



IPRIS Viewpoints

AUGUST 2011

São Tomé and Príncipe: the final decision of the presidential elections

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The time for a final political decision in São Tomé and Príncipe is approaching, with the upcoming second round of the presidential elections looming. On August 7th São Toméans will be called to cast their votes and choose between the two most voted candidates in the first round of the presidential elections, i.e. Manuel Pinto da Costa and Evaristo Carvalho. As several analysts predicted, the July 17th presidential elections resulted in a second round, with none of the candidates achieving more than 50% of the votes required.

Taking a closer look at the results of the first round, it is clear that the first two candidates left behind top figures of the São Toméan society. Manuel Pinto da Costa, a historical figure of the country, is competing for the third time – he was also candidate in the 1996 and 2001 presidential elections – hoping to become São Tomé and Príncipe's next President. He had approximately 21.500 votes (35%), followed by Evaristo Carvalho, the candidate from the Independent Democratic Action (ADI), with approximately 13.000 votes (21%). Delfim Neves, the candidate from the Democratic Convergence Party (PCD) reached the third position with roughly 8.600 votes (14%). Also with 14%, former Prime Minister Maria das Neves

managed to gather about 8.500 votes. With a significant distance from Maria das Neves came former Defense Minister Elsa Pinto, with about 2.700 votes (4.46%), closely followed by Filinto Costa Alegre, with about 2.500 votes (4.14%), and Aurélio Martins, supported by the Movement for the Liberation of São Tomé and Príncipe/Social Democratic Party (MLSTP/PSD) that obtained only around 2.500 votes (4.14%), ahead of a trio of candidates with smaller expression, i.e. Jorge Coelho with 390 votes (0.65%), Hélder Barros with 380 votes (0.63%), and Manuel Deus Lima with approximately 200 votes (0.35%). According to the electoral observation mission of the Community of Portuguese-speaking Countries (CPLP), the first round of the presidential elections was credible, fair, with no major security problems and developed in an orderly fashion, allowing the free expression of universal suffrage in accordance with international standards. Despite this assessment, the practice known as *banho*, which consists in attempting to sway voters in the days before the election and on Election Day by donating money and other material goods, was also identified by the CPLP's electoral observation mission and widely recognized by local media. This behavior will most likely be repeated in the second round of the presidential elections, even though its impact is still uncertain. On August 7th there will be a confrontation between two

* The views expressed in this article do not necessarily reflect the position of the government of Portugal.



distinct areas of political influence. Manuel Pinto da Costa, a historical figure and a reference in São Tomé and Príncipe, is running as an independent candidate – even though he is close to MLSTP/PSD – and is now supported by the candidates from the MLSTP/PSD camp. It was not a surprise to see Maria das Neves – a former Prime Minister who was a candidate against her party's will and also the most voted candidate in the island of Príncipe – giving her support to Manuel Pinto da Costa in the second round. Aurélio Martins, the MLSTP/PSD's official candidate, who obtained a poor result in the first round, also gave his support – and therefore the MLSTP/PSD's support – to Manuel Pinto da Costa. Looking closely at the results of the first round, one could assume that the support of these two candidates might be crucial to ensure the election of Manuel Pinto da Costa.

On the other hand Evaristo Carvalho is backed by ADI and Prime Minister Patrice Trovoada. Evaristo Carvalho will certainly have the ADI's political structure at his disposal in trying to recover from Manuel Pinto da Costa's considerable advantage. ADI and Patrice Trovoada will do whatever they can to guarantee that Evaristo Carvalho wins this presidential race. Electing Evaristo Carvalho would help current Prime Minister Patrice Trovoada maintain the political stability required to fulfill his mandate at the head of the government.

Nowadays Manuel Pinto da Costa has significant support in local media, and has a good campaign structure at his disposal. With a good electoral base of political support, Manuel Pinto da Costa has a good chance of securing the final victory in the presidential elections. One must also add the fact that many voters in São Tomé and Príncipe may not want to see ADI in the government and at the

same time in the *Palácio Cor de Rosa* – the Presidential Palace. This fact could also be relevant for Manuel Pinto da Costa's success. A victory by Manuel Pinto da Costa will mean a more challenging mandate for the President compared to a victory by Evaristo Carvalho.

Manuel Pinto da Costa is considered by local media and some foreign analysts as the favorite to replace Fradique de Menezes after his last presidential term. On August 7th, we will see if the São Toméan voters were willing to elect Manuel Pinto da Costa or if they preferred to give a blank check to ADI's political family.

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