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If statistics don't lie, why are there those who dare to use them to manipulate elections?

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Introduction

The public revelation of the unjustifiable errors in the provincial projections of the Mozambican population of the National Statistics Institute (INE) and the denunciation of the scandalous distortions of the forecasts for the electorate in 2019, by the Electoral Administration Technical Secretariat (STAE) (Francisco, 2019a, 2019b) achieved a sui generis and unprecedented reaction. In less than a month, after the beginning of the polemic spreading across the media and the social networks, the INE and the CNE did not resist the media pressure and found themselves forced to go public to try to rescue their weakened reputation.

Having contributed towards publicising the inconsistencies found in the data of the INE and of STAE (Francisco, 2019b), it is with a feeling of frustration that I have witnessed the two bodies responsible for the official count of the population of voting age exacerbating their divergences and strengthening suspicions. This article takes up again the idea expressed in IDEIAS 113 (Francisco, 2019b) that statistics don't lie, but there are those who use them to manipulate elections, as from their own forecasts of the universe of voters and the targets for the voter registration held between 15 April and 30 May this year.

Beyond the Parade of Egos in Suits and Ties

Last week, both the INE and the CNE went public with separate declarations, in defence of their respective data, trying to devalue the reliability of the other institution's data, in a style which looked more like a parade of egos in suits and ties. The spokespersons of both institutions showed that they were more concerned in appealing to the authority of the mandate conferred upon them than in showing convincingly the reliability of their statistics. The press conferences given separately were at the least surprising for ordinary citizens and for analysts used to seeing a minimum of institutional coordination between public bodies. Up until last May, the National Elections Commission (CNE) declared that the basis of its forecasts were the official statistics of the INE. So what happened so that the INE appeared in public distancing itself from the numbers divulged by STAE/CNE?

The first surprise occurred on 11 July, with the publication of a simple, but revealing statistical table on the INE web page (<http://www.ine.gov.mz>). This table, entitled "Percentage of the Population aged 18 years and above by Province", shot down the claim by STAE /CNE that the population aged 18 and above in Gaza, in 2019, would account for about 80% of the total population of that province. It also added the following sub-title: "Information Transmitted to STAE and to the Bodies of the CNE, by the Governing Body of the National Statistics System (Sent to STAE on 25 May 2019)". The INE thus made known its rejection of the CNE data published in the CNE decision 88/CNE/2019 of 23 June. It also made clear that the

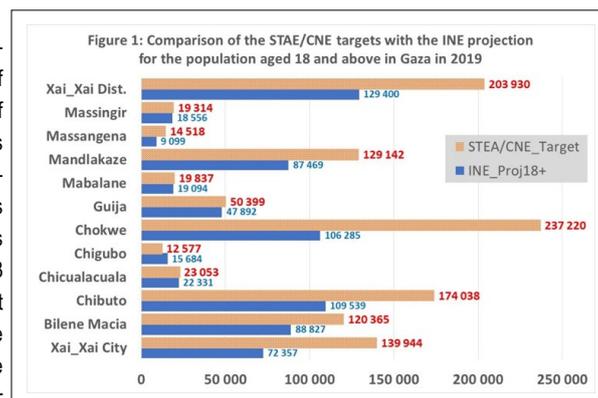
in 2040 will Gaza province reach the number of people aged 18 and above which the CNE forecast for 2019.

Faced with such ridicule coming from the official statistical authority of the Mozambican state, the CNE had no way of escaping from making a public statement. It did so on 19 July, through its spokesperson, Paulo Cuinica. At a press conference, Cuinica simply declared that the numbers from the voter registration in Gaza are reliable, but he did not give any technical explanation. In an awkward imitation of the INE spokesperson, Cuinica refused to comment on the divergences from the official statistics which, as Figure 1 and the following figures in this text show, reveal very strange options.

What was Cuinica's justification for the numerical forecasts of STAE? That they derived from procedures based on the Mozambican electoral legislation and were approved "by consensus" at district and provincial levels. This latter declaration was immediately refuted by a Renamo-appointed member of the CNE, Fernando Mazanga, who told reporters that his group did not see itself reflected in the voter registration numbers and that CNE had not yet met in plenary to discuss the matter in question. All this shows how technical incompetence, mixed with shameless lying, become serious and lamentable disrespect for citizens and for potential voters.

Explanatory Press Conferences? Quite the Contrary!

What conclusion can we draw after the press conferences of the INE and the CNE? We are more puzzled than a month ago. On the one hand, the INE opted to say nothing about the inexplicable "986,000 ghosts" (INE, 2011), shown by IDEIAS 113 of IESE. On the other hand, the CNE preferred not to respond to the letter to the INE; it avoided revealing if it had resorted to some of the identifiable errors in its statistical data base. While it is true that in the INE projections, the CNE forecast for 2019 will only be reached in 2040, it is no less true that the number forecast for 2040 (1,225,109) appears wrongly at the start of the projection of 2007.



population projections for 2019 are based on the data from the 2017 Census and were transmitted to STAE/CNE on 25 May 2019; that is, in good time for the CNE, if it wanted, to be able to avoid the suspicions of statistical manipulation which it caused when it validated the data from the voter registration.

Not satisfied with the information published on its web page, the INE then went to the public, through the programme "Linha Aberta" of the television station STV, to express its willingness to clarify any doubts about its data and methodology, which are consistent with the international methodology used by the United Nations (UN). The following day, 17 July, the INE also held a press conference, at which it reaffirmed, in the most categorical way what the technical staff had put forward the previous day. These declarations proved devastating for the credibility of the CNE, in ridiculing the numbers of STAE, with statements such as the following: "We can't explain it, Gaza goes beyond all demographic theories"; or also, that in accordance with the INE projections for the period 2007-2040, only

The CNE spokesperson was prudent in not trying to return the ridicule offered by the INE, taking refuge in a supposed speculative alchemy, allegedly sustained by the procedures of the electoral law. It would be easy to show that the above-mentioned mistake in the data base, among others of lesser importance, did not affect the estimate for 2019 (INE, 2011). Hence it would have been imprudent and risky to arouse attention to the main source of the estimates of the population aged 18 years and above in 2019 that STAE deliberately used and conveniently refuses to explain.

The main point of divergence between the INE data and those of STAE does not begin with the count of registered voters in the recent voter registration. The discord goes back to the forecast of the electoral universe, even before the INE made available the data it says it sent to STAE/CNE on 25 May. Furthermore, the main divergences are not in the national aggregate data where the differences are negligible. The major divergences are found between the provincial and district projections of the INE and the targets set by STAE, or the population of voting age registered in 2019.

Let us look at some illustrative examples of the possible location of the "ghost" voters in several districts of Gaza and Sofala, in a clear contrast with the targets for Zambezia province which were underestimated by STAE.

Scandalous targets in Gaza, Zambezia and Sofala districts

a) Ghost voters in Gaza districts

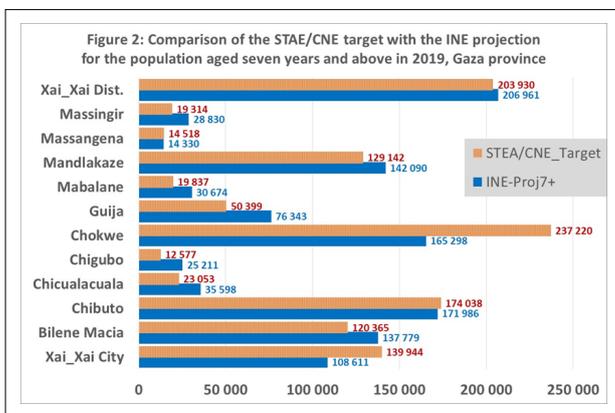
Gaza province has become the main centre of the polemic, as we see that the STAE targets are significantly higher than the INE projections for 2019 (Figure 1). In Chokwe district, the target is more than double (223%) the INE's projection; in Xai-Xai city it is almost double (193%); in Chibuto it is more than 1.6 times (159%) as large and in Mandlakaze 1.5 times (148%) as large. In the group of three districts included in the designation "Xai-Xai district" (Limpopo, Chongoene and Mapai), both Limpopo and Chongoene had targets more than 1.5 times greater (158%) than the INE projection.

As incredible as it may seem, as figure 2 shows, the STAE/CNE targets for Gaza would only be justified in the INE projections, if the electoral law were to stipulate that the population eligible to vote in Gaza included the entire population aged seven years and above. Even so, note in figure 2 that the STAE target for Chokwe exceeds by more than 70,000 the figure for the population aged seven and above projected by the INE for this district.

b) The Contrast with the STAE targets in Zambezia

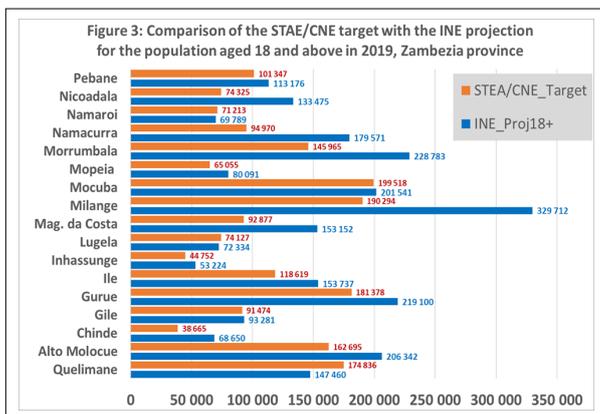
Unlike the excessive targets in Gaza, for Zambezia, STAE went in the opposite direction. It set targets which

excluded about 400,000 people from the electorate, who were envisaged in the INE projection for 2019. This is visible in Figure 3, where practically all the districts show INE estimates above the STAE targets for voters to be registered in that province. Milange district in particular stands out, with 1.7 times more people estimated by the INE (329,712 people) than the STAE target of 190,294.



c) What can be said about the STAE target in Beira?

Given the lack of space to present more illustrative examples of how the STAE targets diverge significantly from the INE estimates, I shall refer to just one more case. While the STAE targets for most districts in Sofala province are similar to the INE projections, for some unexplained reason STAE fixed a target for the city of Beira with almost 90,000 potential voters more than the 260,000 people of voting age estimated by the INE. Why does STAE not think it worth revealing how it reached the target of 349,990 voters that it fixed for Beira?



Concluding note

Presenting more illustrative examples of the divergences between the provincial forecasts of STAE and the INE estimates is scarcely necessary. It is not by chance that the CNE spokesperson, at the press conference mentioned above, took refuge in the allegation that the data derived from procedures in conformity with the Mozambican electoral law and in a supposed "consensus" at district and provincial level, instead of the verifiable methods and techniques used by the INE.

The recently published Bulletin no. 35 of CIP (2019) draws attention to the importance of the manipulation of the voter registration, taking examples precisely from the two abnormal provinces mentioned above: in Gaza the target was exceeded by 137%, while in Zambezia the target was only 77% of the INE estimate, based on the data of the 2017 census. As is also shown above, the discrepancies between the estimates of the INE and the forecasts of STAE are still greater in regard to the recent review by the INE of the population aged 18 and above in 2019: 158% in Gaza and 84% in Zambezia.

The examples presented confirm the revelation of the CIP Bulletin (2019) and of the paper "A Verdade" (<http://www.verdade.co.mz/tema-de-fundo/35/68884>), concerning the Gaza districts where the "ghost" voters are concentrated. In this note it was decided not to compare the STAE targets with the records of voter registration, because it is fundamental not to forget that the statistical divergences result from the option by STAE to ignore the INE estimates. If this were not the case, the CNE/STAE should be better able than the INE to demonstrate it.

The members of the CNE who defend the reliability of their data, in contrast with some of their peers, certainly will not guarantee the reliability of their numbers based on procedures emanating from the electoral law. This being so, what does the recent appeal by the Minister of State Administration, Carmelita Namashulua, mean when she called on the INE and CNE to find "a point of equilibrium"? What is the point of equilibrium between lies and the truth? What common denominator can balance statistical techniques and a speculative alchemy inspired by procedures of the electoral law?

Answering the question in the title: until proof to the contrary, it is visible that there are those who remain committed to using statistics to lie deliberately and to manipulate the electoral process. If they are not imbeciles, they are people who are sufficiently unscrupulous that they do not care about endangering the credibility of the presidential, parliamentary and provincial elections scheduled for the coming 15 October.

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