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Analysing elections results and electoral dynamics in Sofala

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A few months ago, STAE published on its website¹ the results of the 2009 elections up to district level. This happened more than 2 years after the elections and is thus inexplicably late, given the fact that the transformation of the results databases in STAE to a publishable format is not an extremely complex endeavour. In previous electoral cycles it also took unnecessarily long to publish detailed results.

It is a very welcome innovation that the STAE website now gives access to results from all elections (general and municipal) since 1994. This simply did not exist before. The 1994 results were, like all subsequent election results, published in the official gazette (*Boletim da República*), but the detail never goes below the provincial level for general elections (President and Parliament) and aggregated results for the municipal elections. Yet, for the 1994 elections there was a hard copy publication of the results² up to the level of each polling station (*mesa*). This publication must still be available in some libraries (public or private), but it is certainly hard to get to and a printed set of results is just not friendly for analysis. The 1999 and 2004 results were published on a CD-Rom. For 1999 the lowest level of detail is not the individual polling table, but the aggregation per polling location (typically the aggregated results of all the polling stations in one school). The 2004 results are the most complete in electronic format as they disaggregate up to polling station level. For 2009 this was not continued. The results are published up to district level, which omits a lot of detail. Per district the result sheets repeat multiple times the name of one party (legislative) or candidate (presidential), but it is not clear what level of aggregation each sub-result has. If one wants to know how many votes, or what percentage of the votes a party/candidate obtained in a certain district one needs to manually add up the different imputations for each.

The fact that there is no consistency in how the results are presented over the various electoral processes complicates analysis of the data that identifies and explains trends in voting behaviour. The analysis of election results over time remains a very labour intensive, artisanal job that on its turn is subject to mistakes. This is also due to the fact that results are only in pdf format and can thus not be "worked" directly for quantitative analysis.

Besides that, there are also numerical errors (the sum of different candidates gives more than 100% of valid votes; or the number of registered voters is not correct). Still for 2009, the results for Zambezia (district level) are missing for presidential as well as legislative elections. This points to two insufficiencies: i) a lack of rigour and a certain sloppiness in the publication of results and ii) it is not clear what stage of the tabulation process one looks at (district; provincial or national). That means it is not clear if the results include revaluated votes and corrections made at provincial and national level.

The publication of data is laudable, but it needs to be made consistent over time and it needs explanatory chapters on the organization of the data. It would of course be helpful, also for the transparency of the process in general, that the full (up to polling station level) publication of election results is compulsory by law³.

A second remarkable fact is that no one really seems to care. There is no public pressure by media, civil society or academia on CNE and STAE to publish the results. Indeed, the publication of the results on STAE's website went entirely unnoticed by the media. Detailed results may not be considered of direct interest to a broad public, but there is most certainly interest in academic analysis and the completion of time series⁴, and the bottom line is that the choice to consume the information or not remains better with the user than the provider. In other words, a lack of public interest is no excuse to publish results late or only partially. Public interest can also be stimulated by the availability of good quality data.

Besides a striking lack of public interest, there is the even more stunning absence of political pressure. Parties and candidates did not insist at all to have these data published. Not previously and not this time. One can assume that Frelimo does not publicly call to see the data published because they have data (either STAE or party based) to analyse their electoral performance, but the opposition parties and candidates certainly have not. Election results seem like an obvious indicator of where ground has been gained or lost and subsequent internal qualitative analysis could inform why this happened. One would think that Renamo has an interest in analysing in as much detail as possible where they took losses, or that MDM

would like to know where they have made incursions and where not and why.

Political or electoral strategizing by parties seems to be perception-based rather than evidence-based, which does point to an immature political party landscape (except for Frelimo). The analysis of electoral performance can show where loss or progress has been made in the past, but also where potential seems to exist for the future. Opposition parties that work with scarce resources and thus need to make critical choices to allocate funds could use an analysis of electoral results to inform their strategy.

Now, what can the election results tell us and what not?

- Trends in the results can be analysed in relative and absolute numbers in a time series for one party/candidate or by comparing the changing proportional strength of different parties/candidates in a certain area.
- Trends in the number of registered voters can be analysed, and these can on their turn be compared with data from the population census of 1997 and 2007. Going through some data it can easily be observed that the number of registered voters is not changing at the same pace everywhere. It can go from a downward trend to a tripling of registered voters between two elections.
- Trends in participation and thus abstention at national, provincial and district level (and below until 2004) can be measured and compared. This is a crucial measure, not only because it points to the degree that citizens engage in the political process, but it can also reveal anomalies that can reveal fraud.
- Trends can be analysed and geographical comparisons can be made of the null and invalid votes.
- Data can be compared between different elections, or how do presidential candidates perform compared to their parties in the legislative elections. A comparison between general and provincial elections in 2009 is purely theoretical because of the absence or partial participation of opposition parties.

1. www.stae.org.mz The website does not specify when the results were uploaded.

2. The results were published under editorial supervision of Brazão Mazula who headed the CNE for the 1994 elections, but it was a private publication and not an official publication by CNE or STAE.

3. This could be a part of more comprehensive reporting by CNE on all other aspects of the electoral process (compliance with legislation and its challenges, cost of elections, civic education, logistics, training, etc.). Only the CNE that administered the 1994 elections published such a report. Since then, there has been no official and publicly available reporting on elections.

4. Cartografia eleitoral by Luis de Brito, see http://www.iese.ac.mz/?__target__=rec_cart

Table 1 – Dominant party by district

	1994	1999	2004	2009
BEIRA	Renamo	Renamo	Renamo	MDM
BUZI	Renamo	Renamo	Renamo	Frelimo
CAIA	Renamo	Renamo	Renamo	Renamo
CHEMBA	Renamo	Renamo	Renamo	Frelimo
CHERINGOMA	Renamo	Renamo	Renamo	Frelimo
CHIBABAVA	Renamo	Renamo	Renamo	Renamo
DONDO	Renamo	Renamo	Renamo	Frelimo
GORONGOSA	Renamo	Renamo	Renamo	Frelimo
MACHANGA	Renamo	Renamo	Renamo	Frelimo
MARINGUE	Renamo	Renamo	Renamo	Frelimo
MARROMEU	Renamo	Renamo	Renamo	Frelimo
MUANZA	Renamo	Renamo	Renamo	Frelimo
NHAMATANDA	Renamo	Renamo	Renamo	Frelimo

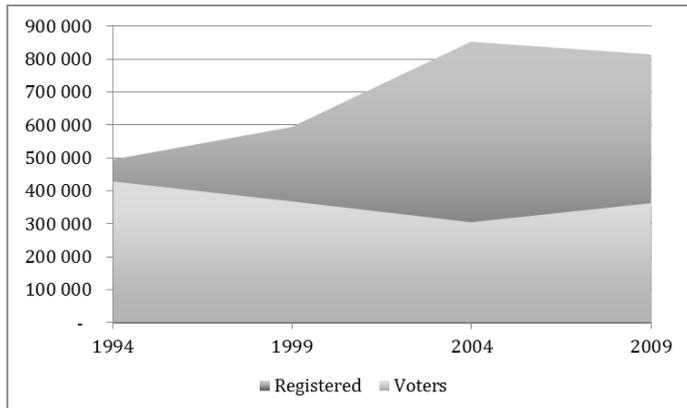
What cannot be done is the identification of the reasons or causes for certain changes. Did changes in poverty levels influence results? Does economic activity (sugar, tobacco, mining) have any relation with election results? Is party activism and leadership a determining factor? These and other drivers of voting behaviour need to be identified by qualitative analysis carried out in different areas. But the quantitative analysis of the existing data needs to indicate where the qualitative can take place and what the research hypothesis can be.

Electoral dynamics in Sofala

The most striking electoral dynamic in Sofala since 1994 is the fact that Renamo (alone or in coalition with smaller parties in the Electoral Union) lost its overwhelming majority in 2009. For three consecutive general elections Renamo was the dominant party in all 13 districts of the province. In 2009, Renamo kept a narrow margin in Caia and still a comfortable margin in Dhlakama's home district of Chibabava. MDM took over the lead in Beira and Frelimo won a majority in the 10 other districts of Sofala.

If one looks more carefully at the trends over time there are two different dynamics that lead to the change. One is that Renamo has lost electorate in every election since 1994. More dramatically so in 2009, but still, the trend is one of a gradual erosion of the party's electoral support. Frelimo did not gain ground in a gradual way. Frelimo's progress in Sofala is mainly due to a sudden jump in 2009. Before that, almost no or only slow progress was made (see chart 1). The trend is even more emphasized when looking at the presidential candidates. In 1999 and 2004, Dhlakama scored considerably better than his party, but the loss is even more

Chart 1 – Renamo and Frelimo votes in Sofala



37.7%; 2004: 63.9%; 2009: 55.2%), but that is entirely due to the known distortion in the in the registration data for 2004.

2004 was the only general election carried out without a new voter registration.

Instead the existing voter register was updated. Yet the register could only be updated with new voters and transfers, but the fact that there was no consolidated national register (but rather 11 provincial registers), transfers stayed registered twice and there was also no way to delete deceased voters. This means that abstention in 2004 was in reality closer to the 2009 abstention rate.

Nevertheless, besides the turnaround in the political balance of power that took place in 2009, the sharp increase in the abstention is certainly the other major electoral dynamic in Sofala, despite the fact that it is the most competitive province in electoral terms. As a result of the high abstention Frelimo can become by far the most dominant political force in Sofala with the support of 20% of the registered voters

If we compare the provincial increase in registered voters with the changes at district level between 1994 and 2009, 4 districts show an increase that is well over the provincial average (x1,6): Muanza (x3,1), Gorongosa (x2,8), Caia (2,5) and Marromeu (2,4). If we look at participating voters the increase is strongest in Muanza (x1,9), Gorongosa (x1,4) and Caia (x1,3). Although Caia makes good progress in both registration and participation it is consistently the district with the lowest levels of participation in all consecutive elections. An odd case is Muanza that has among the lowest participation rates in 1999 and 2004, but the highest in 2009. It is one of three districts where Frelimo quintuples its votes be-

dramatic and outspoken in 2009. On Frelimo's side there was and is notable difference between the party and the presidential candidate.

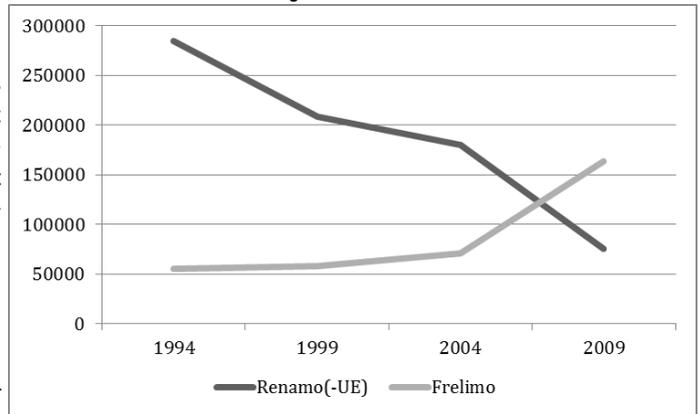
The number of voters dropped considerably between 1994 and 2004, but more citizens went to vote in 2009 than in 2004.

This trend is even more pronounced when we look at the national abstention rates (1994: 12.9%; 1999:

tween 2004 and 2009 (Chemba and Maringue are the other two districts where Frelimo multiplies its voters by 5 in 2009). In Maringue, historically closely linked to Renamo, Frelimo got 87% of the votes in 2009. At the same time Renamo lost 90% of its electorate in that district. In Beira Frelimo makes in comparison with other districts the least progress, but after having scored around 32.000 in the previous 3 general elections it still increases its votes to 48.000 or 50% more in 2009.

And how did MDM perform? It wins a majority in Beira with 55000 votes, a 1000 more than Renamo scored in 2004 and it makes an incursion along the Beira Corridor (Buzi, Dondo, Nhamatanda) where it takes over 20% of the opposition vote. In the southern district of Machanga MDM becomes the main opposition party. On an aggregated level in the province MDM and Renamo score the same (around 75000 votes), but MDM with 75% of their votes coming from Beira.

Chart 2 – Registered voters and turnout



Now what these figures do not explain is the how and why of the changes. There are assumptions that can be made, but there is no research as yet that explains and substantiates the changes. Did Renamo lose almost ¾ of its electorate in 15 years time because it did not construct a credible opposition, or did it lose its support because of the lack of party organization and activism at local level (and is that a consequence of lack of financial resources or political dedication or both, or are there other reasons)? And how did Frelimo manage to mobilize around 90000 voters more in 2009 than in 2004? The increase itself is larger than the voters they mobilized in any of the previous elections (65000 to 75000). What changed in the party's presence and activism in the districts after 2004? Notably, the remarkable electoral progress happens at the same time that the national poverty survey show a strong raise in poverty in rural Sofala. Frelimo's national policies did not seem to have benefited the Sofala electorate, on the contrary. If not that, than what drove the 90000 to go out and vote Frelimo? Again, is this the result of party activism and/or resources?

These and other questions merit further research to clarify how political micro behaviour and macro behaviour influence voting behaviour.