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Frelimo majority cut in Niassa

The ruling Frelimo Party and its presidential candidate, Filipe Nyusi, have won last week's Mozambican general elections in northernmost province of Niassa, but with much reduced majorities and on a low turnout.

Slightly less than 50% of Niassa's registered voters cast ballots in the presidential election, and turnout fell to under 44% in the parliamentary election.

Nyusi won 48% in the presidential poll, and was thus outvoted by the two opposition candidates combined. Renamo's Afonso Dhlakama won 44.5%, and Daviz Simango, leader of the Mozambique Democratic Movement (MDM) won just over seven per cent.

The Frelimo vote collapsed, when compared with the 82% of the Niassa vote which the current president, Armando Guebuza, won in the 2009 election. Dhlakama's vote rose very sharply – in 2009, he only won 12.7% in Niassa.

The parliamentary election saw Frelimo win a narrow majority of 50.5%. This means that Frelimo will lose almost half the Niassa parliamentary seats it currently holds.

The Niassa results betray some serious problems. First, many more votes were cast in the presidential than in the parliamentary election.

It is normal, in almost all polling stations, for some voters only to cast ballots for the presidency, and to ignore the parliamentary election. But this is generally a fairly small number of voters. In Niassa, however, almost 20,000 more votes were cast for the president than for parliament, leading to the difference in turnout between the two elections of over three per cent.

Even more serious is the alarmingly high number of invalid votes – 5.6% in the parliamentary election and 7.3% in the presidential election. Normally one would expect around three or four per cent of votes cast to be invalid (because voters have tried to vote for more than one candidate, have failed to make any clear choice, have signed the ballot paper, or have written insults or other words on it).

But when the number of invalid votes reaches five per cent, alarm bells should start ringing. Such a large

number of invalid votes suggests vote tampering – it suggests that dishonest polling station staff have deliberately added marks to ballot papers to invalidate them.

We know this happened in previous elections because it was publicly denounced by the National Elections Commission (CNE) – though nobody was ever arrested for this fraud.

Since 7.3% is the average for invalid parliamentary votes cast across the entire province, in some polling stations it must have been lower, and in others considerably higher. But only an analysis polling station by polling station will reveal exactly where vote tampering took place.

Furthermore, in two Niassa districts illicit attempts to change the results were reported, according to the "Mozambique Political Process Bulletin", published by AWEPA (European Parliamentarians for Africa), and by the anti-corruption NGO CIP (Centre for Public Integrity).

In the provincial capital, Lichinga, on 16 October, the day after the elections, a group of people allegedly came into the city counting centre and replaced the results sheets submitted by polling stations with new ones they had brought. Some staff from the local branch of the Electoral Administration Technical Secretariat (STAE) told observers about this interference.

In the neighbouring district of Chimbonila, local staff said that more senior STAE officials came and tried to change the numbers that had been submitted by polling stations. The law regards such interference as serious crimes, which can be punished with up to eight years imprisonment.

The Niassa Provincial Elections Commission has not taken a decision on these two cases, and it is likely that they will be thrown into the lap of the National Elections Commission (CNE).

The full Niassa results, as announced by the provincial commission, are as follows:

Presidential election

Number of registered voters	615,065	
Number who voted	288,831	
Turnout	46.95%	
Valid votes	249,698	(86.45%)
Blank ballots	22,992	(7.96%)
Invalid votes	16,141	(5.59%)

Candidates (percentages of valid votes)

Filipe Nyusi (Frelimo)	120,818	(48.39%)
Afonso Dhlakama (Renamo)	111,114	(44.5%)
Daviz Simango (MDM)	17,776	(7.12%)

Parliamentary election

Number who voted -	269,899	
Turnout	43.88%	
Valid votes	224,691	(83.25%)
Blank ballots	25,604	(9.49%)
Invalid votes	19,604	(7.26%)

Parties (percentages of valid votes)

Frelimo –	113,496 (50.51%)
Renamo -	91,743 (40.81%)
MDM -	18,105 (8.06%)

These figures do not add up to 100%, because the many minor parties on the ballot paper, who took a handful of votes between them, have been disregarded.

Niassa will have 14 seats in the new parliament, and on the basis of this result, Frelimo will take eight of them, Renamo five and the MDM one. In the 2009 election, Frelimo won 12 seats in Niassa, Renamo two and the MDM none. So, on the basis of these calculations, Frelimo will lose four seats, three of them to Renamo and one to the MDM.