

Title	Freedom in the World 2013 - Cape Verde
Publisher	Freedom House
Country	Cape Verde
Publication Date	5 March 2013
Cite as	Freedom House, <i>Freedom in the World 2013 - Cape Verde</i> , 5 March 2013, available at: http://www.unhcr.org/refworld/docid/5139c2592d.html [accessed 10 April 2013]
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Freedom in the World 2013 - Cape Verde

2013 Scores

Status: Free

Freedom Rating: 1.0

Civil Liberties: 1

Political Rights: 1

Overview

Cape Verde continued to serve as a model for political rights and civil liberties in Africa in 2012. In January 2012 municipal elections, the Movement for Democracy (MDP) won the majority of city councils. The African Party for Independence of Cape Verde has continued to decline in popularity since its candidate was defeated by the MDP in the 2011 presidential election. Both elections were considered credible and fair by international observers.

After achieving independence from Portugal in 1975, Cape Verde was governed for 16 years as a Marxist, one-party state under the African Party for the Independence of Guinea and Cape Verde, later renamed the African Party for Independence of Cape Verde (PAICV). The establishment of the opposition Movement for Democracy (MPD) in 1990 helped to bring one-party rule to an end, and in 1991 the country became the first former Portuguese colony in Africa to abandon Marxist political and economic systems

and hold democratic elections. The MPD won both the legislative and presidential elections, with candidate António Mascarenhas Monteiro elected president by a landslide victory. In 1995 legislative elections, the MPD increased its majority in the National Assembly, and Monteiro was reelected in 1996.

The 2001 presidential election was more competitive, with PAICV candidate Pedro Verona Rodrigues Pires narrowly defeating Carlos Alberto Wahnnon de Carvalho Veiga of the MPD in the second round. The PAICV also captured a majority in the legislative elections that had been held a month earlier. The January 2006 legislative elections had a similar outcome, with the PAICV taking 41 of the 72 seats, and the MPD placing second with 29. Pires won a new five-year mandate in the February presidential election. While Veiga claimed that the results were fraudulent, they were endorsed by international observers.

In June 2007, the legislature unanimously passed new electoral code provisions aimed at strengthening the National Electoral Commission's transparency and independence.

In the February 2011 legislative elections, the PAICV secured 38 seats, while the MPD garnered 32 and the Democratic and Independent Cape Verdean Union (UCID) – a smaller opposition party – took 2. However, in the August presidential election, former foreign minister Jose Carlos Fonseca of the MPD defeated Manuel Sousa of the PAICV, claiming 54 percent of the vote in a second-round runoff. International observers declared both elections to be free and fair. Subsequently, Fonseca and Prime Minister José Maria das Neves of the PAICV promised to put aside their political differences and work together to ensure Cape Verde's stability and increased prosperity.

In January 2012, Cape Verde held its second municipal elections since the new electoral code was instituted. The MPD won 14 of 22 municipalities, 2 more than in 2008; the PAICV in turn lost 2 city councils and had to settle for a total of 8. An independent movement supported by the MPD won the remaining city council. The MPD's strong performance confirmed the PAICV's decline in popularity.

Services, particularly tourism, dominate the economy, representing nearly 80 percent of the gross domestic product. As a result of persistent droughts, the country experienced heavy emigration in the second half of the 20th century, and Cape Verde's expatriate population is greater than its domestic population; remittances therefore continue to be a major source of wealth. While the United Nations raised Cape Verde out of the least developed countries category in 2008, the country's official unemployment rate is still around 11 percent, and there is significant income inequality.

Political Rights and Civil Liberties

Cape Verde is an electoral democracy. The president and members of the 72-seat National Assembly are elected by universal suffrage for five-year terms. The prime minister is nominated by the National Assembly and appointed by the president.

Cape Verde received the second-highest ranking for governance performance in the 2012 Ibrahim Index of African Governance. However, in a recent survey of Cape Verdeans, the police and city council members were deemed to be corrupt by 17 and 85 percent of those interviewed, respectively. Cape Verde was ranked 39 out of 176 countries in Transparency International's 2012 Corruption Perceptions Index.

While government authorization is needed to publish newspapers and other periodicals, freedom of the press is guaranteed in law and generally respected in practice. The independent press is small but vigorous, and there are several private and community-run radio stations. State-run media include radio and television stations. The government does not impede or monitor internet access.

According to the 2011 U.S. Department of State's International Religious Freedom Report, there were no societal or governmental incidents of religious intolerance, and the constitution requires the separation of church and state. However, the vast majority of Cape Verdeans belong to the Roman Catholic Church, which enjoys a somewhat privileged status. Academic freedom is respected.

Freedoms of assembly and association are legally guaranteed and observed in practice. Nongovernmental organizations operate freely. The constitution also protects the right to unionize, and workers may form and join unions without restriction. Approximately a quarter of the workforce is unionized, but collective bargaining is reportedly rare.

Cape Verde's judiciary is independent. However, the capacity and efficiency of the courts are limited, and lengthy pretrial detention remains a problem. In 2010, Cape Verde signed the Dakar Initiative to fight trafficking by strengthening judicial systems, improving security forces, and increasing international cooperation. In 2011, Interpol agreed to work on a permanent basis with Cape Verdean authorities. In June 2012, Cape Verde's attorney general declared that "money laundering" was on the rise along with an increase in drug trafficking.

Ethnic divisions are not a salient problem in Cape Verde, although there are tensions between the authorities and West African immigrants. Work conditions for undocumented migrants in the country are often dire.

While discrimination based on gender is legally prohibited, problems such as violence against women and inequalities in the areas of education and employment persist. To

address these issues, the government has adopted a series of legislative reforms, including a 2010 law criminalizing gender violence and a National Action Plan to fight gender violence (2009-11). The gender issue was declared to be one of the four main elements of the government program for 2011-16.

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