

[Luca Bussotti](#) [1]

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When Frelimo announced in mid-2011, though in a low voice, that three presidents of their respective municipal councils were considering resigning from the positions they occupied, everybody thought that it was a joke. When the rumors were intensified, many started to doubt the political wisdom of the leaders of the party in power. When the three politicians involved (Arnaldo Maloa de Cuamba, Sadique Yacub de Pemba and Pio Matos de Quelimane) finally officially handed in their resignation, we started to wonder why Frelimo had opted for such a complicated road, less than a year before the end of their mandate.

So far, there is no precise answer about that event; there is no reasonable explanation to justify such a strategy. It is necessary to stress that, above all in an autarchic election, there are unwritten rules that operate all over the world: The president of the municipal council is a figure elected directly by the people. Therefore, he needs to account for his actions before the voters, first of all, and to the party (or the coalition of parties) that supported his candidacy. Consequently, the link that connects the elected one with the voters is extremely strong and can only be broken by the end of a mandate or by very serious reasons that lead the president to stop his work.

None of that happened in the three cases in point. It was termed 'administrative' incapacity, disobedience to the party. There was even mention of judicial issues by at least a few of the interested people. But obviously there was no proven conclusion. Hence, the image that came across was of a party, Frelimo, which, due to its internal issues, wanted to break the link between the elected ones and the voters and in that way ignoring one of the basic rules of politics (at least in its local form). Frelimo did not realise that, due to the probable discontentment of the communities, the three presidents were leaders of all municipal members, not only the ones subscribed under Frelimo. Therefore, the resignations generated even more incredulity and discontentment. They generated, what can be summarised in one word as mistrust.

The second important rule is that politics has its norms in terms of communication. And Frelimo should have vast experience of this. This time it was not that way: Frelimo was not able to justify the reason why it let three presidents abandon their seats. For example, in the case of Pio Matos, it was said that there were health issues which would have made it impossible for him to continue his mandate in Quelimane. However, Pio Matos himself was seen in the streets of Quelimane hopping around, singing and campaigning for his supposed successor, a candidate of Frelimo, and dismissing the official version of the reason for his resignation. Therefore, in terms of the general communication and in relation to what since the beginning was known as the most problematic municipality, Quelimane failed. There should be good reasons to justify the money spent as well as the 'discomfort' caused to all members of the municipality who had to go back to the voting booth before the planned time. And there should also be good reason to explain why the largest party in the country made a mistake in the selection of its candidates for the position of president of the

municipality in 2009. That did not happen and Frelimo suffered the consequences.

Finally, the choice for these three municipalities was also unfortunate, at least partially: of course Pemba constitutes an electoral space that belonged to Frelimo, therefore everybody knew that there could not be problems. However, Cuamba and, above all, Quelimane, had never in the history of the country represented a safe haven for the party in power. Intelligently, the party of Simango, the MDM (Democratic Movement of Mozambique) concentrated its efforts precisely in these two cities. On the other hand, Renamo, which is the strongest opposition in the country, decided to boycott these interspersing elections by not presenting any candidate for any of the three municipalities.

Aside from the serious failures, Frelimo organised an electoral campaign in Quelimane that was simply disastrous. As it was emphasized by Salomão Moyana through a television broadcast days before the elections took place, it would have been advisable to emphasize the figure of the candidate himself, instead of sending upper-echelon national leaders in the capital of Zambézia to 'dictate the line'. To a certain extent, we did not know if, once elected, Frelimo's candidate in Quelimane would enjoy enough autonomy to govern the city or if, on the contrary, he would only execute the orders of their comrades in Maputo.

The newspaper 'Channel of Mozambique', in its editorial of 9 December pointed out another issue: the fact that Frelimo wanted to provide proof that the 'high ranking ones' of Quelimane were by its side. Luxurious cars, powerful businessmen; in sum, the totality of the Zambeziian upper echelon displayed in support of Frelimo. On the contrary, Manuel de Araújo, MDM candidate since his very first time showed up whining on television. It was realised that the 'popular' vote should be captured. And that was the case. His electoral campaign was basically made in Chuabo, the local language, in popular neighbourhoods in which the supporters rode bikes - in that way marking a clear 'cultural' distance from their competitor.

The ballot boxes yielded the following results: Vicente Lourenço (Frelimo), in Cuamba obtained 63.75 percent of the votes; Tagir Carimo, in Pemba (Frelimo) 88.8 percent; Manuel de Araújo, in Quelimane (MDM) 63.14 percent.

Overall, the mini-suicide of Frelimo may have different readings: above all, Quelimane is the second provincial capital conquered after Beira by the MDM. Therefore, the virtual political monopoly of Frelimo continues, but with some very serious ruptures in its electoral structure. The second aspect is that it needs to be emphasized that the leaders of Frelimo probably did not realise that 'risk' that they were forcing three presidents to resign. Hence that constitutes a very serious index about how the leaders of the party in power consider the political scenario in Mozambique: a type of desert in which the only actor is Frelimo, disregarding any other electoral opponent.

The other issue has to do with the vote in the city: above all, the percentage of absent voters has been astounding. It is true that in the autarchies this is a constant issue in the recent history of Mozambique. However, the fact that in Cuamba only 14.4 percent of the voters turned up, in Pemba 19 percent and in Quelimane 27.8 percent signals a problem of general credibility of the local ruling class and the political-electoral mechanisms which are grounding the nascent Mozambican democracy. Frelimo is in increasing difficulty. It is not only related to having lost Beira and Quelimane (a very significant fact in itself): even in the last general elections, in central and residential neighbourhoods of Maputo, the result of the MDM was by far better than that of Frelimo. This probably bears witness that the young sectors of the population, as well as the strata with higher educational levels, ultimately tend to punish the party in power, due to its eternal promises of combating corruption or making the state non-partisan; promises that are never fulfilled.

Finally, in spite of everything, Frelimo provided the result that all the national and international observers had been waiting for: that is, to demonstrate that in Mozambique, the democratic mechanisms exist and are possible despite the great difficulties that are currently experienced. From this standpoint, these small elections were a live confirmation of that.

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* Luca Bussotti is a Guinea Bissauan researcher at the Africa Study Centre ISCTE in Lisbon, Portugal.

Mozambique: Changing fortunes for the ruling party

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Article-Summary:

Recent municipal elections in Mozambique show that the ruling party in Mozambique, Frelimo, may not be as strong as it would like to think. Luca Bussoti reports that low voter turnout and an impressive showing by the opposition suggest all is not well for Frelimo.

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