



ELECTION • TALK

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MALAWI'S "BOGUS" VOTER STATISTICS

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There has recently been a feud between the Malawi Electoral Commission (MEC) and the National Statistical Office (NSO) over the correct figure for the registered voters in Malawi. During the second week of April 2004, the MEC announced that 6.5 million voters registered for the 18 May 2004 presidential and parliamentary elections. The NSO described the figure as "bogus" because it does not conform to the country's natural demographic trends. "It defies all logic", observed the *Weekend Nation*, one of the country's leading weekly papers. A mathematician and statistician at the Polytechnic, one of the constituent colleges of the University of Malawi, who is also Director of Publicity for the opposition National Democratic Alliance (NDA) described the figure as "absurd and a pointer to [election] rigging". Last year, with assistance from the US Bureau of Census, USAID, and the UNFP, the NSO projected the country's population above 18 years of age at 5.5 million in 2004.

This would constitute the population qualified to register as voters, as the legal voting age in Malawi is 18 years and above. The current population comprises about 12 million people. "Our projections [based on the last (1998/99) national population census] are [that] the population has grown at an average rate of 3.2 per cent", observed the NSO. [*Sic:*] "But if you calculate the average rates at which the Commission's figures are based on, you will find that they are way above the normal population growth rate", the NSO argued. The MEC registered some 5,071, 822 voters for the 1999 general elections. The figure for the 2004 elections suggests an increase of 1 million, despite the fact that some 106,086 registered voters have died in the last five years and have since been removed from the voters' register. To some analysts, including the NSO, these figures do not make much sense, especially if they are broken down into regional distributions. Malawi has three administrative regions: north, centre and south. Slightly more than 50 per cent of the country's population lives in the southern region, and just about 12 per cent in the northern region; and about 38 per cent in the central region. The comparative figures for the registered voters for the 1999 and the 2004 elections, and the NSO population projections for the 18 years and above, are as follows:

Region	Registered Voters		NSO Projections
	1999	2004	2004
North	678,906	924,879	698,094
Centre	1,975,203	2,703,621	2,260,480
South	2,417,713	3,040,339	2,635,507
TOTALS	5,071,822	6,668,839	5,594,081

Source: NSO/MEC/Nation Newspapers

According to the NSO, "why should the northern region, all of a sudden, have over 200,000 [voters] more registered in just five years? In the south, can they [MEC] explain how three million people registered when our projected adult population by June this year is only 2.6 million?" The number of registered voters in the northern region was 678,906 in 1999. It has risen to 924,879 in 2004, representing a 36 per cent increase. In the central region, 1,975,203 voters registered in 1999; 2,703,621 registered in 2004 – another 36 per cent increase. In the southern region, 3,040,339 voters registered in 2004, compared to 2,417,713 in 1999 – an increase of 25 per cent. To many people, the argument is that although an increase was indeed expected, given the natural increase in the country's population, the registration increase is just too high and warrants an explanation. According to the *Weekend Nation* (17-18 April, 2004), "either [the adult] population is unknown or 6.5 million voters are from Mars! Even if the Commission assumes a 100 per cent registration rate – which is not possible even where people get punished for not registering – the 6.5 million figure cannot be accurate. There simply are not that many adults of 18 and above in our country." The statistics feud has increased fears of election rigging. The opposition parties are of the view that "it shows how the ruling party has orchestrated rigging by inflating figures [and] creating polling centres just to increase the number of voters". A critical analyst would argue that if it is at all true that the governing UDF (United Democratic Front) and the MEC are orchestrating rigging, then the current formula may be risky. It has the potential to work against them. The increases in the numbers of the registered voters are

larger (by 36 per cent) in the northern and central regions. The two regions are generally regarded as opposition strongholds. The 25 per cent increase in the southern region may also easily work in the favour of the opposition parties, given that the governing party's candidate and two of the leading contenders in the presidential race are all from the same region. There will be splitting of votes, and the UDF has no guarantee of success in the region. They can no longer bank on the regional-cum-ethno-linguistic bloc vote. The MEC-NSO feud is interesting in many other respects. In 1999, the NSO was criticised by academics and civil society organisations for "inflating" the adult population of the southern region. It was interpreted as a move to facilitate the UDF winning of the elections that year, given that the southern region is viewed as the UDF's stronghold. This time it is the NSO versus the MEC, raising similar concerns. One would argue that at the centre of all these controversies is the integrity of the demographic databases in the country. Whose demographic statistics does one believe: those of the NSO or those of the MEC? Something sounds awfully wrong with Malawi's demographic statistics and databases. Also questionable is the integrity of the MEC as an election management body. Rocked by various accusations and controversies, its professional management of the overall electoral process has become rather suspect and may be challenged after the polls on 18 May 2004

VOTER EDUCATION IN BOTSWANA: TOWARDS 2004 GENERAL ELECTIONS

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Regular, free and fair elections are a central characteristic of representative democracy. Elections give voters an opportunity to choose their leaders for a specified period of time. This implies that there must be reflective choice in elections rather than voting by herd instinct. For that to be the case, voters should possess the voting skills and sufficient knowledge of their political world such that they are in a position to make effective political choice. They must be informed citizens who are able to engage in political debate and to rationally evaluate the performance of their political leaders. This is why voter education is so important in a representative democracy. The purpose of voter education is to promote political awareness and develop the ability of citizens to understand their political world and to participate in large numbers in elections. This briefing note focuses specifically on voter education in Botswana in the run-up to the 2004 elections. In so doing, it will also examine the role of the IEC of Botswana in this process.

Between March 1965 and October 1999, Botswana held eight competitive multiparty elections in succession. Until the establishment of the IEC in 1997, there was no deliberate programme to provide political education to eligible voters. Consequently, voter turnout has been fluctuating quite considerably. For instance, in the 1974 general elections only 31% of registered voters turned up on polling day to vote from a high voter turnout of 74.5% in 1965. Thereafter voter turnout shot up to 77.5 in 1984 and then declined to 68% in 1989. It is partly these fluctuations that have prompted the IEC to launch a robust voter education programme.

The goals of the programme, *inter alia*, are to promote enhanced public appreciation of the need to register and vote in large numbers and to foster understanding and acceptance that voters have responsibility to participate in the democratic governance structures of the country, especially general elections. The voter education programme that the IEC has launched is intended to inform and empower voters with information and knowledge about the processes and procedures of voting. The overarching objective is to create an informed and reflective citizenry. The IEC has devised a multi-faceted communication strategy to reach eligible voters. Besides its own workshops, seminars, meetings with potential candidates, dramas and debates, the IEC has engaged two companies to implement its voter education programme: one for electronic media and another for print media. A considerable array of publicity materials and voter education instruments have been produced – including a stage drama, documentary, T/shirts, posters, car license disk holders, 4 TV Commercials and 7 radio jingles currently played on Radio Botswana 1 and 2, and two private radio stations as well as a weekly political debate programme on Botswana Television called *Matlho-a-Phage* (Direct Fierce Debate).

Despite this enormous effort, a substantial section of the voting population remains apathetic. Evidence on the ground indicates quite clearly that the majority of the electorate is unaware of the existence of the IEC and its functions. More disturbingly, a recently released *Afro Barometer* study shows that only 35% of Botswanas have confidence in the IEC compared to 54% in 1999. Further evidence of entrenched voter apathy in Botswana is indicated by the results of the March 2004 Supplementary Registration figures. The exercise ran from March 13 to March 21, 2004. The IEC had a target figure of 200,000 registered voters at the end of the exercise. Regrettably, the total number of registered voters after the supplementary registration was a paltry 73,400. Equally regrettable is that only 455,260 people out of a total voting population of 850,000, registered to vote in the first registration exercise in August 2003. Furthermore, this exercise ran for two weeks.

A variety of factors explain this worrying trend of voter apathy, of which only two critical factors will be dealt with here. One is the lack of choice for the voters, given a continuously fragmenting opposition. Voters are sick and tired of split after split in the main opposition party, the Botswana National Front (BNF). The BNF has split twice in less than five years: in 1998 and in 2003 resulting in the formation of two new opposition parties, the Botswana Congress Party (BCP) and the New Democratic Front (NDF). These splits weaken the opposition and deprive voters of meaningful choice between the opposition and the ruling party. In other words, the opposition in Botswana is not an alternative government and it is increasingly losing credibility. The second factor is a growing perception amongst informed eligible voters that politicians in Botswana are a self-serving elite seeking power and wealth by hook or crook. Politicians are increasingly viewed as the self-enrichment elite with voter interaction only at the approach of elections. This is partly why they have been referred to as "frogs" and "vultures" by the Vice-President, General Khama.

TENSION-RIDDEN ELECTION CAMPAIGN IN MOZAMBIQUE

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Adam Przeworski defines democracy as a system in which parties lose elections (1991). However, in an important footnote Przeworski adds that the system is said to be democratic not only when parties lose elections, but also when losing is neither a social disgrace nor a crime (1991: 10). David Beetham and Kevin Boyle also contend that "Open competition for government office is socially and politically divisive, and stakes for those involved are usually high". Beetham and Boyle then add, "A condition for democracy's survival, therefore, is that the cost to the losing parties and their supporters of exclusion from office is not insupportable. In particular, they must have confidence in their ability to fight another electoral contest more successfully..."(1995: 10).

The contention of this very brief paper is to argue that the rising tensions and increasing (verbal) violence in election campaigning in Mozambique can also be understood in terms of what Przeworski, Beetham and Boyle are saying. Before elaborating on this point let us consider the latest three examples of (verbal) violent campaigning in the country.

When the Executive, now led by the new Prime Minister Luisa Diogo, was called to Parliament in the first week of April 2004, to answer questions raised by parliamentarians, it became clear that the stakes had risen. Indeed, the degree of violent expressions used by members of Cabinet against RENAMO parliamentarians has never been heard before. Of

course, it is not that FRELIMO parliamentarians usually abstain from using violent expressions against their fellow RENAMO parliamentarians and vice-versa; it's just that Cabinet members used to be essentially polite and tolerant to violent expressions. This time things were different: Cabinet members displayed the old memories of the destruction of infrastructures and the displacement of people that occurred during the war and reaffirmed their belief that it was all the responsibility of RENAMO. In particular, they referred to many of the RENAMO parliamentarians who were at that time, seated before them.

The weekly journal *ZAMBEZE*, directed by the popularly known journalist and civil society activist, Salomão Moyana began its 1 April 2004 edition with the lead story that the leader of RENAMO, Afonso Dhlakama, intends to take a number of FRELIMO's top officials to court. This would take place, according to Dhlakama, should he win the next presidential elections. Interestingly, the officials in question include Joaquim Chissano, the current head of State, Armando Guebuza, the current Secretary-General of FRELIMO and its chosen presidential candidate for the next presidential elections, and Marcelino dos Santos, the first Mozambican vice-president and former Speaker of the Popular Assembly. Afonso Dhlakama made this statement in the city of Beira - one of the four municipalities where RENAMO won in the November 2003 local elections - at a well attended public gathering. Despite the fact that Dhlakama added in that meeting that this action would not originate with him but as a result of popular request, it may be interpreted as an indication of a desire for vengeance or political prosecution.

The weekly journal *DOMINGO*, one of the oldest in Mozambique and integrated in the *NOTICIAS* group that publishes the main daily in the country, opened its editorial in the first week of April 2004, with a critical analysis of events in Nampula. Nampula is generally considered the "capital" city of Northern Mozambique, a region comprising the provinces of Cabo-Delgado, Niassa and Nampula. This city - and the Nampula province in general - is fast becoming well known worldwide by the episodes reported in several European newspapers and internet sites referring to the sale of children and human body parts in Mozambique. The country's Attorney General took this matter seriously and a team of inspectors was duly dispatched to Nampula but was unable to gather sufficient evidence to corroborate the rumours. The police in Nampula came out publicly to denounce the culprits responsible for extracting human body parts for sale, one of whom is alleged to be a RENAMO member. The problem is that since public outrage is mounting against this sordid business (whether real or not), linking RENAMO with it becomes an opportunistic political gamble. So, what do all these

tales of verbal attacks in the pre-election campaigning tell us? Basically that unfortunately for Mozambique's infant democracy, the prospect of losing an election amounts to *insupportable social disgrace* (to use both Beetham and Boyle and Przeworski terms) and neither of the two biggest political parties is prepared to go down that road in the 2004 general elections. In that context everything counts - including the incitement to violence. Will this scenario change in time to allow a peaceful process of election campaigning towards the next general elections?

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POLITICAL HEAT INTENSIFIES AS NAMIBIAN ELECTIONS LOOM

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Towards the end of this year, Namibia will hold its national election as required by the constitution. This will be the country's fourth democratic election, indicating that Namibia will have respected the election cycle which is a significant sign of a consolidating democracy. The election dates for the coming general elections in Namibia were announced in Parliament by the Minister of Local and Regional Government and Housing, Joel Kaapanda. The presidential and parliamentary elections will take place on two separate days, November 15 and 16 respectively, contrary to the new trend in the SADC region where countries increasingly hold dual or tripartite elections on the same day. This decision seems to have been influenced by the belief that when presidential and parliamentary elections are held simultaneously, they tend to create confusion for the voters. Regional Council elections are also planned for 29 and 30 November. Holding so many elections in one month may, perhaps, be less confusing for voters, but there may be a need to assess the impact this extended voting period will have on voter turnout. Experiences in the SADC region where dual or tripartite elections have been held show no sign of widespread confusion among voters. Inadequate planning and poor judgment of Electoral Commissions on the other hand have been the causes of such confusion, if any. In Namibia's case, no serious problems are expected in the management of these elections, as the country's electoral management body represents an impressive case. It has, over the years, continued to administer its elections relatively smoothly using fairly limited resources.

As far as the presidential elections are concerned, the uncertainty over the future of the founding and incumbent President has been put to rest. The ruling

party, Swapo, announced in April that President Sam Nujoma would not stand for a fourth term as many had speculated. The speculation was influenced by numerous unambiguous statements issued by both the party and its leader that demonstrated Nujoma's desire to run again. For example President Nujoma himself, was quoted by Reuters' reporter on March 30, 2004 that he might go for a fourth term "if the people" wanted him to do so." Nujoma seems to be suggesting that "*Vox populi, vox Dei*" (the voice of the people is the voice of God). This declaration was followed by a political march by Swapo's supporters, demanding that President Nujoma should stand for a fourth term. The announcement by Swapo's Central Council (CC) that President Nujoma would retire after his third term must have been precipitated in an attempt to avoid confusion and perpetuate uncertainty. Following this announcement three candidates -- Hidipo Hamutenya, Nahas Angula and Hifikepunye Pohamba, all of whom are ministers, have lined up to replace Sam Nujoma, and are expected to stand for election at the next Swapo's Extraordinary Congress in May. The winner will no doubt represent the party in the coming presidential elections.

It is important to understand that Nujoma's decision to step down might not have been a deliberate one. There is a strong attempt within Swapo to try and remain within the confines of the constitution. It is possible that President Nujoma was faced with the same pressure that Chiluba in Zambia and Muluzi in Malawi encountered within their respective parties when they attempted to seek another term in office beyond the two terms mandated in their countries' constitutions. Whilst Swapo as a party may have respected the country's constitutional requirements, it is facing a harder time following its own. It appears that internal democracy is being put to test as the race for finding Nujoma's replacement is gathering momentum. Already there appears to be tension within the ruling party as Nujoma is clearly giving his support to Hifikepunye Pohamba. As is the norm, outgoing presidents play a key role in choosing their successors. In South Africa, Mandela was instrumental in the choice of the current President Thabo Mbeki and in Zambia, President Chiluba simply handpicked Mwanawasa. The same seems to be happening in Namibia. There is no doubt, Nujoma still commands enough support within the party and among its supporters, to impose a successor. His decision to favour Pohamba, however seems to be influenced by his desire to have a political heavyweight, who will be trusted to continue with the land distribution programme. Nujoma, just as Mugabe in Zimbabwe, would not like to go without a resolution of the land issue. His support for Pohamba can therefore be understood as the Minister of Lands, Pohamba has been outspoken on the issue of land expropriation in accordance with the party policy on land distribution.