

2014 National Elections



Mozambique political process bulletin



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CNE promises end to hidden results changes

An end to unexplained changes and other discrepancies in the election results has been promised by the National Elections Commission (CNE), following changes to the law and to its own procedures. This should result in tighter control of lower level counts and more explanations of changes made by the CNE.

In a major change with past practice, the final national result will be based on the provincial results and not on the CNE's own count, and any differences with provincial results will be publicly explained.

The issue has plagued Mozambican elections since 1994, with the CNE announcing results which are different from those announced at provincial and district levels. The changes have always been made in secret and without explanation. In the 2009 national elections, 100,000 votes were thrown out without even being mentioned in the CNE's final report. In municipal elections last year, the results for Angoche, Beira and Ribaué announced by the CNE were significantly different from those announced by district elections commissions in those cities, and there has never been an explanation. Inevitably this created distrust.

Many CNE changes to results have been attempts to correct misconduct at lower levels, which party nominees on the CNE refused to allow to become public. For example, in Changara district, Tete, local officials stopped party delegates and observers from entering polling stations. Then at the end of the day, polling stations reported turnouts of more than 100%, with nearly everyone voting for Frelimo. Many of the 100,000 votes excluded in 2009 were believed to be from stuffed ballot boxes. In other cases results sheets (editais) from districts have been destroyed or tampered with. The CNE was left to clean up the mess.

Officially, the provincial result is simply a sum of the district results, and the national count (apuramento nacional) is simply a sum of the provincial results. The CNE also reconsiders all invalid votes (nullos) and accepts some as valid, and these are added to the provincial results. However, at national level the CNE and STAE has always done their own complete count, based on individual polling station results sheets, known as the "interim count" (contagem provisória). Although supposedly interim, it was often used in place of the sum of the provincial results.

The CNE directive agreed on 15 August returns to the position set out in the electoral law: "The

national count is done on the basis of minutes (actas) and results sheets (editais) of the provincial count. The national count prevails, in general, over the interim count."

And in an important commitment, CNE press spokesman Paulo Cuinica told this newsletter: "We cannot use the interim count without explanation. We must have explanations."

The CNE hopes that two other important changes will reduce the potential for discrepancies and misconduct. One change in the electoral law introduced after the negotiation with Renamo is that the polling station staff consists of four members chosen in the normal way, by public competition, plus one each nominated by Frelimo, Renamo, and MDM. The hope is that the presence of opposition party people will prevent the kind of blatant misconduct that occurred in Changara and thus curb at least the crudest ballot box stuffing.

Also, at the request of the parties, the CNE has agreed to give a signed copy of the polling station result sheet (edital) to each of the three party members of the staff, as well as to any party delegates present as in the past. This will be an important check on the improper changing of results, as happened in Gurué last year. At least Frelimo and MDM hope to do their own count of all 17,000 polling stations based on those editais. This will provide a check on attempts to improperly change the results at district and provincial level - one of the causes of discrepancies in the past.

In cases where results sheets appear to have been damaged or changed or lost, the election commissions are told to use the official copies which have been given to parties.

Finally, the revised electoral law for the first time explicitly allows polling station recounts, which can be called for by election commissions or political parties. This will also reduce discrepancies, because in some cases polling stations have been excluded because of unresolvable errors on the results sheets (which are written by tired staff in the small hours of the morning). Now, instead of being excluded, a recount will be done.

NOTE: One would normally translate "apauramento provincial" as "provincial count" and "contagem provisória" as "provisional count." Provincial and provisional are confusingly close in English, so we have opted for "interim" instead of "provisional".

A detailed report on the 2009 elections is available, in two parts, on
<http://bit.ly/MozElec2009-1a> and <http://bit.ly/MozElec2009-2>

The Portuguese edition of the Bulletin is more detailed, and can be read on
<http://www.cip.org.mz/election2013/> Some English bulletins cover two Portuguese bulletins and have a double number.

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