebrate their harvest with a 3-day festival that features singing, dancing, chanting, and feasting.

Sports and Games

Popular sports in Mozambique include soccer, basketball, netball, volleyball, boxing, wrestling, and field hockey. While Mozambique has competed in every Summer Olympics since

1980, track and field athlete Maria Mutola is the only Mozambican ever to have medaled. Specializing in the 800-meter race, she won bronze in 1996 and gold in 2000.

Soccer: Known as football in the region, soccer is the most popular sport in Mozambique. Both adults and children play in local recreational leagues and pick-up street matches. Many Mozambicans passionately follow soccer at the local, national, and international levels. During much of the 20th century, some Mozambicans played for Portugal's national team, though after independence, several returned to play for their home country.

Of these, Eusébio da Silva Ferreira is the most famous. Also known as the Black Panther, Eusébio played for the Benfica football club in Lisbon, Portugal, and many consider him one of the world's greatest players. Although Mozambique's men's national team (nicknamed the Mambas) has competed several times in the African Cup of Nations, they have failed to qualify in recent years.



Dance

This practice is culturally significant across Mozambique and often varies by location or group. Dances typically tell a story, celebrate an event, or teach lessons. Public performances are popular, and many provinces host large dance companies and troupes that perform traditional dances unique to the region or group.

In the North, dancers perform on special occasions such as weddings, rites of passage, and holidays. Some common dances include the **tufu** (or **nsoppe**), a slow-paced, fluid dance which women perform, and **n'ganda**, a war dance originating from colonial times, performed today to celebrate independence from Portugal. Makonde perform dances such as **lipiku**, **mapiko**, and **mdimu** during rites of passage (see *Family and Kinship*). Among the Chewa in the Northwest, the **nyau** ("mask") is the most culturally significant dance, typically performed at funerals, memorials, and rites of passage. Many Chewa believe the dance evokes spirits and deities, with each dancer

traditionally representing a unique figure by performing in elaborate masks and costumes. Today, the costumes often represent aspects of modern life, such as motorcycles or cars.

Many dances in central Mozambique commemorate rites of passage and independence. Mozambicans originally performed the mournful **niquetxe** dance while laboring during Portuguese colonial rule, though today it marks special occasions. Multiple participants typically perform the **makwaya** and **semba** group dances, traditionally at weddings. Another well-known dance is

the **makwaela** of the southern Chopi group, which features acapella singing and percussion made by rapid foot movements.

Music

Much like dance, music historically served as a method of storytelling

and education (see *Learning and Knowledge*). Some ancient musical traditions became less widespread in the 20th century during Portuguese colonial rule. However, several groups still play traditional music. The Chopi have produced one of the most famous music styles of Mozambique. Named for the xylophone that serves as the predominant instrument, **timbila**) also refers to a form of music, dance, and storytelling. *Timbila* performances tend to be lengthy, are typically accompanied by **makwaela** dances and often include over two dozen musicians and dancers. Among the Chewa, music known as **myumba ya Chewa** teaches youth about traditions and culture.

The drum (**ngoma**) is the central instrument in most traditional Mozambican music and provides a beat for dancers. Drums come in a variety of sizes and are often



elaborately painted. Other instruments include the xylophone (**mambilira** or **marimba**), tambourines, flutes, whistles (typically made from the dried **matamba** fruit), and rattles and shakers made from cans or dried gourds filled with seeds.



In cities, **marrabenta** is the most popular music genre. Developed in the colonial era, **marrabenta** began as protest songs against the Portuguese before evolving into music

about the civil war, natural disasters, politics, and other topics. The genre combines local languages with elements of traditional African and Portuguese musical styles. In the 21st century, many urban artists have blended **marrabenta** with Western rap and reggae styles.

Film

Soon after independence (see *History and Myth*), the government invested heavily in Mozambique's film industry, using cinema to spread propaganda and bolster political support among the largely illiterate population (see *Learning and Knowledge*). As a result, Mozambique became one of the few countries in sub-Saharan Africa with a national film institute and a fully functional film studio in the 1970s. The government's socialist political ideology attracted notable filmmakers from the USSR (Soviet Union, present-day Russia), France, and Brazil to make films in the country. Born in Mozambique, Portuguese-Brazilian Ruy Guerra's **Mueda: memória e massacre** ("Mueda: Memory and Massacre") became Mozambique's first feature film, detailing a massacre that left 600 dead and was a spark for the Mozambican War for Independence. Young Mozambicans have perpetuated the filmmaking tradition. In 2020, Mickey Fonseca's film **Resgate** ("Redemption") sold out cinemas across the country and became the first Mozambican film hosted on Netflix, the world's largest video streaming service.

Literature

Traditional Mozambican myths, history, and moral lessons were passed through generations but seldom recorded. Written

literature became widespread only in the 20th century, with the rise of anti-colonial poetry. José Craveirinha today considered Mozambique's greatest poet, became popular in the 1940s for his work on racism, suffering under Portuguese rule, and calls for rebellion. While women have been underrepresented in literature, Noémia de Sousa rose to fame during the same era for her poetry addressing anti-colonial sentiment and women's challenges. Jorge Rebelo wrote poetry about similar themes and became a leading voice against the Portuguese in the 1970s, earning him the nickname ***poeta da revolução moçambicana*** ("poet of the Mozambican Revolution"). During the war for independence, Marcelino dos Santos became famous for his poetry depicting battles, ambushes, and marches. Accordingly, many Mozambicans referred to him as one of Mozambique's "guerrilla poets."

After Mozambique gained independence in 1975, its literature blossomed, with novelists such as Ungulani Ba Ka Khosa, Lina Magaia and Eduardo White, rising to prominence with stories about the war. Today, Mia Couto, a novelist and playwright, is one of Mozambique's most celebrated authors, receiving international recognition for his fantasy books. Known for his unique writing style that blends Portuguese with local words and phrases, Couto has won several international literary awards.

Folk Art and Handicrafts

Folk art comprises an important part of culture and everyday life. Most groups have unique artistic traditions specific to their history and cultural practices, which typically include sculpting masks and other carvings, jewelry-making, weaving, basket-making, painting, and *capulana* printing. Makonde are known for ebony carvings depicting people and animals, while many southern groups carve similar subjects from sandalwood. Groups throughout the country notably create elaborate masks used for dancing, rites of passage, and other important events.



10. SUSTENANCE AND HEALTH

Sustenance Overview

Meals with friends and family are important social events in Mozambique. The country's culinary traditions exhibit an array of African, European, Indian, and Arab influences that incorporate fresh, locally produced and brightly seasoned ingredients.

Dining Customs

Mozambicans typically eat two or three daily meals, and typically snack throughout the day. The evening meal is usually the largest and is often shared among family and friends (see *Family and Kinship*). Women traditionally prepare the meals, often enlisting assistance from friends and relatives when entertaining guests. In rural and poorer city areas, roasting food over wood fires or charcoal grills is a common way of cooking meals.



In rural areas, some Mozambicans visit the homes of friends and family unannounced, during which the hosts often serve snacks and tea. When invited to a home for a formal meal or to celebrate a special occasion, guests typically arrive a few minutes late and usually present the host a small gift, such as fresh fruit or pastries. In general, Mozambicans serve family-style meals. Hosts usually serve guests first, giving them the best portions of the meal, and diners typically serve themselves subsequent portions from the large, shared dishes.

Diet

While Mozambican cuisine tends to vary by region, most meals contain more starches and vegetables than meats or dairy products. Cassava, a root vegetable or tuber also known as manioc, is a common ingredient. Due to its versatility, low cost, and high nutritional value, its starchy root and leafy greens are used in many dishes. Other common staples include millet, corn, butter beans, and black-eyed peas. **Xima** (or **ncima**), a porridge

made of ground corn or cassava, is a staple and typical accompaniment to many meals.

On the coast, shrimp, crabs, squid, tuna, and swordfish are featured prominently. In the interior of the country, chicken, goat, and beef are primary sources of protein. Some Mozambicans supplement their diet with wild buffalo, antelope, warthogs, and other animals, collectively referred to as bushmeat. Although the

practice of poaching wild game is illegal, the government rarely enforces the law.

Fresh fruit and vegetables comprise a significant part of the local diet. Mozambicans commonly grow mangos, cashew

fruit, bananas, oranges, and pineapples. Nuts, particularly peanuts and cashews, are used to flavor and thicken many dishes. Other common seasonings include garlic, cumin, parsley, onions, mint, cinnamon, saffron, and coriander (also known as cilantro). **Peri-peri** (or **piripiri**) peppers, are chopped and sometimes sautéed, then mixed with lemon juice to create a popular spicy sauce.

Popular Dishes and Meals

Bread, sweet potatoes, cassava, and tapioca are common breakfast foods. Since many rural

Mozambicans do not consume a large mid-day meal, popular lunch options are **prego do pão**, a sandwich containing thinly sliced beef served on a roll, and **macaza**, grilled shellfish skewers. Dinner is typically heartier and features stews and starchy side dishes. One popular dinner meal is **matapa**, a stew of cassava leaves, coconut milk, peanuts, and shrimp or crab. Another common dinner dish is **caril de amendoim e galinha**, chicken served in a spicy curry sauce made with peanuts.



On special occasions, Mozambicans often eat **feijoada**, a bean stew cooked with pork or beef and served over *xima*, as well as **galinha assada**, a flame-grilled chicken marinated in either *peri-peri* or coconut milk. Other popular dishes include **chamuças** (samosas – chicken or shrimp turnovers spiced with onions and fragrant spices wrapped in pastry dough), and **mucapata**, a porridge-like dish made from mung beans, coconut milk, and rice. Common desserts include **bolo polana**, a cashew and potato cake, and **etoritori**, a soft peanut fudge.

Eating Out

Restaurants in Maputo and other large cities range from upscale establishments specializing in international cuisine to inexpensive **barracas** (casual eateries) serving light snacks or grilled meats and shellfish. **Salões de chá** (tea salons) and **pastelarias** (pastry shops) are also common in urban areas and serve small dishes such as omelets, fresh bread, desserts, tea, and coffee. American-style fast food restaurants are increasingly common among Mozambican youth in cities, due to their low cost and convenience. Restaurants are uncommon in rural areas, as they are unaffordable for many families. When available, they generally offer local Mozambican fare. While tipping is not expected in casual eateries, a surcharge of 10-20% for good service is common in restaurants frequented by foreigners.

Beverages

Black tea, much of which is grown locally (see *Economics and Resources*), is a popular drink consumed at breakfast and throughout the day. Many Mozambicans also drink coffee, though more commonly in restaurants and eateries than at home. Soft drinks are available in urban informal eateries and cafes, whereas mango and cashew fruit juices are typical beverages offered in rural areas. Popular alcoholic beverages include **shema** or **utchema** (palm wine) and **maheu**, a corn mash mixed with water and left to ferment slightly. Local producers also brew beer and distill rum. Some Mozambicans drink wine imported from South Africa or Portugal.



Health Overview

While the overall health of Mozambicans has improved in recent decades, communicable disease outbreaks and other serious health challenges persist. Since 1990, life expectancy at birth has increased from around 45 to 58 years and is close to the



average for sub-Saharan Africa (61) but well below the US (81). In the same period, infant mortality (the proportion of infants who die before age 1) declined from 162 to 58 deaths per 1,000 live births, though it remains

higher than the sub-Saharan average (50) and significantly higher than the US (5). Since 2000, maternal mortality declined from 798 to 127 deaths per 100,000 live births, about half the sub-Saharan average (536) but over 15 times the US rate (21).

Traditional Medicine

Traditional medicine consists of the knowledge, practices, and skills derived from a native population's beliefs, experiences, and theories. In Mozambique, traditional medicine centers on the knowledge of local healers called ***n'angas***, also known as ***curandeiros***, or ***mukulukhanas*** in some northern regions (see *Religion and Spirituality*). Many *n'angas* consider illness to be a result of conflict with ancestral spirits or evil spirit attacks and witchcraft. To address physical or spiritual afflictions, they communicate with the spirit world and perform certain rituals. Due to the prevalence of traditional medicine, especially in rural areas, the government established the Institute for Traditional Medicine under the Ministry of Health to regulate and coordinate traditional practices as part of the national health system.

Modern Healthcare System

Mozambicans are entitled to medical care under the constitution (see *Political and Social Relations*). The Ministry of Health is charged with managing the country's public healthcare system, monitoring private medical institutions, and distributing pharmaceuticals. However, during Mozambique's civil war (see

History and Myth), combatants destroyed rural clinics and attacked medical professionals, severely damaging the country's healthcare system. To address these challenges, the government steadily increased health sector investment from about 1% of GDP in 2000 to around 9% in 2022, higher than the sub-Saharan average (5%) but much lower than the US (17%).

Despite this recent increase in investment, public health institutions are typically ill-equipped and understaffed. In some cases, admitted patients must provide their own bedding, food, and other essentials. Most facilities are overcrowded and endure a shortage of medical personnel, as many healthcare professionals emigrate to practice in neighboring countries that have more favorable working conditions (see *Economics and Resources*).

According to recent estimates, Mozambique has less than 2 physicians per 10,000 people, similar to neighboring Tanzania but lower than Zambia (3), South Africa (8), the World Health Organization's recommendation (23), and the US (37). Widespread corruption and weak governance (see *Political and Social Relations*) often result in poor hospital management and prevent coordination between healthcare institutions, further reducing the quality of care.

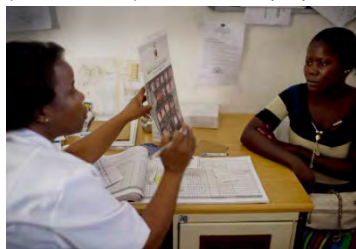
Furthermore, access to healthcare is unequal. While some privately run hospitals in Maputo and other cities offer better care than public hospitals, their high cost makes them inaccessible to much of the population. Many wealthy Mozambicans prefer instead to travel to South Africa for elective procedures. Healthcare offerings deteriorate substantially in rural areas, where small clinics staffed by workers with limited medical knowledge deliver only basic services. Further, community health workers are frequently undertrained and underequipped. To receive emergency services or treatment for long-term serious illnesses,



rural residents typically must travel long distances on poor-quality roads to provincial hospitals.

Health Challenges

The leading causes of death in Mozambique are communicable diseases, which account for about 60% of all deaths. Some 12% of adults aged 15 and older live with HIV/AIDS, a significantly higher rate than the sub-Saharan average (4%) and the US rate (less than 1%). The virus disproportionately affects Mozambican



women, which has led to notably high pre-natal transmission to infants. As of 2022, some 120,000 children were estimated to be infected with the virus.

Due to the impact of HIV/AIDS on the immune system, many

Mozambicans with the virus contract other communicable diseases, most notably tuberculosis (TB). Around 361 of 100,000 people have TB, significantly higher than the US rate (3). Malaria also poses a substantial health challenge, as it accounts for 29% of all deaths and 42% of deaths in children under age 5. In addition, as of April 2025, Mozambique had confirmed over 233,900 positive cases of COVID-19, the disease caused by coronavirus SARS-CoV-2, resulting in around 2,300 deaths. The actual numbers of cases and deaths are likely much higher.

Non-communicable “lifestyle” diseases accounted for over 31% of all deaths in Mozambique in 2021. Cardiovascular disorders, strokes, and birth defects are some of the leading causes of death from non-communicable diseases. Widespread poverty, inadequate maternal and neonatal care, and resultant birth defects have resulted in extensive neonatal disorders, which became the fifth-leading cause of death in 2021. Preventable “external causes,” such as suicides, car accidents, and other injuries comprise some 7% of deaths. Road injuries are notably the 13th-leading cause of death nationwide (see *Time and Space*).

11. ECONOMICS AND RESOURCES

Overview

For centuries, most Mozambican residents subsisted as small farmers or animal herders. Until the end of the 15th century, the kingdoms that ruled vast areas of the region maintained their influence through the control of coastal trade routes, which supplied gold, iron, copper, ivory, and cotton to the Middle East and Asia (see *History and Myth*). In the early 16th century, Portuguese settled along the Mozambican coast and dominated these trade routes for nearly 200 years. However, inland



kingdoms continued to control a large portion of regional trade in the interior (see *History and Myth*).

To gain control of inland trade, the Portuguese developed **prazos**, large estates along the Zambezi River Valley, where

prazeros (landholders) used forced labor to work the land and grow crops. By the 19th century, slavery had become a central aspect of the colonial economy. Not only did the Portuguese enslave Africans to work on **prazos**; they also earned profit from shipping slaves around the world (see *History and Myth*). In the late 19th century, Portugal leased territory to large corporations, which used forced **chibalo** labor (see *History and Myth*) to build infrastructure and work on sugar, tea, and cotton plantations. By the 1930s, the Portuguese government regained control from the corporations, though it maintained many of the same harsh labor practices.

Meanwhile, the Portuguese focused on producing wood, palm oil, coal, and salt for export. They restricted manufacturing to avoid taking a share of Portugal's industrial export market. Following World War II, Mozambique's exports increased due to high global demand for agricultural products, and the Portuguese mandated a greater production of additional crops such as cotton, agave, and cashew nuts.

Amid high unemployment in Portugal, the government began encouraging settlers to move to Mozambique in the 1950s. In response, the Portuguese began to invest in manufacturing, and the number of companies in Mozambique increased from 150 in 1947 to 1,025 in 1961. While providing economic incentives for Portuguese settlers, colonial policies restricted Mozambicans from most managerial positions. Instead, many locals toiled on plantations, growing cash crops such as tea, rice, and tobacco.

Between 1964-74, war disrupted the economy, and by the time Mozambique gained independence in 1975 (see *History and Myth*), most Portuguese colonists had fled the country. The Mozambican government nationalized formerly Portuguese-controlled land to create large state-run farms, especially in the South. In factories, existing Mozambican workers replaced Portuguese managers. To further centralize planning, the government nationalized banks in 1978 and began investing heavily in manufacturing. Key state-run industries produced rubber, metals, textiles, soaps, and oil, which led to economic growth.

However, civil war (see *History and Myth*), a shortage of skilled labor, and a massive drought in 1983 began to take a toll on the economy. During the war, government opponents



targeted transportation infrastructure, negatively impacting producers' ability to move their products for export. As a result, Mozambican exports plummeted, which led to economic collapse in 1986.

In the late 1980s, the government abandoned its centralized economic model and began to liberalize the economy through free-market reforms. Mozambique joined the International Monetary Fund (IMF) in 1984 and later allowed the privatization of banks. The 1992 peace accord (see *History and Myth*) ended the war, resulting in increased foreign aid. In response, GDP grew by around 8% annually between 1993-2014. However, the number of jobs did not grow as quickly as GDP.

Since the early 2000s, the government has called for increased foreign direct investment (FDI) and created industrial free-trade zones in large cities to provide tax breaks for multinational corporations. As a result, FDI has significantly increased in the mining sector, particularly for graphite, coal, and gemstone production. In the early 2010s, the discovery of enormous natural gas reserves in northeastern Mozambique attracted additional FDI, notably from France and the US. The government has stated it plans to create a sovereign wealth fund to use natural gas proceeds for development projects.

Following the government's 2016 announcement that it failed to report \$2 billion in state-guaranteed debt to the IMF (see *History and Myth*), the Mozambican economy went into rapid decline. The government had used the borrowed money to guarantee



loans to state-owned enterprises, none of which were successful. Consequently, between January-August 2016, Mozambique's currency depreciated by 50% against the US dollar, and GDP fell by nearly half to 3.8% in the same

year. In addition, the IMF and many foreign governments suspended aid and loans, which further amplified the economic decline. Today, economic growth has still not recovered. Per capita GDP growth has been below 2.5% since 2016. By 2019, Mozambique entered recession, and in 2020, restrictions to combat the COVID-19 pandemic further hindered economic recovery. However, the economy rebounded by 4.2% in 2022 and 5.4% in 2023.

Estimates show that some 63% of Mozambicans live below the international poverty line of \$2.15 per day, and inequality is a major issue. A large share of investment goes to the South, while much of the rest of the country remains underdeveloped. Amid the recent terrorist attacks in northern Mozambique (see *Political and Social Relations*), thousands of residents have fled their homes, intensifying financial difficulties. This instability, in addition to recent damaging cyclones (see *Political and Social*

Relations), has delayed the development of the gas fields and other significant FDI in northern and central Mozambique.

Today, many Mozambicans work in farming, fishing, and trading, which accounts for some 70% of all businesses and 26% of GDP. Other Mozambicans work as migrant laborers in South Africa, which has created a significant flow of remittances. In 2023, total remittances accounted for about 3.2% of GDP. Meanwhile, child labor continues to be a prevalent issue (see *Family and Kinship*). Many children work in food production, fishing, forestry, and as street vendors.

Services

Accounting for about 41% of GDP and some 21% of the labor force in 2023, services comprise the largest economic sector. Key subsectors include finance, tourism, transport, retail, and communications.

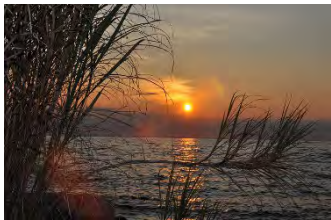
Tourism: As of 2023, tourism accounts for some 9% of GDP. While tourism has historically been a significant component of the economy, the sector has faced setbacks due to war and the recent terrorist attacks. Popular destinations include beaches and national parks such as Niassa National Reserve, Gorongosa National Park, Maputo Special Reserve, Inhaca Island, and the town of Ponta do Ouro.

Agriculture

Accounting for about 26% of GDP and some 69% of employment in 2023, agriculture remains a vital component of the Mozambican economy.

While some companies operate large agro-industrial farms for exporting cash crops like cotton, sugar, tobacco, coconut, tea, and agave, most Mozambicans subsist on small farms that produce staple foods for daily consumption.

Farming: As of 2022, about 7.2% of Mozambican land is arable. Nearly 90% of Mozambican farmers either consume their produce or sell it at local markets. Principal crops include corn, cassava, coconuts, peanuts, and cashews.



Fishing: Mozambique's fishing industry is primarily comprised of small-scale artisanal fishers, although some companies fish on an industrial scale, mainly for shrimp and tuna. Other local catch typically includes shellfish, mackerel, sardines, tilapia, and anchovies.



Industry

As of 2023, the industrial sector accounts for some 21% of GDP and just 9% of the workforce. Significant subsectors include manufacturing, mining, construction, and energy.

Manufacturing: Historically significant for the initial economic development of Mozambique, manufacturing accounts for some 7% of GDP as of 2023. Key industries include the production of textiles, plastics, food, and cement.

Mining: The mining subsector is an important source of growth for the Mozambican economy, accounting for some 11% of GDP in 2022. In addition to large deposits of salt, beryllium, bauxite, titanium, tantalite, iron ore, and gold, Mozambique also has nearly 2 billion tons of coal reserves, the second-most in Africa. In 2009, a farmer discovered a ruby deposit in Cabo Delgado thought to contain some 40% of the world's rubies. However, observers have criticized mining companies for forcing residents to relocate to develop mines, and they have caused significant environmental damage in recent years (see *Political and Social Relations*).

Construction: As of 2022, construction accounts for about 2% of GDP. However, experts predict infrastructure spending will increase due to the anticipated development of the natural gas industry, driven primarily by local partnerships with Portuguese and Chinese construction companies.



Natural Gas: Since 2004, the Mozambique-South Africa Gas Pipeline has exported natural gas from fields in southern Mozambique to South Africa and has the capacity to transport over 500 million cubic ft per day. In the early 2010s, US and Italian energy firms discovered large natural gas fields in the Ruvuma River Basin off the country's northeastern coast. Experts believe Mozambique has around 100 trillion cubic ft of proven gas reserves, making it Africa's third-largest holder. As such, the government intends to make the country one of the world's largest exporters of liquefied natural gas.

Currency

The Mozambican *metical* (plural: *meticaís*) (MT or MZN) is issued in five banknotes (20, 50, 100, 500, and 1,000) and five coins (50 *centavos*; 1, 2, 5, and 10 meticaís). In 2023, the exchange rate was US \$1 for MT 63.89. After a spike in inflation due to the 2016 debt crisis, the *metical* has been largely stable with relatively low inflation.

Foreign Trade

Mozambique's imports, which totaled \$11.18 billion in 2023, primarily consisted of petroleum, fluorides, food stuffs, and automobiles from South Africa (23%), China (15%), the UAE (10%), and India (8%). In the same year, exports totaled \$9.29 billion and consisted of coal and solid fuels, aluminum,



electricity, and gas sold to India (16%), China (14%), South Africa (14%), and South Korea (6%).

Foreign Aid

In 2023, Mozambique received some \$2.824 billion in official development assistance, with the US, World Bank,

The Global Fund (see *Sustenance and Health*), the EU, and Germany serving as top donors. In 2023, the US committed \$614.08 million in bilateral aid to Mozambique, targeted primarily at economic development, peace and security, health programs, and the humanitarian response to extreme natural disasters throughout the country.

12. TECHNOLOGY AND MATERIAL

Overview

Mozambique's transport infrastructure reflects its colonial past (see *History and Myth*), when the Portuguese developed roads and rail to transport goods from the western interior to coastal ports. Since the country gained independence in 1975, years of conflict (see *History and Myth*) and natural disasters (see *Political and Social Relations*) have left much of Mozambique's physical infrastructure in disrepair and hindered the development of telecommunications networks. While free speech and press are constitutionally protected, the government, opposition groups, and terrorist organizations (see *Political and Social Relations*) occasionally restrict those freedoms.

Transportation

Few Mozambicans travel by privately-owned vehicle, but rather, the most common forms of transportation are foot, bicycle, motorcycle, **chapas** (passenger trucks or minivans), and buses. **Chapas** that operate on set routes and depart when the vehicles are full serve as the main form of public transport in urban areas. **Machibombos** (coach buses) provide scheduled service between major cities. However, due to a lack of central bus terminals, many **machibombos** leave from company garages or highways en route to their destinations. Transport infrastructure in rural areas is underdeveloped. Most residents travel by foot, while others use bicycles or motorbikes, if accessible.



Roadways

Of Mozambique's nearly 20,000 mi of roads, about 25% are paved. Highways connect major cities to provinces and adjacent countries. The N1 spans some 1,500 mi from the capital Maputo in the South to Pemba in the North. Other highways connect Beira to Zimbabwe and Nacala to Malawi. Rural roads are typically unpaved and hazardous (see *Time and Space*).

Railways

Mozambique has about 3,000 mi of railways, most of which were constructed in the 20th century to transport tea, sugar, minerals, and other goods to seaports (see *Economics and Resources*). Although four rail lines remain in use for passenger travel, rail is mostly used for freight.



Ports and Waterways

Mozambique's three major seaports are Beria, Maputo, and Nacala, all on the Indian Ocean. Large

ships can navigate some 285 mi of the Zambezi River, from the central coast to Tete in the Northwest. However, frequently low water levels and rapids prevent the use of the Zambezi as a primary means of transport.

Airways

Of Mozambique's 92 airports, 21 have paved runways. Maputo International Airport is Mozambique's busiest, receiving about 50% of the country's freight traffic and 65% of its passengers. Other air hubs include Vilankulo Airport, Beria Airport, Inhambane Airport, and Nampula Airport, although these mostly accommodate regional flights.

Energy

In 2023, Mozambique generated some 83% of its electricity from hydroelectric plants, 16% from fossil fuels, and less than 1% from renewable sources such as biofuels. Most of the country's energy production comes from hydroelectric plants located on the Zambezi. The recent discovery of large natural gas reserves off the country's northeastern coast (see *Economics and Resources*) led to the construction of several refineries to exploit the estimated 100 trillion cubic ft of proven reserves. Despite Mozambique's abundance of natural resources, only about 33% of the population has some form of access to electricity due to an underdeveloped power grid. To increase electrification and renewable energy adoption, the government implemented a renewable energy strategy for 2011-25. The strategy aims to increase the capacity of hydroelectric plants and establish solar plants for off-grid electricity use.

Media

Mozambique's Constitution protects freedoms of speech and press. While the government generally respects these rights, it has restricted media coverage of ongoing terrorist attacks in Cabo Delgado Province (see *History and Myth*). In a 2025 ranking of press freedoms, Mozambique placed 101 of 180 countries, lower than neighboring South Africa (27) and Eswatini (98), and Tanzania (95).

Print Media: Mozambique's most widely circulated newspapers are Portuguese-language *Notícias*, *Diário de Moçambique*, and *O País*. While no print newspapers publish in English, the *Agência de Informação de Moçambique* offers English-language news bulletins. Overall, print readership is minimal due to low literacy rates (see *Learning and Knowledge*) and a large rural population with irregular access to print publications.

Radio and TV: Radio is popular in Mozambique. Several public and private stations such as *Rádio Moçambique*, *Cidade FM*, and *Rádio Miramar* broadcast news, talk shows, and *marrabenta* music (see *Aesthetics and Recreation*). The Catholic Church's *Rádio Maria Moçambique* is also popular. Many local radio and TV stations broadcast in Bantu languages (see *Language and Communication*), and some residents access international radio and TV channels through satellite services.

Telecommunications

Mozambique has severely underdeveloped but growing telecommunications infrastructure, and penetration rates remain low in rural areas. In 2022, Mozambique had less than 1 landline and 42 mobile cellular subscriptions per 100 people.

Internet: Some 20% of Mozambicans regularly used the Internet in 2023, and most connections are from mobile devices due to limited fixed-line infrastructure. Generally, the government neither restricts access nor blocks or censors content, although some observers claim it monitors social media posts.





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