



ELECTION • TALK

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POLITICAL VIOLENCE AND INTIMIDATION SOFALA: A CAUSE FOR CONCERN?

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With the Mozambique elections just around the corner, the long-standing conflict between the ruling FRELIMO and opposition, RENAMO, appears to have particularly manifested itself in the opposition stronghold of Sofala province. Political competition has intensified since RENAMO, for the first time, claimed Beira, Sofala's municipal centre and second largest city in Mozambique, in the local government elections last November. Despite commendable success in building peace and reconciliation in the country, over the past two months, reported cases of political violence in several districts throughout the province, bring into question the prospects for stability in Sofala in the run-up to the general election of December this year. For the purposes of this brief discussion, it is imperative to highlight the nature of the accusations from the warring parties, which appear to have surrounded RENAMO leader, Afonso Dhlakama's, visit to Sofala in early April.

Reports in the Maputo daily newspaper, "Noticias", refer to beatings, house breaking and random shootings, allegedly perpetrated by former RENAMO guerrillas in the Maringue district¹. According to official news agency, AIM (Agencia de Informacao de Mocambique), "RENAMO's illegal "security force" in Maringue, beat up a local FRELIMO leader, burnt down his home, and took him prisoner"². In addition to reports by the Maringue district administrator that FRELIMO's offices had been set on fire and their flag burned by RENAMO men, the newly formed PPD (Party for Peace and Democracy) "also saw its flagpole knocked down."

Incidentally, PPD leader, Raul Domingos, is a former member of RENAMO "expelled from the party in 2000"³. The potential of Maringue as a political hotspot for conflict should, perhaps, not be underestimated. The district has long been a base for RENAMO's security force, having housed the party's military headquarters toward the end of the civil war⁴. Despite the demobilisation and disarmament of RENAMO troops following the 1992 General Peace Agreement, RENAMO retained their Maringue force and have refused to incorporate them into the Mozambican police force, preferring that they answer to RENAMO, as opposed to the police command⁵. One government statement

alleges that Dhlakama has urged citizens in six of Sofala's districts to contact him should they feel that local administrators or police are "committing abuses" so that he can send his "security men to seize" them⁶.

On the one hand, it is essential to be aware of possible bias, particularly toward the ruling party, in reports of the alleged incidents. RENAMO's justification for their actions is that they have merely acted in response to "FRELIMO provocation"⁷ and have accused the government of deliberately trying to "discredit Dhlakama prior to...elections"⁸. Moreover, although denied by the ruling party, FRELIMO has been accused of buying voters' cards in Sofala. Dhlakama is adamant that those affected are supporters of RENAMO⁹.

The effects of this conflict could have the potential to be the most detrimental in Marromeu district, which, since the local government elections of 2003, has seen the co-habitation of a RENAMO mayor and a FRELIMO majority in the municipal assembly. In issue no.9 of *Election Talk*, Siteo provided an interesting analysis of the 'forced co-habitation' in Marromeu, speculating upon the survival of this very scenario given the historical antagonism between the two parties. One cited incident was of Dhlakama ordering his men to beat up a police officer and two security guards who

¹ 'Renamo Armed Men Accused of New Terror in Maringue', *AIM (Agencia de Informacao de Mocambique)*, Maputo, April 20, 2004, www.allafrica.com

² 'Sofala Governor Accuses Renamo of Terrorism', *AIM*, Maputo, April 23, 2004, www.allafrica.com

³ 'Renamo Armed Men Accused of New Terror in Maringue', *AIM*, Maputo, April 20, 2004, www.allafrica.com

⁴ 'Frelimo Denies Buying Voters' Cards', *AIM*, Maputo, April 9, 2004, www.allafrica.com

⁵ 'Renamo Armed Men Accused of New Terror in Maringue', *AIM*, Maputo, April 20, 2004, www.allafrica.com

⁶ 'Government Reacts to Renamo Violence', *AIM*, Maputo, April 27, 2004, www.allafrica.com

⁷ Fernando Mbararano, cited in 'Sofala Governor Accuses Renamo of Terrorism', *AIM*, Maputo, April 23, 2004, www.allafrica.com

⁸ Fernando Mazanga, *Diario de Mocambique*, cited in 'Government Reacts to Renamo Violence', *AIM*, Maputo, April 27, 2004, www.allafrica.com

⁹ 'Frelimo Denies Buying Voters' Cards', *AIM*, Maputo, April 9, 2004, www.allafrica.com

had been sent to escort the RENAMO leader, at his own request, during his April visit to Marromeu¹⁰. Regardless of the degree of truth in the above allegations, they serve to bring to the fore the on-going conflict between the two parties. Moreover, so long as RENAMO security forces remain so actively involved in the province, they may well serve to undermine law and order, and local government authority. This is particularly so given the numerous speculations that orders to carry out the attacks, and incitement of “civil disobedience” amongst the local people, have come from Dhlakama himself¹¹.

As a long-established opposition stronghold, RENAMO’s concern to see a continuation of their influence in Sofala is nothing new. However, their recent claim on Beira in the local government elections has, perhaps, served to raise the political stakes for both parties in the province. Moreover, it may well have boosted RENAMO’s desire to ensure the protection and further consolidation of Sofala. The cause for concern is that the reported incidents of violence serve to highlight both the ongoing distrust between the two main political parties, and the need for continuing efforts to establish a culture of political tolerance in Mozambique. Existence of RENAMO armed forces in Sofala could threaten not only the prospects of a peaceful run-up to the election, but also the possibilities of co-operation between the two parties to ensure a stable political environment in the province.

CIVIL SOCIETY AND THE ELECTORAL PROCESS IN MALAWI

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Since the adoption of a democratic political order in 2004 in Malawi, the impact of the country’s civil society on national political processes has attracted much public debate. The debate has been particularly focused on the context of the electoral process.

In the run-up to the elections of 18 May 2004¹², various civil society organisations have been engaged in a variety of activities including voter education, advocacy for legal and administrative reforms to promote a free and fair election and questioning candidates on their manifestos. In these activities, three features of civil society organisation in Malawi are key to understanding their impact on the democratisation process in the country. The three factors are financial dependence, non-partisanship and ability to facilitate inclusion of marginalised groups in the electoral process.

Funding Autonomy

According to a grouping of NGOs called the Malawi Electoral Support Network (M.E.S.N.) non-governmental organisations were unable to deliver any substantial voter education programmes in relation to the 2004 elections because donor governments and agencies did not provide them with funds for this purpose. MESN was particularly critical of the local mission of the United Nations

Development Funding (U.N.D.P.), the agency which acted as the conduit for a substantial part of donor funding for the elections.

The inability of NGOs to undertake voter education due to lack of donor funding spoke volumes about the limits of the independence of NGOs in Malawi. Part of the reason for the NGO’s predicament was their expectation that the donors would provide the same levels of resources to the NGOs as they had done in the 1994 and 1999 elections. The experience is likely to make the NGOs better prepared for the next elections due in 2009, having discovered that donor funding is variable and never guaranteed. Local NGOs have to start considering ways of funding their election activities, such as voter education and monitoring.

Non-Partisanship

The other debate over the work of civil society organisations in the electoral process has related to their impartiality. Exemplifying this debate has been the argument over whether one of the most influential non-governmental organisations, the Public Affairs Committee (P.A.C.), has been fair. The issue attracted such attention that it deserves to be described in detail.

One of the most serious allegations was made by the U.D.F., the League of Islamic Graduates and some newspapers sympathetic to the U.D.F. Their allegation was that the chairperson of P.A.C.’s Board of Directors, Roman Catholic priest, Boniface Tamani, had delivered a sermon in which he had urged his congregation not to vote for candidates of the U.D.F. in the elections, particularly since their Vice-Presidential candidate was a Muslim. Father Tamani refuted the allegations, saying that all he had done in his sermon was to urge his congregation to scrutinise all candidates, including Vice-Presidential candidates carefully before deciding for whom to vote. Tamani further argued that, in any case, he had delivered the sermon in his capacity as a priest and not as chairperson of P.A.C. Despite the priest’s denials, a local radio station, Radio Islam, broadcast a phone-in programme whose content was described as hate speech by one of the country’s oldest human rights NGOs, the Civil Liberties Committee (C.I.L.I.C.).

The U.D.F. lodged a formal complaint to the Malawi Electoral Commission in which they argued for the removal of P.A.C. from the list of N.G.O.s accredited by the Commission to conduct voter education and election monitoring. At the time of writing, the complaint had not been determined.

Facilitating Inclusion

One of the most notable roles played by civil society in the 2004 electoral process was to encourage participation in the elections by the broadest spectrum of society. Two initiatives were most notable: the first was the effort by a number of non-governmental organisations to improve the participation of women as candidates in the elections.

A coalition of a number of NGOs called the Gender Electoral Support Network (G.E.S.N.) and the Pan-African Civic Education Network (PACENET) were most active in this area. Among other efforts, the two NGOs used various media to encourage women to become candidates; they organised training workshops for those who came forward and encouraged party leaders to include women on their candidate lists.

¹⁰ “Sofala Governor Accuses Renamo of Terrorism”, *AIM*, Maputo, April 23, 2004, www.allafrica.com

¹¹ *Ibid*

¹² These have been postponed until 20 May 2004

Some NGOs have also focused on increasing the inclusion of the poor in the electoral process. The National Democratic Institute (N.D.I.) and others arranged a series of public debates among parliamentary candidates in selected constituencies. At these debates, ordinary members of the public were given the opportunity to question the candidates. Unlike other fora such as radio phone-in programmes and letters' pages in newspapers, the debates provided the opportunity of participation to even the poor who typically own no phones and cannot read or write.

A limited number of N.G.O.s, such as the Malawi Economic Justice Network (M.E.J.N.) promoted inclusiveness in the electoral process by linking it to the concerns of the majority of Malawians, particularly the poor and marginalised. The majority of N.G.O.s, however, did not make this linkage in their advocacy activities, viewing poverty eradication as an undertaking that is separate from elections which are considered as "political."

Conclusion

Civil society in Malawi has played an important role in the electoral process. However, its impact has been limited by the lack of any significant organisation at the grassroots. Civil society is thus dominated by urban-based N.G.O.s whose independence is limited by donor-dependence. Despite their limitations, N.G.O.s have made a significant contribution to the democratisation process by delivering some amount of voter education, providing election monitors and facilitating inclusion in the electoral process of marginalised social groups such as women and the poor.

VOTER TURNOUT IN NAMIBIA 1989-1999

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Healthy democracies are perceived to have citizens who care and who are willing to participate to help shape or influence the common agenda for the society. Democracy, more than any other type of regime creates numerous opportunities for citizens to participate. Of these elections are of great importance. Whilst it is possible to have elections without democracy, it is not possible to have democracy without elections. Yet at least one study on global voter turnout for national and presidential elections suggests that the number of registered voters that actually vote has declined since the 1990's.¹³ The drop in turnout is also significant because it occurred at a time that saw numerous developing countries join the free world.

Average turnout across all regions of the globe that held elections since 1945 seems to converge on a figure between half and three-quarters of the voting age population of any given country.¹⁴ Global turnout is shaped by a number of factors:

- The age of the democratic dispensation. Older democracies have higher turnout than other states although the gap is rapidly closing.

¹³ IDEA, Voter Turnout from 1945 to 1997: A Global Report, IDEA: Stockholm

¹⁴ IDEA, Voter Turnout from 1945 to 1997: A Global Report, IDEA: Stockholm, p. 24

- Turnout is highest in countries with most political rights and civil liberties but has been declining since the 1970's.
- Turnout in new democracies seems to be influenced by their colonial experience. Former Netherlands colonies have the highest turnout followed by former British colonies. Former Portuguese colonies have the lowest turnout.
- On average, democracies that use one of the proportional representation (PR) family of electoral systems have a higher turnout than those using a semi-PR system or plurality/majoritarian.
- Countries with a literacy rate of more than 95% have a higher turnout than those in which the rate is below 95%.
- Those countries with a higher ranking on the Human Development Index (HDI) have higher turnout than those with lower end rankings.
- Turnout is higher in countries with more competitive political systems, or conversely, political systems in which one party wins more than 50% of the overall vote have lower turnout.

This article reviews the dominant trends with regard to voter turnout in Namibia since the first democratic elections in 1989. It concerns itself primarily with national elections – i.e. National Assembly elections.

Turnout Statistics

Turnout is usually presented as a percentage of registered voters. This figure thus deliberately excludes citizens of voting age that are not registered. Further distortions of this figure are caused by inaccurate registration lists. Thus another way to calculate turnout is to present turnout as a percentage of voting age population (VAP). This figure is usually lower (and in some cases much lower) than the first and hence, politically more controversial. It is also more difficult to calculate accurately if recent and reliable census data is not available. Hence, Table 1 presents turnout as a percentage of registered voters.

As is to be expected, the turnout for the founding elections in 1989 was exceptionally high. Notwithstanding high election fever, turnout was inflated by concerted efforts to ensure that the process was fair and that all could vote. This included a substantial number of potential voters no longer resident in Namibia. These were transported from various locations within South Africa to polling stations close to the border. These voters could not vote in subsequent elections.

Table 1: Turnout in Regional and National Elections

Election	Type of Election	Voter turnout
1989	National	
1992	Regional	81.37
1994	National	52.36
1998	Regional	38.26
1999	National	58.09

Table 1 also shows that the election fever lasted another two years until the regional elections of 1992. Since then, turnout has declined, especially at the regional level. At the national level Namibia's turnout conforms to the global trends (between one half and three quarters of VAP).

Trends

If the founding elections are omitted from the elections (for reasons mentioned above) several interesting trends are

observed since the first regional elections in 1992.¹⁵ On average for the years 1992 to 1999:

- Regional elections using a plurality electoral system produced a higher mean turnout.
- Regions that were fully within the colonial militarised zone have higher turnout than other regions.
- Regions in which the winning party obtained on average more than 50% of the vote have a higher turnout than those regions in which the winning party obtained less than 50% of the overall vote. Thus, less competitive regions have higher turnout.

Conclusion

Although Namibia falls within the international parameters for turnout for national elections, it does seem to be a peculiar case. It shows atypical turnout trends with regard to the type of electoral system used and the degree of competitiveness. An additional factor that affects turnout is past exposure to militarisation. Since the latter also shapes the degree of competitiveness (more militarised areas are less competitive) these trends suggest that turnout has been highest in parts of the country that are firmly behind the current ruling party. It is thus possible that the weakness of the opposition has something to do with the overall decline in turnout. This points to a vicious circle, in which voters fail to turnout because their party(s) has no real chance of winning. This in turn, weakens their party(s) even more. It is no surprise therefore, that over time the current ruling party managed to win more seats in the National Assembly with less actual votes. This process is likely to repeat itself this year unless the opposition parties manage to increase turnout among their own supporters.

THE ROLE OF POLITICAL RALLIES IN BOTSWANA'S ELECTORAL PROCESS

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Political rallies are one of the conventional techniques used by all political parties in Botswana to sell and distribute their party programmes, and manifestos to drum up support. Political rallies are platforms that do not only bring politics closer to the electorate but also provide the electorate with an opportunity to interact with their possible representatives, ask questions and be able to understand what the different parties stand for. They are one of the avenues for expressing political opinions.

Despite all these opportunities political rallies afford to the electorate, the attendance of political rallies in recent years has been very poor. As a result, the electorate loses that opportunity of understanding the policies of the different parties more so that Botswana Television has been banned from covering "political activities, especially political rallies". One possible explanation for low attendance is that the electorate is generally cynical about politics partly because of the way politicians conduct themselves at political rallies and after they have been voted into office.

The general perception today is that politicians are mainly interested in pursuing their personal interests rather than those of the voters.

Rather than concentrating on the issues contained in their election manifestos at political rallies, rallies are characterised by rhetoric, trading of insults, name calling, and exposure of problems afflicting other parties. Yet there is a lot of ammunition in terms of issues on which they can concentrate. These include amongst others, unemployment, poverty and inequalities; 47% of the population is estimated to be living in poverty while unemployment is put at around 21%. Despite all the above problems facing the country, politicians avoid using political rallies to address issues that closely affect the electorate. Ruling party politicians use rallies to talk about their achievements and what they have done for the country since the party was first voted into office as they identify themselves with successful government projects. They also concentrate on the problems facing the opposition parties yet they do not explain to the electorate how they intend to tackle these challenges. On the other hand, opposition politicians use political rallies to castigate the policies of the BDP and identify its failures. Yet they do not project their programmes as an alternative. One possible explanation for failure to address issues facing the voters is that the electorate does not hold the politicians accountable for these problems and failures.

Of all the key players in this year's general election, only the Botswana Congress Party (BCP) has released its party manifesto. It was launched on 28 February 2004. The BCP manifesto identifies education, jobs and the economy, HIV/AIDS and poverty eradication as its key priorities. The Botswana Democratic Party (BDP) election manifesto will be launched on 25 April 2004 following its National Council and Special Congress. One of the issues to be discussed at that meeting is the election of the party president. So far, only the sitting President Festus Mogae has indicated that he will stand for the party presidency. The other possible contender, Ponatshego Kedikilwe has pointed out that he will not contest the party presidency partly due to pressure from the media, party members and also because he wants to put party unity over personal interest following primary elections which were characterised by factional animosity.

A joint manifesto of the Botswana Alliance Movement (BAM), Botswana National Front (BNF) and Botswana Peoples Party (BPP) is to be released sometime in May 2004 according to an interview with BNF Executive Secretary, on 21 April 2004. The three political parties entered into an electoral pact in 2003. Despite the controversies that surrounded the frail pact regarding the position of the BPP, it seems to be on track. The BPP is now a firmly entrenched member following a Special Congress in March 2004 during which the majority of the delegates decided that they should stay in the pact. The pact seems to be on a good footing after winning one of the four council wards by-elections held on 17 April 2004. The BDP and the BCP won two and one ward(s) respectively. However, it is not clear how the pact is expected to work after the elections. It appears the main focus is upon winning the elections.

¹⁵ Although some might caution against comparing regional and national levels of elections, because one is often considered to be more important than the other, it makes sense to do so, since these are essentially the same voters registered on the same lists but voting under different electoral systems.