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Nacala: narrow Frelimo win still in doubt

Frelimo's candidate for mayor of Nacala, Chale Ossufo, won the narrowest of victories with 50.3% of the vote, the Nacala District Elections Commission (CDE) announced on Saturday night.

To avoid a second round, a candidate must have more than half the vote, but the result is still in doubt, and a second round is still possible, for two reasons. First, the CDE result does not correspond to the parallel counts and could be subject to correction. Second, 5% of the votes were invalid (*nulo*) and must be reconsidered by the National Elections Commission (CNE). Historically, Renamo gains more requalified votes than Frelimo, so this could bring Ossufo before 50%.

Could the District Election Commission be wrong?

The CDE result was a surprise, because it gave 700 more votes to Ossufo than two parallel counts, but agreed in other respects with those counts. The table below compares the CDE results to the parallel count by the Electoral Observatory and the preliminary count provided by STAE, the Technical Secretariat for Electoral Administration (which are in close agreement).

	CDE		Elec Obs		STAE	
Mayor						
Chale Ossufo, Fre	22,594	50.3%	21,786	49.6%	21,843	49.3%
Manuel dos Santos, Ren	21,348	47.5%	21,311	48.3%	21,504	48.5%
Assembly						
Frelimo	21,618		21,753		21,389	
Renamo	21,396		21,330		20,824	

The CDE Intermediate Count is done manually, but the individual results sheets (*editais*) are now being computerised by the Provincial Elections Commission in Nampula. The National Elections Commission (CNE) will compare the computerised

result with the one submitted by the CDE. Also observers and parties will be able to compare the computerised editais with their own copies.

There are two reasons to think the CDE may have made an arithmetic mistake. First, the Renamo list for assembly and its mayoral candidate have nearly the same number of votes, close to 21,350. But Chale Ossufo has 976 more votes than the Frelimo assembly list. Where did those extra votes come from? Second, Ossufo's vote differs significantly from the two parallel counts.

Nulos could still tip the balance

Even if the CDE result is correct, the decision on the second round still rests at national level, with the CNE. There are more than 2500 invalid votes (*nulos* – 5% of the total vote) in Nacala, which must be reconsidered by the CNE. This is exactly the same level of nulos as in the 2003 local election. In that election, the CNE considered one-third of those to be valid – and of those, allocated roughly one-third to Frelimo and two-thirds to Renamo. If that happened again, it would be enough to push Ossufo down to 49.8% and dos Santos up to 48%, forcing a second round.

Historically, more revalidated nulos have been assigned to Renamo – perhaps because Renamo has more illiterate supporters who vote with fingerprints, leaving extra marks on the ballot paper.

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Strong hints of fraud on Ilha de Moçambique

There are strong indications of misconduct in half of polling stations in Ilha de Moçambique. In at least 7 polling stations it appears that valid votes for Renamo presidential candidate Gulamo Mamudo were declared invalid (*nulo*). In several polling stations it appears that there was ballot box stuffing. And 14 polling stations closed at 1800 while people were still in the queue.

In the article below, we look in detail at why we are concerned about nulos and ballot box stuffing.

In two polling centres on Ilha, Chembesse with 8 polling stations and Nalia with 6, organised groups of youth went into the polling centres just after 1800, the normal closing time for polls, yelling and demanding that the polling stations close. By law, polling stations must stay open to serve everyone in the queue at 1800, and there were long queues, mainly of older people. But faced with the disruption, all 14 polling stations closed, depriving hundreds of people of their right to vote.

Making Renamo votes invalid

Provisional results for Ilha de Moçambique give the Frelimo mayoral candidate 8176 votes and the Frelimo assembly list a similar 8152 votes, while the PDD candidate for mayor had 84 votes and PPD list for assembly had 110. This is what one would expect, since most people choose the same party for both mayor and assembly. But the Renamo assembly list had 5146 votes, while the Renamo candidate for mayor

had only 4418 – a difference of more than 700. Where did those 700 votes go? We think they were improperly declared invalid.

People vote with either an X or a finger print, and a vote is invalid (*nulo*) if there are marks for two candidates or if the intent of the voter is not clear. In some cases polling station staff are too strict in interpreting the rules, for example calling a ballot invalid when there is a cross on the picture of the candidate instead of in the box. Thus there is a variation in the percentage of ballots considered invalid. Because of this, the National Election Commission (CNE) reconsiders every single invalid ballot paper – and normally accepts some as valid.

There are, however, two ways that polling station staff can act improperly. The first is to simply consider ballots for one party to be invalid when they are not. This is improper, but does no long term harm, because they are later accepted by the CNE. The second, however, is explicitly fraudulent – someone during the counting process has concealed ink and puts an extra finger mark on ballot papers for one party, to invalidate them. We have seen evidence of this in past elections – in a particularly gross example, a whole stack of ballot papers had exactly the same finger print in exactly the same place. (Despite the existence of a fingerprint as evidence, this was never investigated and no one was ever prosecuted.)

Comparing polling stations

The best way to look for indications of misconduct is to compare polling stations in the same school. People from the neighbourhood register to vote at the school in a relatively random pattern. Each 1000 people are assigned to a polling station which is in a classroom in the school, and normally each polling station within the school has a very similar voting pattern. Neighbourhoods will be mostly Renamo, or mostly Frelimo, or half-and-half – and normally the voting results in each polling station in a school will show the same thing. Thus, if one polling station in a school stands out as being dramatically different, it usually indicates something is wrong.

In Ilha de Moçambique, the average for all polling stations was that 8.5% of all ballots were invalid (*nulo*). Of course, there is substantial variation. But 7 polling stations had more than 14% nullos. One polling station had 189 invalid votes (35%) and another had 140 invalid votes (25%), and both had very few votes for Renamo compared to other polling stations in the same schools. That is very suspicious indeed.

Consider two polling stations (505 and 506) at the primary school EPC 16 de Junho, which had unusually high turnouts of 86% and 83%. Average turnout on the Ilha was about 55%, so these are very high. Now compare 506 to the polling station in the neighbouring classroom, 507. It has a turnout of 58%, close to average. In polling station 506, there were 250 extra votes cast, and 200 went to Frelimo. Of course it is possible that the neighbourhood around the school was very unusual and had many people really anxious to vote for Frelimo – but why only those registered in polling station 506 and not those in 507?. Thus, it looks like ballot box stuffing to us. And there is at least one report of an observer seeing polling station staff ticking off names on the register of people who were not there – another indication of ballot box stuffing.

Two schools in detail

Finally, we look at two schools in detail, where we think fraud was committed. First, consider the school EP1 in Jembesse. Our attention is immediately drawn to polling station 542 which has 140 nulos, compared to an average of 28 for the other polling stations in the school. But when we look more closely, we also see something else.

This table compares polling station 542 to the average of five others in the school and to the polling station in the next classroom 543. All but one of the polling stations has about 990 registered voters.

	542	543	average
Total vote	561	496	423
Matata, Fre	338	229	199
Mamundo, Ren	82	216	160
Nulo	140	29	28

If we look at polling station 542, we first see that it has at least 110 nulos more than would be expected, but it also appears that the Renamo candidate Gulamo Mamundo has between 80 and 140 votes fewer than we would expect. That looks very suspiciously like a large number of votes for Mamundo were invalidated,

But there is more. This polling station had a much higher turnout than the other schools – 140 more than average. And if we look at the Frelimo candidate Alfredo Matata, we see he has 139 more votes than average. That looks very suspiciously like ballot box stuffing, with an extra 140 votes being given to Frelimo.

Of course, none of this is proof. But polling station 542 stands out as being different from all the others in the school, and thus is highly suspect. It seems very likely that votes for Renamo were made invalid and extra votes given to Frelimo.

A table with all the polling stations of EP1 Jembesse is posted on our websites, <http://www.cip.org.mz/pub2008/> and http://www.cip.org.mz/pub2008/index_en.asp

The polling station with the highest number of nulos in the Ilha was 522 at EP1 Tocolo, which had an incredible 189 nulos. Compare it to its neighbour station 521. Each has 993 registered voters.

	522	521
Total vote	540	443
Matata, Fre	251	205
Mamundo, Ren	74	181
Nulo	189	24

Again we see 100 extra voters and 50 extra voters from Frelimo, while there are a huge number of nulos and 100 fewer votes for Renamo. It does not seem reasonable.

Comment

Of course comparisons between polling stations are not proof. (Although finger prints on invalidated ballot papers would be.) Instead, we can only point to places where it is highly likely that fraud occurred and that it was not noticed by inattentive party delegates.

We have published a paper on the website of the prestigious London School of Economics which uses this type of analysis on the 2004 national election, and

concludes that such wide discrepancies between polling stations are highly unlikely to occur by accident. It is much more probable to be intentional fraud. The paper is "Identifying Fraud in Democratic Elections: a Case Study of the 2004 Presidential Election in Mozambique", by Joseph Hanlon and Sean Fox:

<http://www.crisisstates.com/download/wp/wpSeries2/wp8.2.pdf>

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