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## **Cape Verde: The Most Democratic Nation In Africa?**

Bruce Baker<sup>\*</sup>

### **ABSTRACT**

The article examines the substance behind the claim that the small archipelago off the west coast of Africa known as Cape Verde is the best country in Africa for political rights and civil liberties. Based on interviews conducted with 22 key informants in government, the judiciary, the legislature and civil society, the article explores not just the electoral process, and the political parties, but the functioning of the National Assembly, civil and political rights, the judicial system, civil society and economic equality. It finds that its unique geography and history have played a key role in facilitating good governance, and an open and non-violent society that values the real political gains of 1991. However, democracy has not yet eradicated either gender discrimination, dependency on the Diaspora, or poverty.

That this small archipelago of 10 islands, isolated from the West African mainland by 300 miles of Atlantic and a with population of only 476,000, should be widely regarded as the best in sub-Saharan Africa in terms of political governance and one of the best in terms of economic management, comes as a surprise to many. Yet over the last decade average growth rate has been double that of African countries as a whole. In addition, for political rights and civil liberties, according to Freedom House's aggregated scoring system, it was given a 1 for political rights and 2 for civil liberties between 1993 and 2003; and since then has been given 1.1, following 'modest improvements in women's rights' (Freedom House 2004). Only São Tomé e Príncipe, Mauritius and South Africa can match a score of 1.2, and even then, not for that

length of time (São Tomé e Príncipe and Mauritius since 1994 and South Africa since 1995) (see Table 1). The headline of most democratic state in Africa is startling, but has it any substance?

**Table 1 here**

This article explores the quality of Cape Verde's democracy. It examines not just the electoral process, and the political parties, but the functioning of the National Assembly, civil and political rights, the judicial system, civil society and economic equality. It is based on interviews conducted in late 2005 with 22 key informants in government, the judiciary, the legislature and civil society.<sup>1</sup>

## THE ELECTORAL PROCESS

The African Party for the Independence of Cape Verde (Partido Africano da Independência do Cabo Verde, PAICV, then known as the African Party for the Independence and Union of Guinea and Cape Verde or PAIGC) took power from independence in 1975 and was constitutionally the sole legal political party from 1980 until 1990 when the constitution was amended to legalise opposition parties.<sup>2</sup> Yet it must not be assumed that democracy or interest in development only began with multipartyism in 1990. In fact the one party state that was created in 1980, though it 'asserted its political control over the country [and] brooked little opposition' (Chabal 2002: 71), set up an effective and largely incorrupt administrative structure. It demonstrated a great concern for investing in water retention schemes, health and education and in promoting women's rights (Davidson 1989; Andrade 2002). In

practice it was more pragmatic and social democratic than its socialist ideological claims might have suggested. It did not, like **Angola and Mozambique**, **redefine itself as a Marxist-Leninist party and associate exclusively with the Soviet bloc**. Indeed it resisted **the so called ‘Lisbon cadres’, who had called for explicit socialism, as unrealistic, causing them to withdraw from the PAIGC in 1979**. ‘Socialism did not sit easily with a people long accustomed to roam the world, seek employment abroad, freely to use their earnings and invest their savings’ (Chabal 2002: 71). In their looser definition of one-party state, constituents were invited to propose candidates and sometimes to vote for the person of their choice, and these candidates were not always party members. Indeed, 30% of the 1985 National Assembly were non-party members.

**The nonparty members were by no means passive legislators. For example, when Dr. Carlos Veiga, the Attorney General who left the PAICV government in 1982 after differences with the party, returned as an elected member of the National Assembly in 1985, he took an active role. He used his position as a member of the Committee on Constitution and Legal Matters to lead opposition to the one party system. The influence of non-party members and dissidents within the party to the political debate contributed to the PAICV’s gradual political liberalisation from the mid-1980s (Andrade 2002: 269). It also made the ruling party more alert to the democratisation that what was taking place in Eastern Europe. In addition, some argue, remittances from the westernised Diaspora and European aid (which was as prominent as Soviet and Chinese aid), ensured that Cape Verde was not a typical one-party socialist state. For a long time it had seen that its future lay in maintaining an open international policy. The break up, therefore, of the eastern bloc in Europe seemed the moment to**

seek assurance of the growing assistance of western countries by opening up politically (Meyns 2002).

In an apparent move to ride the pro-democracy wave before the opposition could consolidate, the PAICV in February 1990 called for an emergency congress to debate possible multipartyism.<sup>3</sup> This precipitated the consolidation of dissident voices within and outside the PAICV into the *Movimento para a Democracia* (MpD) in April. It received much of its initial support from professionals, particularly lawyers (e.g. Mascarenhas Monteiro, who went on to become the first elected President), from the Diaspora and from the Catholic Church, which for some time had been critical of the PAICV government in its monthly publication *Terra Nova*. They pressed the case for multipartyism. Keen not to allow the MpD time to establish a national organisation and popular recognition, President Pereira immediately announced that a presidential election would be held in December on a democratic basis. He followed this up with a further announcement that democratic legislative elections would be held as well, pushing the electoral timetable on to January 1991 for the legislature and February for the presidency. Pereira clearly thought he would be secure against an unprepared opposition. In the context of a political consensus concerning means if not ends, dialogue (though not without disputes) allowed a negotiated settlement on multipartyism between the two political parties (Meyns 2002).

Unlike many other African states, therefore, the transition was not due to pressure from popular protest. Some see the absence of popular violence and regime resistance as a product of Cape Verde's liberation history. Koudawo (2001) argues that PAIGC's armed struggle on the mainland led to the

imposition of 'command logic' in Guinea-Bissau, while in Cape Verde, where there was no armed struggle, the 'administrative logic' prevailed. Political violence has certainly been a feature of Guinea Bissau, Angola and Mozambique, where guerrilla warfare was conducted against Portuguese colonialism. However the thesis has to be set against the fact that most of the leaders of the Guinea Bissau guerrilla war were from Cape Verdean and became the country's leading figures after independence.

Though it was an elite negotiated transition settlement, it did not totally exclude citizen participation, for they were to be called upon to endorse it by participating in the subsequent elections. By September 1990 the constitution had been duly amended to allow for multipartyism, leaving the MpD only three months to prepare for elections. Received wisdom, unsurprisingly, considered that this did not leave the MpD sufficient time to match the PAICV in organisation, fund raising, securing access to the media or gathering public support. Indeed, it only held its first party congress in November.

Yet the calculation of Pereira proved woefully defective. To his and most senior party official's astonishment, the MpD won control of the legislature and the presidency in 1991. In an atmosphere where almost everybody was convinced of the need to liberalise politics and the economy, the majority chose change and less rigidity. It was the first state in sub-Saharan Africa to hold democratic elections in the Third Wave. The miscalculation of the Pereira may have been because the brevity of the period between the change in the constitution and the actual election harmed the PAICV more than the MpD. Ames, *et al* argue that:

**the short time span did not allow for the formation of various independent political parties. Thus PAICV stood for the system of one-party rule and was blamed for all the problems the population then faced, and MpD represented change and openness. The two parties became polarized, and this polarization ultimately harmed the PAICV (Ames *et al.* 2002).**

The MpD confirmed their governing party status when they won the second National Assembly elections of 1995; and the presidential elections of 1996 with their candidate Antonio Monteiro. In 2001, however, weakened by internal struggles, they lost to a rejuvenated PAICV. In the case of the 2001 presidential election, the PAICV opposition candidate, Pedro Pires, defeated the ruling party MpD candidate Carlos Veiga, by just 12 votes. The 2006 election repeated that result, this time with Pires defeating Veiga by 2,856 votes.

The ease by which power has been transferred, with defeated governments and their supporters accepting the electorate's verdict, has been one of the most striking indicators of Cape Verde's democratic maturity. The essentially untroubled transfer of power on three occasions over the last 15 years indicates that the nation has, by and large, confidence in its electoral institutions.

The National Assembly has 72 members, elected for a five-year term. The electoral system follows the Portuguese pattern. The constituencies are 16 multi-member (at least 2 seats) constituencies with allocation of seats according to population. The voting system is proportional representation using the closed list (d'Hondt) method. Vacancies arising between general elections are filled by substitutes elected at the same time as titular members, taken as next on the party list.

The registration process for the National Assembly and Presidential elections of 2006 proceeded smoothly. It was supervised by the National Electoral Commission

whose five members are elected by the National Assembly. Electoral rolls are computerised and software was used to detect suspicious registration patterns that were then investigated and cases of multiple registrations eliminated. The provisional list was displayed in town halls and on the Internet to allow corrections and challenges before the final version was published in September 2005.

Overall, the opportunity to stand for public office still favours men. One female deputy spoke of there being, in her view, a cultural restriction on women's participation. Other factors influence choice as well. As in all party list situations, though candidates are chosen by the local party, the central party headquarters has the final say and determines where candidates stand on the party lists and therefore determines their chance or otherwise of being elected. Deputies are reticent to express criticism, but one admitted that the determination of the list of 15 party candidates for Praia the capital involved 'difficult negotiation' within his party.

Five main political parties contested the 2006 elections. Apart from the two largest parties, the PAICV and the MpD, there was also Partido da Renovação Democrática (Party of Democratic Renewal); União Caboverdiana Independente e Democrática (Independent and Democratic Cape Verde Union); and the Partido Social Democrático (Social Democratic Party). Given the dominance of the two main parties, the smaller parties understandably complain that it is difficult for them to be heard, despite the requirement that state TV and radio give equal airtime to all parties. They complain of the limited state funding (400 escudo, about £2.44, to a party for each vote received and financing for parties in the Assembly according to the number of seats they hold) and of a PR system whose quotas according to the d'Hont method favour the biggest parties. Money borrowed from banks in earlier campaigns had not been fully reimbursed by the state and had left them with little resources to fight the



2006 campaign. Likewise, although the main parties could find a voice in the papers (in 2001 the *Expresso das Ilhas* was started by the MpD to counter what they perceived as the dominance of the PAICV of the media) this was not so for the smaller parties.

An unusual feature of the electoral process is the degree of representation of the Diaspora. Though they number about 600,000, which is more than the population on the islands, registration for the electoral roll is very small. Of perhaps 200,000 eligible voters in Europe in 2006, 31,686 registered but only 2,599 voted; and in the Americas, which is mainly the US, 11,419 registered but only 2,797 voted. Despite this low participation, six seats are allocated in the National Assembly to deputies elected by the Americas (2), Europe and the world (2) and Africa (2). Politically, therefore, their representation is problematic and at times pivotal. In the case of the closely fought presidential elections of 2001, the islanders gave Veiga the MpD candidate 1,921 votes more than the PAICV candidate Pires. Yet amongst the Diaspora, Pires got 1,933 votes more than Veiga and, in particular, Pires got 1,387 votes more than Veiga in the Americas. Likewise, in the 2006 elections, the islanders gave Veiga 24 votes more than Pires, but once again a majority of 3,366 among the Diaspora for Pires swung the total vote in his favour. As most Cape Verdeans perceive it, the US Diaspora swung the election for the PAICV both in 2001 and 2006.

The electoral process is well organised and appeared to be largely free of party and/or government interference, but irregularities have come to light in the last two elections. The National Electoral Commission and international media judged that 2001 presidential elections to be free and fair elections, only for the Cape Verde courts in 2003 to sentence a number of people for election fraud. Local members of

both main parties were found guilty of violations, such as stuffing ballot boxes, and were given light prison sentences. In the recent 2006 elections there were accusations concerning fraud in the crucial Diaspora voting. Veiga bitterly observed that there was a ‘well known lack of control and democraticness in the electoral process in some countries’ (<http://www.afrol.com/articles/18086>). Though his charge that the whole electoral process was flawed was rejected, he did succeed in bringing about a re-run of the São Tomé e Príncipe voting for the African representatives on 8 March, after the Supreme Court agreed that the organisation of the vote there had been ‘chaotic’. The final results for the 2006 elections are shown in Tables 2 and 3.

**Tables 2 and 3 here**

#### THE FUNCTIONING OF THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY

Due to the PR system, the composition of the National Assembly reflects the choices made. The 52.3% of the vote for the PAICV in the 2006 elections translated into 40 seats (57%); and the 44.0% of votes for the MpD translated into 29 seats (40%). Where the composition is unbalanced is in gender. Only 11 of the 72 seats in the 2006 intake or 15.2% were held by women (though the Sub-Saharan average is 15%). There are 6 women in the 2006 Cabinet.

Having two parties of fairly equal strength, as opposed to the ruling party dominance so common in Africa, has also ensured lively debate in the National Assembly and meant that no government has been able to be complacent (see Table 4).

#### **Table 4 here**

Indeed, the size of the opposition in the Assembly has been sufficient to block bills, as when the MpD successfully prevented the adoption of a new electoral code in 2002 that failed to make the National Election Commission independent (Africa South of the Sahara 2005: 194).

The PAICV promotes itself as an Africa-orientated political party. Its principal support is among the poor, both in the high density areas of the capital and among agricultural workers in areas such as the least industrialised islands of Santa Cruz and São Filipe. The MpD, on the other hand, appeals more to the urban based middle class. It is a centre right party, favouring free trade and a liberal economic policy. Because these policies are perceived by some as being damaging to local traditional agriculture, its greatest support has been found in islands where, apart from Santo Antão, agricultural is less important, such as São Vicente, Santa Luzia, São Nicolau, Sal, and Boa Vista and in the smaller towns such as Mosteiros, Calheta, Assomada and Tarrafal. In terms of institutional support, anecdotal evidence suggests that the Roman Catholic Church in Cape Verde prefers the MpD, whilst the unions back the PAICV. Both, however, function minimally outside the election period, hence the PAICV website closed shortly after the 2006 elections.

A feature of the political parties, unlike many in Africa, is that they are based not on ethnic rivalries but, especially in their early days, on different views about state involvement in solving economic and social problems. **The MpD government's new economic programme of 1991 saw the reduction of government intervention in the economy, the privatisation of state owned companies, and further opening of the country to the international economy. And following their success in the 1995**

**elections, there was still further privatisation. Although there are no reported scandals over the way the process was conducted, there was no public enthusiasm over the fact that most of the public firms sold were bought by Portuguese companies. Further, the programme did little to benefit the rural, poorer areas and this failure became the focus of the PAICV campaign in the 2001 elections. They successfully portrayed the MpD as guilty of the indiscriminate sale of state owned businesses to foreign owners and of market reforms that were indifferent to the negative social consequences: for example that consumers unable to pay water and electricity bills were simply cut off. Indeed, even the MpD itself became divided over the economic policies and this (together with disagreements over the party presidential candidate) led to a splinter party (Partido Renovador Democrático, PRD) being formed.**

**Yet despite the success of the PAICV in 2001, based on the critique of the MpD economic policies,** in the last five years even these ideological differences have blurred considerably. The PAICV has controlled public spending, increased competition, pursued privatisation and implemented the growth and poverty reduction programme in a manner that meets the IMF's approval. In other words, disagreements between the parties now revolve around pragmatic political issues (IMF 2005). This was apparent in the 2006 election campaign. In the public spats, the MpD still portrayed the PAICV as still having centralist, statist tendencies; whilst the PAICV has accused the MpD of insensitivity to the social needs of the poor (e.g. housing for the rural poor). However, the main campaign issue was on promoting economic development and reducing the high unemployment rate. Pires boasted that the PAICV government's economic policies had ensured that Cape Verde was 'on track as a respected country'. The MpD leader Veiga, unable to offer any significantly different

policies, countered by suggesting that democracy was safer in MpD hands. He offered to ensure the establishment of 'democratic institutions, democratic environment and democratic functioning of the state'. The similarity was such that, as one school teacher put it, 'I am glad whoever wins; I am glad to vote'.

Despite the two parties insistence on their difference, continuity in government programmes has been much more prominent. In fact, both have pursued economic liberalisation policies of privatisation, incentives to foreign investors, restrictions on union rights, closer trade links with Europe and Africa and high investment in education.

Deputies from both main parties believe the National Assembly to be effective in adversarial debate. Where they felt the greatest weakness lay was in the area of reaching consensus through negotiation. One senior deputy claimed: 'The Assembly does not show much maturity about compromise. To that end a third party that held the balance of power might be useful for this initial period [of democratic transition]'. They may also feel with hindsight that they have not been as effective as they might have been regarding scrutinising legislation. For instance, though both parties broadly support privatisation, many deputies rue the terms of the privatisation and the fact that they so often handed long monopolies to Portuguese firms, as was the case with electricity, water, telecommunications and banking. Further, in the last National Assembly, the Parliamentary Inquiry Commission, set up in August 2005 charged with investigating the investment agency Cabo Verde Investimentos, was repeatedly cancelled due to the failure of members to attend meetings. Likewise, the Constitutional Revision Commission had not, by mid November, held any meetings since the October plenary session of the Assembly, in which it was given three more months to draw up conclusions for proposed constitutional revisions.

One method of curbing the corrupt use of office is for elected officials to declare their relevant interests and income. In Cape Verde this is done in part. Deputies must register their assets and income, though not their vested interests, in the office of the Supreme Court when they enter the Assembly. Yet deputies cannot be accused of neglecting their constituents or being inaccessible. Deputies spend two weeks in their constituencies every month, with one in plenary sessions of the Assembly and one in committees. This is admirable, but makes parliament very expensive with travel between islands and the Assembly building in Praia.

The failure of the Assembly 2001-6 to reach agreement on proposals to revise the electoral law, the constitution and the eligible voters of the Diaspora, has not won it any popularity. Indeed, in a publication by the Assembly itself, it reported a survey that revealed only moderate levels of confidence by citizens in political institutions:

**Table 5 here**

Cape Verde has a semi-presidential system, which means that there is a powerful prime minister who directs government. He can choose ministers from deputies or elsewhere, but if they do come from the Assembly then they cease to be deputies and one of the reserve deputies takes their place. Since the 1999 constitutional revision, presidential powers have been substantially increased. The President can now dismiss the government, with the approval of the political parties represented in the National Assembly and the Council of the Republic.<sup>4</sup> The President also has veto rights that are relative as regards the National Assembly and absolute as regards the cabinet.

## CIVIL AND POLITICAL RIGHTS

Civil and political rights are enshrined in the constitution and widely respected in practice. Human rights organisations are agreed that ‘neither arbitrary arrests, extra-judicial killings or politically motivated disappearances occur and there are no political prisoners’ (Freedom House 2004). However two areas give cause for concern, namely the implementation of the constitutional and legal rights of women and of organised labour.

Women play a key role in society in Cape Verde because of the prominence of male emigration. Some suggest that 40% of households are female-headed. Yet despite adult education among women and the promotion of women’s rights by successive governments since independence, discrimination against women persists. Cultural habits and ignorance of legal rights undermines the legal and constitutional protections that are in place. A particularly disturbing fact is the widespread practice of domestic violence against women, including wife beating. In 1998 the National Assembly revised the Penal Code, widening the definition of sexual abuse and strengthening penalties against perpetrators. Yet though the law protects certain rights of the victims, it does not ensure the right of compensation. On the encouraging side, following the promotion of reporting of sexual violence by the government and women’s groups, there are signs that women are more willing to go to the police, but it is by no means the norm.<sup>6</sup>

Despite constitutional prohibitions against sex discrimination and provisions for full equality, including equal pay for equal work, unequal pay continues in places and equal access to employment opportunities remains elusive. The ratio of female earned

income to male earned income is 0.48 (UNDP 2003). The US Department of State claims in its country report on human rights in Cape Verde that, 'there is evidence that some women are being discriminated against in inheritance, family, and custody matters' (Department of State 2006). It also suggests that women are pressured 'to sign judicial agreements detrimental to their statutory inheritance rights', though this is strongly denied by women's groups on the islands.

On the positive side, women's groups report that women are increasingly aware of their rights, there are more NGOs working on their behalf, there are high rates of girls attending school (52.2% of secondary school students 2003/4 were girls, compared with 46.9 in 1990/1) and sexual health education programmes have been promoted. Statistics compiled by the Institute of National Statistics demonstrate that women are making modest inroads in various professions. The proportion of women employees in public administration (43.8%), financial services (43.6%), education (64.2%) and international organisations (41.6%) and judicial magistrates (46.9%) is grounds for encouragement.

The other area of civil rights concern is the field of organised labour. The constitution protects the right to unionise, and workers may form and join unions without restriction. Two confederations, CCSL (Confederacao Caboverdiana dos Sinicatos Livres) and UNTC-CS (Uniao Nacional dos Trabalhadores de Cabo Verde Central Sindical) together embrace 25 unions. Between them they claim 50,000 members, but the figure is more likely to be under 30,000 since many union jobs have been lost to privatisation in the last decade. Both confederations insist that they use their right to strike with success at times, but acknowledge that the market economy has lessened their influence. Particularly disturbing is the use by governments of both main parties of the Workers' Code and the Civil Rights Commission to over-ride



strikes. Using regulations that are meant to apply to strategic industries and those that concern the welfare of citizens, the government has demanded on several occasions that striking unions provide the required minimum of 50% cover and that that core work force operate without work-to-rule tactics. In these situations the Director General of Workers acts as a national arbitration service. If no agreement can be reached through its offices, then the courts decide if the strike is legal. The outcome, in the view of the unions, is always in the government's favour. Though the unions have taken the issue of the Civil Rights Commission to the ILO, no settlement is in sight and the reality is that the unions' right to strike has been restricted. There are also reported incidents in the tourist and construction sectors of employers illegally sacking those who join a union or who take part in a strike.

## THE JUDICIAL SYSTEM

The judiciary is regarded by independent commentators as independent and therefore free of political bias, although 28% of the public still regard police officers as involved in 'some corruption' and 19% felt the same about judges and magistrates (Ames *et al.* 2002: 15). Reforms to strengthen an overburdened judiciary were implemented in 1998. Between 2000 and 2005 there was a 15% increase in the number of judges and magistrates. Further, to assist in increasing access to justice, the Ministry of Justice is planning to open Legal Advice Centres from 2006, where advice, legal counsel, arbitration and mediation will be available.

The *Polícia de Ordem Pública* (POP; Police for Public Order) and the Judicial Police (a federal investigative bureau) number about 800 officers, which is a very

high level of provision per head of population for Africa. In 2005 the POP was strengthened with the creation of three new Police squadrons, though it is still short of vehicles. Until 1994 they were controlled by the military, but are now separate and answerable to the Department of Internal Administration. It has primary responsibility for maintenance of law and order. The law prohibits arbitrary arrest and detention, and the police generally observe these prohibitions, hence 55% of the population trust them (Ames *et al.* 2002: 15).

Despite government efforts to stop it, some members of the police still commit human rights abuses. For example, there are 'credible reports' that 'police beat persons in custody and in detention' (US Department of State 2006). The government did begin investigating allegations of human rights abuses by police in 2001, but as yet, no prosecution has taken place. Nor have any charges been brought against police officers responsible for beating a detainee on Sal Island in 2000. Despite, therefore, mechanisms for investigating citizen complaints of police abuse, in practice these mechanisms neither ensure the punishment of those responsible, nor prevent future violations. The Ministry of Justice is aware of the problem and is seeking to prosecute 'errant' officers, but claims it is finding it 'difficult'. In addition, in some instances of violence against women, the police have not protected the victims effectively. One senior member of the Ministry of Justice believed the police were 'not yet sensitive to the issue' and 'did not fully understand it'. However, training workshops are being held for the police to improve the situation.

Immigration is becoming a contentious issue as workers from West Africa enter the country and, according to popular opinion, work for lower rates than Cape Verdeans. 48%, according to one survey, agreed that: 'People from African countries that come to live and work in Cape Verde bring more problems than improvements to the

country' (Ames *et al.* 2002: 25). There have also been reports that immigration authorities harass Nigerian citizens. Discontent amongst immigrants boiled over in March 2005 when hundreds of West Africans residing in Cape Verde attempted to invade the Government Palace in Praia. The protest, considered unlawful by the police, was sparked by the murder in Praia of a young man from Guinea-Bissau. According to the protestors, 'When one of us is beaten, the police do nothing, and if they arrest the person who did it, he always goes back to the street' (*Afrolnews*, 17.3.2005). The disturbance was quelled by the police with army reinforcements, but clearly the potential for further violence remains. The situation is such that senior officials admit that immigrant quotas may have to be introduced.

According to both police statistics and victimisation surveys, crime is low. Though recorded crimes against property are rising (from 4,492 in 1996 to 7,487 in 2003) and crimes against persons are rising (from 6,385 in 1996 to 9,925 in 2003), 78% report that they have never had a burglary and 92% say they have never been physically attacked ([www.pop.cv](http://www.pop.cv); Ames *et al.* 2002: 15). Some of the violent crime is attributed to drug-use and drug gang rivalry (according to the CIA, Cape Verde is used as a transshipment point for illicit drugs moving from Latin America and Africa destined for Western Europe).

The Constitutional right to a fair trial is upheld in the country. Defendants are presumed to be innocent; they have the right to a public, non-jury trial; to counsel; to present witnesses; and to appeal verdicts. Free counsel is provided for the poorest. The most serious concern is the delays caused by a seriously overburdened and understaffed judicial system. A backlog of cases routinely leads to trial delays of six months or more and some 10,780 cases were pending at the end of 2004.

## CIVIL SOCIETY

Cape Verde is one of the few countries in Africa to have an homogenous society, free of ethnic competition and the burdens of tradition. 'Asked to self-identify with a sub-national group, nearly a majority could not; i.e., they refuse to identify themselves as anything other than Capeverdean' (Ames *et al.* 2002: 2). The homogeneity arose because those imported by the Portuguese as African slaves from the 1500s who were not sold on to slave traders, remained to intermarry their masters. The resulting Mestiço race, adapted the Portuguese language into a self made Creole and developed their own distinctive cultural development (Lobban, 1995; Lobban, & Lopes, 1995). Such a society means that civil society can maintain a focus on challenging state policy and practice and is not fighting over the relative representation of different groups (although that is not to deny modest inter-island rivalry over the distribution of resources).

A healthy democracy requires information about government actions, and the effects of their policies from independent sources that are accessible to the public. The government generally respects freedom of speech and of the press. No authorisation is needed to publish newspapers and hence the independent media is growing, though the state is still dominant in newspaper and radio broadcasting and holds a virtual monopoly in television broadcasting. Journalists are independent of government control, are not intimidated by slander laws and are not required to reveal their sources. However, some claim that journalists do practice self-censorship fearing, if they are in the government-controlled media, demotion or dismissal and if they are in the independent media, fearing hindrances to information from the government. One

journalist working for an independent newspaper spoke of 'self criticism' and saw journalistic liberty as only 'conditional'. To seek to avoid political interference the state television (TCV) is run by a 3-person administrative council, though this is appointed by the government. Nevertheless, it is reported by station journalists that direct interference by the government in state-owned media is rare.

The provision of independent monitors is still in the process of emerging. The National Assembly have approved the idea of an independent Ombudsman, but as yet the powers of the office remain undefined and no Ombudsman has been elected, since no political consensus has yet been reached. Recently the National Commission on Human Rights was inaugurated as a private human rights watchdog, but it has yet to make its mark on society.

As elsewhere in Africa, voluntary associations that represent their constituencies' views and critiques to government are not, as yet, widespread or influential. This is partly due to the absence of professionals, with 67.5% of university-educated citizens living abroad (the highest in Africa, according to the World Bank 2005). But there are other factors too. There is no lack of interest in politics *per se*, according to *Afrobarometer* survey. Fully 78% claim they are 'interested in public affairs' (Ames *et al.* 2002: 2) and 51% 'discussed politics with friends or neighbors'. Yet when it comes to participating in a more organised form of political participation, such as attending community meetings, it fell to 38% and fewer still are members, of trade unions, professional associations, or community development associations (14%, 16% and 10% respectively). Confidence in the efficacy of formal processes of politics appears to be low and perhaps, as Meyns suggests, it is linked with the negotiated nature of the democratic transition. The democracy was born amid very limited

popular participation and low levels of political violence and so there is not history of people power (Meyns 2002).

## ECONOMIC EQUALITY

History has played a large part in shaping Cape Verde's openness to trade. Owing to their higher educational levels and 'less African/more European' manners and appearance, the Portuguese sent the Cape Verdeans as their administrators throughout their African colonies (indeed, Cape Verdeans were automatically given the status of *assimilado*). It strengthened their ties with Guinea Bissau, São Tomé e Príncipe, and Angola, but did nothing to improve their reputation on the mainland as Africans. Then the droughts of the twentieth century caused hundreds of thousands of Cape Verdeans to flee to the US (where earlier generations of Cape Verdean whalers had settled), Portugal and elsewhere. The result was a constant return stream of remittances that ensured economic survival on the islands, and in time, returnees with capital to invest and American/European ideas to purvey.

Not surprisingly in this historical context, the Cape Verdean government sees the country's position as somewhere between Africa, Europe and America and is determined to keep good trade relations and cultural ties with all three. Individual Cape Verdeans may argue over whether they are Africans or Portuguese; continental Africans may question whether they are 'real Africans'; but the truth is that they are neither and both. Their identity focuses on the fact that they can never be either just

African or just Portuguese. Though others may regard that position negatively, most Cape Verdeans see it as a uniqueness to be proud of.

Only 10% of the country's land area is suitable for agriculture. Scarce and irregular rainfall is another major constraint to agriculture. In the last 265 years there have been 97 years of drought, with 14 of the droughts having lasted 3 years or more. Under these difficult conditions, food production permanently lags behind demand. Cape Verde imports more than 80% of the food consumed in the country. Vulnerability as a result of insularity leads to multiple, small-scale infrastructure facilities, and to high unit costs for transportation and communication, thus reducing the country's competitiveness. Further, energy vulnerability leads to high import of petroleum products, which make up 6% of total imports.

Despite the absence of natural resources and the proneness to droughts, Cape Verde has made remarkable development progresses since independence. GDP growth for 1975-80 is recorded as 10% and for 1980-90 at 8.4%. **Interestingly democracy has made little difference to the growth rates, despite the MpD coming to power in 1991 offering economic liberalisation as a key to improved growth.** For 1991-95 growth rates were 6.2%; and for 1997-99 at 7.0% (UNDP 2003); and is estimated for 2005 and 2006 as more than 6%. Life expectancy is one of the highest in Africa, estimated in 2004 as 70.14 (male: 66.83; female: 73.54). There has been thirty years of significant investment in education (primary school attendance is 98%), health, sanitation, and clean water, together with the building of economic infrastructure and a doubling of the number employed over the last 20 years (IMF 2005). And the 2004 budget prioritised spending on the social sector as well as maintaining the fiscal balance.

Yet despite this investment, there are still 36,000 unemployed (more than 20%). The promotion in the last decade of private enterprise and foreign investment, especially in the tourist industry, may be seeing results, but has not so far reduced poverty. In 2002 there were still 36.7% of the population classified as poor and 19.7% classified as very poor.<sup>5</sup> This compares with an estimate for 1993 of 30% poverty and 14% severe poverty. In other words, since democratisation poverty appears to have increased in both absolute and relative terms. As one senior development organization official admitted: 'how to reduce poverty is Cape Verde's greatest challenge'.

The incidence of poverty is related to urbanisation, gender and employment. It predominates in rural areas, among female-headed households and amongst the unemployed.<sup>6</sup> Nor is poverty distributed evenly among the islands, but is highest in those most focused on agriculture such as San Antão, Fogo and Brava.<sup>7</sup> In terms of development, therefore, it is of concern that it is unequally distributed geographically and demographically.

With more than a third of the population still trapped in poverty and the inequality of income distribution increasing (as shown by the Gini coefficient, which in 1988-89 was 0.43, but by 2001-2002 was 0.57) it is hard to say that equality is not an issue in Cape Verde. Nor is this a sustainable basis for their current political stability. If emigration opportunities lessen due to restricted entry into Europe and the USA, if liberalisation policies continue to fail to promote employment, and if the government remains reluctant to engage in serious wealth redistribution through taxes and benefits, then the numbers in poverty will be hard to reduce. In addition, there is the vulnerability caused by Cape Verde's dependence on emigrant remittances and foreign aid that together represent 34% of GDP. Currently migrants' remittances are



at an all time high, but they are set to decline alongside falling emigration (Carling 2002).

The fear is that a permanent underclass is in danger of forming and the benefits of a nation homogenous in race will be lost to a nation divided by class. Andrade, in 2002, noting the cut-backs in health spending, the means tested provision of school meals and the failure of privatisation to provided jobs commented: ‘If such policies increase the number of deprived poor people, with no hope of employment, is there not a risk of social deprivation or even violence?’ (2001: 289). It was noted by one economic expert interviewed that: ‘the economic expectations of the people are far beyond our economic power’. Their widespread travel and their contact with those who have migrated makes them well aware of the standard of living of those in the West. Their educational levels have given them high expectations in terms of employment. Consequently the government is under considerable pressure to provide or face the wrath of this frustrated body of citizens.

Poverty reduction is likely to dominate the political agenda for a long time to come. Indeed, Ames *et al.* believe its eradication will determine the outcome of the consolidation of democracy. They believe that their finding that 44% were not satisfied with democracy is based on the elision in people’s minds of the political system with the economic performance of the governments. Hence support for democracy may only be conditional – conditional of economic progress.

The government believes that in part it has been a victim, ironically, of its own prudent economic management. Attention has been paid to maintaining external debt service (49.1% of GDP 2004) at the cost of development programmes. As the Foreign Minister has observed, it would be an injustice if those most assisted with debt relief by international donors were those who had been most careless in accruing debt:

The impact of the [government's development] strategy, particularly on living conditions of the poorer population, would be far greater if the country did not have to spend a considerable amount of resources on external debt service. Alternatively, these resources could be put to much better use in priority sectors such as Education, Health and Basic Infrastructure ... the Government calls on the international community to relieve Cape Verde of the heavy debt burden by means of its cancellation ... More than a reward for good behaviour, what is called for here is that a country not be penalised for its good performance in the area of development (official correspondence to the British Government, 2005).

## CONCLUSION

Cape Verdeans overwhelmingly regard their country as a democracy and support that political system (even if not unconditionally). A senior Cape Verdean diplomat claimed: 'The democratic system is now in the minds of Cape Verdeans; it was long their ideal'. The language of the press and the street bears out that popular support is widespread.

**Democracy has not just been a change of name, but has brought tangible benefits to Cape Verdeans. Even though Cape Verde had under one party rule a much better record of human rights than most countries in Africa and had a measure of popular participation because of the power delegated to local citizens' committees, political rights and civil liberties were both rated at the lowest point on the Freedom House scale in 1990. Now citizens enjoy good governance and have few restrictions on the right to freedom of speech, of**

assembly and association, and of religion. They now can exercise the right to change their government through periodic elections held on the basis of universal suffrage. These elections are largely free of corruption and in 2006 enjoyed a turnout rate of 58.9% of those registered voters on the islands. Democracy means that they have a government that holds no political prisoners, that is largely free of corruption and permits monitoring by the National Assembly, the press and civil society. In the criminal justice system, too, neither judges, magistrates nor the police are noted for corruption, though lengthy pre-trial detention remains a serious problem. It is true that there are still high rates of abuse against women in terms of domestic violence and sexual harassment, but there has been a concerted effort since 1991 by successive governments to change the culture which is beginning to pay off - as seen in the increasing reporting of such crimes to police. Democratic values are also observable in a prevailing social tolerance; and absence of discrimination based on colour, race or religion (with the possible exception of a discrimination against African immigrants).

The main ambivalence concerning democracy is in its ability to deliver tangible economic progress, illustrated by an interview with a coastguard disillusioned by an under-funded service that he often had to subsidise himself out of his own pocket. **The fact is that, despite democracy, the majority of jobs still do not pay a liveable wage, so that most workers with families rely on second jobs and extended family support.**

The issue of the Diaspora raises not so much issues of democratic values as democratic process. Few, countries have experienced emigration as extensively as Cape Verde. With resources so limited on the islands, governments have been keen to tap into the resources of what they call the 'international community' of Cape

Verdeans. Indeed, the Bank of Cape Verde has, with the National Assembly, devised policies to stimulate remittances and long-term investments. The economic importance of the Diaspora, however, raises the question of to what degree they should influence the politics of the islands. Should their remittances buy electoral power? Yet since 1991 the right to vote in the Cape Verdean national elections and to have representation in the National Assembly has been accorded Cape Verdeans living abroad (the official definition a Cape Verdean includes those having a parent or grandparent born in the islands). This electoral right might be more than most emigrants want, for few actually vote, but it is an electoral pool that particularly the PAICV have been keen to exploit and some say manipulate to the point of overturning the will of the people of the islands themselves. Senior government officers may speak fondly of having ‘one of the best diasporan models in the world’, but one senior deputy believed that sentiment prevailed in policy concerning them. In his view: ‘deputies have yet to talk openly about the Diaspora vote’. There is unfinished business here.

This, then, is more than an electoral democracy. For all the weaknesses noted above, this is a serious democracy and for that reason alone a rarity in Africa. Its roots go deeper than the constitution and shape political and social practice. And among the elite, democracy is not simply a device to attract donors, but appears to be a deep-rooted commitment. What others might regard as insuperable economic problems that necessitate perpetual dependency on external help, has promoted in Cape Verde a strong determination to succeed by the quality of its own educational attainments and careful resource management. Its very ambition is apparent in its dealings with the EU. Currently its prime minister is arguing the case for Cape Verde’s entry into the European Union, backed by former Portuguese president Mário Soares. In addition,

Jose Barroso, president of the European Commission (and former Portuguese prime minister) is promising to help integrate Cape Verde within the European Union sphere of influence via greater cooperation with Portugal. EU membership seems an unlikely scenario, but on the basis of Cape Verde's current level of democratic governance, is not one that is out of the question.

This may be a society that may have been artificially constructed by the perverted values of ruthless slave traders and exploitative Portuguese colonialists; and it may be a society that faces the extraordinary vulnerability of a small island economy lacking natural resources and high transportation costs to markets. Yet from this inauspicious foundation has arisen perhaps one of the most successful democracies in Africa and the developing world. In 1986 Basil Davidson, an enthusiastic supporter of the PAICV socialist politics, after revisiting the country concluded:

Here was an African people which has found a way to save itself, which has shown how the poorest and most despairing of the legacies of foreign rule can be challenged and thrown off, and which so far has prevailed against every forecast of failure (1989: 195).

The socialism may have faded, but the sense of success against the odds perseveres in Africa's most democratic nation.

## NOTES

\* Applied Research Centre for Human Security, Coventry University, UK. The research was conducted along with Professor Roy May of Coventry University, to whom the author is indebted for critical comments on the text.

<sup>1</sup>. Interviews were conducted with the Director TCV (Televisão de Cabo Verde); the Administrator-Executivo da Media & Comunicações, Expresso das ilhas; Presidente CCSL (Confederação Caboverdiana dos Sindicatos Livres); Secretário Geral, UNTC-CS (União Nacional dos Trabalhadores de Cabo Verde Central Sindical); Vice-reitor, Universidade Jean Piaget de Cabo Verde; Research Director, Comissão Nacional para a Instalação da Universidade de Cabo Verde; four PAICV Deputies; an MpD Deputy; Presidente da Assembleia Nacional; Ministro dos Negócios Estrangeiros, Cooperação e Comunidades; Assistant to Minister of Justice; the adviser to Minister of Economics; Assistant to Minister of Justice; a judge; The President of Women Jurists Association; Administrador, Technil Sociedade de Imobiliária; the former Minister of Justice; a Administração Eleitoral; Vereador, Cidade da Praia; Programme Manager UNDP (Governance); Presidente Instituto da Condição Feminina; Coordenador, Ministério do Trabalho e Solidariedade Programa nacional de Luta Contra Pobreza; Directeur du Centre Culturel Français au Cap-Vert; newspaper editor.

<sup>2</sup>. There was an alliance of the independence movements of Portuguese Guinea and Cape Verde under the name of African Party for the Independence and Union of Guinea and Cape Verde (known by its Portuguese acronym PAIGC). This made strategic sense in the years following 1959 and made practical sense seeing that Amílcar Cabral, Aristides Pereira, Fernando Fortes, Abílio Duarte, who were key leaders in the armed revolt in Guinea, were Cape Verdeans (Davidson 1969). But the marriage of Portugal's educated administrators with the under-educated of Guinea Bissau was never going to last, despite the initial political union at their independence in 1975. A military coup in Guinea Bissau in 1980 that overthrew President Luís Cabral was more of a confirmation of failed marriage than the cause of the divorce. After the coup the Cape Verdean branch of PAIGC was renamed the Partido Africano da Independência de Cabo Verde (PAICV).

<sup>3</sup>. Most African incumbents preferred to delay and hinder democratic elections. The only exception apart from Pereira, were Houphouët-Boigny in Côte d'Ivoire and Da Costa in São Tomé e Príncipe. When Da Costa and Pereira only secured a third of the votes in the legislative elections that preceded the presidential elections, Da Costa unlike Pereira had cold feet and withdrew from the race at the last minute.

<sup>4</sup>. This Council consists of the President of the National Assembly, the Prime Minister, the President of the Constitutional Court, the Attorney General, the Ombudsman (when appointed), the President of the Economic and Social Council, the former presidents, and five private citizens appointed by the President.

<sup>5</sup>. The poverty line corresponds to 60% of the median annual expenditure per capita; extreme poverty corresponds to 40% of the median.

<sup>6</sup>. In rural areas 51% of the population are poor and 12% very poor (compared to 25% poor in urban areas). 32% of female-headed households are poor, and 68% very poor (compared with 26% of male-headed households who are poor and 14% who are very poor). 46% of the households where the head is unemployed are poor, 60% very poor.

<sup>7</sup>. San Antão has 54% of the population living in poverty; Fogo 43%; and Brava 41%. In contrast, the islands of Sal and São Vicente, where there are higher economic activity rates, have only 13% and 26% respectively living in poverty. On the main island of Santiago it is 36%. As regards the very poor, the islands of Santo Antão, Maio, Fogo, São Nicolau and Santiago, had respectively 34%, 25%, 24% and 20% of the population in this category.

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**Table 1: Leading Democracies of Africa**

1994	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003
Cape Verde									
1,2	1,2	1,2	1,2	1,2	1,2	1,2	1,2	1,2	1,1
South Africa									
2,3	1,2	1,2	1,2	1,2	1,2	1,2	1,2	1,2	1,2
São Tomé									
1,2	1,2	1,2	1,2	1,2	1,2	1,2	1,2	1,2	2,2
Mauritius									
1,2	1,2	1,2	1,2	1,2	1,2	1,2	1,2	1,2	1,2

Source: Freedom House, Inc

**Table 2: The 12 February 2006 presidential election results**

Candidates, Nominating parties	Votes	%
Pedro Pires, African Party for the Independence of Cape Verde	86,583	50.98%
Carlos Veiga, Movement for Democracy	83,241	49.02%
Total (turnout 53.1%)	169,824	100.00
Source: National Electoral Commission.		

**Table 3: The 22 January 2006 National Assembly election results**

Parties	Votes	%	Seats
African Party for the Independence of Cape Verde ( <i>Partido Africano da Independência de Cabo Verde</i> )	88,965	52.28	41
Movement for Democracy ( <i>Movimento para a Democracia</i> )	74,909	44.02	29
Democratic and Independent Cape Verdean Union ( <i>União Caboverdiana Independente e Democrática</i> )	4,495	2.64	2
Democratic Renewal Party ( <i>Partido da Renovação Democrática</i> )	1,097	0.64	-
Social Democratic Party ( <i>Partido Social Democrático</i> )	702	0.41	-

Total (turnout 54.0%)	170,168	100.00	72
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Source: National Electoral Commission.

**Table 4: National Assembly Seats**

	PAICV	MpD	Other
1991	23	56	0
1995	21	50	1
2001	40	30	2
2006	41	29	2

**Table 5: Degree of Citizen Confidence in Institutions**

Institution	No confidence	Some confidence	Much confidence
President of the Republic	18%	49%	29%
National Assembly	16%	50%	24%
National Electoral Commission	21%	55%	19%
City Mayors	21%	43%	32%

Source: *Eficacia e Transparencia do Parlamento na Era Digital*, Assembleia Nacional de Cabo Verde, 2005: 59.

