



Democracy Digest 14
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Southern African Elections

2024 has been a bumper year for elections, with people in a number of heavyweight democracies going to the polls: Indonesia, Japan, France, the United Kingdom, the USA, Mexico, Pakistan, and the world's largest democracy, India. Southern African has also had a larger than usual number of elections, with South Africa, Botswana, Mozambique, Mauritius, the Comoros, Madagascar and Namibia all having voted. The elections in our region threw up a variety of outcomes, some encouraging, such as Botswana's, and some distressing, such as Mozambique's. The following links provide an overview of the rather uneven state of democracy here at the southern end of Africa.

Firstly, an article that explores why in so many countries, not least South Africa, former liberation movements that went on to become governing parties have fallen out of favour with voters.

<https://tinyurl.com/yymx2s95b>

One of the biggest shocks, but also one of the best examples of adherence to democratic values, came from **Botswana** at the end of October, when the Botswana Democratic Party, in power since independence in 1966, went from an outright majority to just four seats. President Mokgweetsi Masisi garnered much praise for gracefully accepting the outcome and ensuring a peaceful and orderly hand-over of power.

<https://www.news24.com/citypress/voices/mmusi-maimane-democracy-works-lessons-from-botswana-20241111>

<https://tinyurl.com/43dnymfv>

<https://www.news24.com/citypress/voices/mondli-makhanya-pretoria-take-note-of-botswana-and-realise-its-time-to-pivot-20241103>

The Indian Ocean country of **Mauritius**, often touted alongside Botswana as one of Africa's economic and political top performers, held elections in November. Disturbingly, the government imposed a social media ban in the days immediately before the polls, a ban it rescinded in the face of public pressure. In the end it was to no avail, as the opposition Alliance for Change took 60 of the 62 seats. As in Botswana, there was a quick hand-over of power.

<https://theconversation.com/mauritius-social-media-shutdown-a-worrying-sign-that-civil-rights-are-slipping-242906>

<https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/c5y3pg0ey99o>

Interestingly, there were high percentage polls in both Botswana and Mauritius, 81 and 79 per cent respectively, indicating a firm belief in the democratic process by voters.

Unfortunately in **Mozambique**, the experience was very different, with the incumbent ex-liberation movement, Frelimo, rigging the election and then violently crushing strong popular resistance. Two months after the polls the situation is unresolved, but there is little sign that democracy will prevail there, as the repression continues.

<https://tinyurl.com/5n6erp8z>

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2024_Mozambican_general_election

The situation in Mozambique drew stronger than usual responses from Catholic leadership, both local and regional. The country's own Bishops called on electoral officials not to "certify a lie", while the Southern African Catholic Bishops' Conference berated "the decision of our government in South Africa to endorse the elections despite such widespread complaints and its speediness in congratulating a party that 'has won' when people on the ground feel that their voices have not been heard".

https://www.fides.org/en/news/75573-AFRICA_MOZAMBIQUE_Presidential_and_parliamentary_elections_Bishops_denounce_irregularities_and_violence

<https://sacbc.org.za/sacbc-reiterate-call-for-authorities-to-address-election-disgruntlement-in-mozambique/>

Other commentators also drew attention to South Africa, and SADC's, failure to take a stand against the undermining of democracy, but the ANC, predictably enough, saw it differently.

<https://www.news24.com/news24/opinions/columnists/phillipdewet/phillip-de-wet-south-africa-and-sadc-are-failing-mozambique-even-by-their-low-standards-20241108>

<https://www.news24.com/news24/politics/ronald-lamola-denies-anc-is-protecting-its-friend-frelimo-ahead-of-more-protests-in-mozambique-20241112>

Finally in this brief survey, **Namibians** went to the polls on 27 November and, thanks to what appears to have been a particularly badly-organised election, some were still voting three days later. Before the elections there had been speculation that SWAPO, the party of liberation, would lose the outright majority it had enjoyed since 1990.

<https://theconversation.com/namibias-game-changing-2024-elections-swapo-might-face-defeat-for-the-first-time-since-independence-in-1990-241723>

<https://tinyurl.com/yc4v2tzip>

However, this was not to be. SWAPO held on to a slim parliamentary majority of 53 per cent, while its presidential candidate, the generally respected Netumbo Nandi-Ndaitwah, earned 58 per cent of the vote. But the chaotic running of the elections has left a pall of smoke hanging over the outcome, even if at this stage it cannot be said that the cause was maliciousness on the part of the electoral commission, as opposed to mere incompetence. Either way, it appears likely that opposition parties will challenge the results in court.

<https://www.dailymaverick.co.za/article/2024-11-28-namibia-poll-slammed-after-after-delays-ballot-shortages-questions-over-id-cards/>

<https://www.namibian.com.na/analysis-namibias-2024-general-elections/>

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