



Cape Verde — Va-PoReg Country Report

Kailitz, Steffen, et al., 2026: Varieties of Political Regimes (Va-PoReg). Country Report Cape Verde, Dresden: Hannah Arendt Institute for Totalitarianism Studies.

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.7910/DVN/JYEL7U>

[officially known since 10/24/2013 as Cabo Verde]

01/01/1462 Start Direct Rule Colonial Regime [of Portugal]: Around 1462 Portugal colonized Cape Verde and the islands were administrated by a Portuguese governor. However, the islands were uninhabited at that time (Lansford 2021: 282). The decline in the slave trade in the 19th century resulted in an economic crisis. With few natural resources and inadequate sustainable investment from the Portuguese, the citizens grew increasingly discontented with the colonial masters, who refused to provide the local authorities with more autonomy. The dissatisfaction accumulated in the beginning of the 20th century. Consequently in 1951, Portugal changed Cape Verde's status from a colony to an overseas province in an attempt to blunt growing nationalism.¹ According to LIED, no multiparty executive or legislative elections were held during the specified period. Moreover, both LIED and V-Dem's PCLI indicate that political liberties were absent for the colonial time. From 1900 to 1973, V-Dem's JCE is interpreted by us as indicating that judicial constraints on the executive were limited, while V-Dem's LCE is classified by us as indicating that legislative constraints on the executive were robust. For the year 1974, V-Dem's JCE is interpreted by us as indicating that judicial constraints on the executive were limited, while V-Dem's LCE is classified by us as indicating that legislative constraints on the executive were moderate.

12/30/1974 End Direct Rule Colonial Regime [of Portugal, Democratizing Regime]/Start Non-Electoral Transitional Regime [semi-sovereign, external affairs under Portugal, Democratizing Regime]: An agreement signed with Portuguese authorities on this date provided for a transitional government prior to independence on 07/05/1975. We code this regime change event as a negotiated transition. LIED identifies political liberties as absent, and V-Dem's PCLI is likewise classified by us as showing that political liberties are absent. For the relevant regime period, V-Dem's JCE is interpreted by us as indicating that judicial constraints on the executive were robust, while V-Dem's LCE is classified by us as indicating that legislative constraints on the executive were moderate.

06/30/1975 End Non-Electoral Transitional Regime/Start One-Party Autocracy [semi-sovereign, external affairs under Portugal, Liberal Democracy]: A 56-member National People's Assembly was elected on 06/30/1975, but only the African Party for the Independence of Guinea and Cape Verde (PAIGC) participated (Lansford 2021: 282). The PAIGC was the sole legal party at the time, with voters being asked to approve or reject a PAIGC list of 56 members for the parliament.²

07/05/1975 Continuation One-Party Autocracy [as independent country]: On this date independence was attained as the Republic of Cape Verde (Lansford 2021: 282). Afterwards the African Party for the Independence of Guinea and Cape Verde (PAIGC) established its one-party political system under universal suffrage.³ In February 1990, the National Council of the ruling Party for the Independence of Cape Verde (PAICV) officially supported a transition to multiparty rule. On 09/28/1990 The government implemented a constitutional revision that concluded one-party rule and instituted a multi-party semi-presidential system (Haggard/Kaufman/Teo 2016: 19).⁴ The elections are not considered competitive by LIED. According to LIED, both executive and legislative elections were held, but they were not categorized as multiparty. During this period, V-Dem's EF&FI indicates that elections were somewhat free and fair. Their CEI indicates an

ambiguous state regarding electoral cleanliness. Regarding the political liberties they are still coded as absent per LIED. V-Dem's PCLI is in a range that we interpret as an ambiguous state of political liberties until 1987 and pointing into the direction that they were somewhat present until 1990. According to the Polity5 indicator, during this period, the executive faced substantial limitations on decision-making power. From 1976 to 1980, V-Dem's JCE is interpreted by us as indicating that judicial constraints on the executive were comprehensive, while V-Dem's LCE is classified by us as indicating that legislative constraints on the executive were robust. For the years 1981-1990, V-Dem's JCE is interpreted by us as indicating that judicial constraints on the executive were comprehensive, while V-Dem's LCE is classified by us as indicating that legislative constraints on the executive were moderate. For 1991, V-Dem's JCE and LCE are both interpreted by us as indicating comprehensive constraints on the executive. Per FH's evaluation for 1975, the country scores from 9 to 10 as not free, which we categorize as rather not free. From 1976 onward, the country scores between 11 and 14 as not free, which we also interpret as not free. As classified by FH for 1990, the country scores once again between 9 and 10 as not free, which we interpret as rather not free.

02/17/1991 End One-Party Autocracy/Start Liberal Democracy: On this date competitive elections were held (Haggard/Kaufman/Teo 2016: 19).⁵ According to FH Cape Verde maintained stability as a democracy with competitive elections, featuring periodic transfers of power between rival parties. LIED has ever since categorized them as competitive. According to LIED, multiparty executive and legislative elections were held during this period. Since 1991, V-Dem's EF&FI and CEI have consistently scored the countries elections as free, fair and clean. Per FH's scoring for 1991, the country is classified as free with a score of 5, which falls into our interpretation of the rather free category. From 1992 onward, the country is considered free with a score ranging from 2 to 4, which we also interpret as free in our framework. LIED classifies political liberties as present from 1992 onward. V-Dem's PCLI codes political liberties as present in this entire period. From 1991 to 2000, as per Polity5's categorization, the executive's authority was significantly constrained, nearing parity with other branches, placing it in the third intermediate category. Since 2011, based on Polity5's assessment, the executive was either equal to or subordinate to other institutions, demonstrating strong constraints on decision-making authority. During this regime period, V-Dem's JCE is classified by us as indicating that judicial constraints on the executive were comprehensive, while V-Dem's LCE is classified by us as indicating that legislative constraints on the executive were also comprehensive. While civil liberties are generally safeguarded, the court system faces challenges due to overload, impacting access to justice, and crime remains a notable concern. Ongoing issues include persistent inequalities for women and migrant workers.⁶ Compared to other African states, Cape Verde is relatively tolerant towards LGBT people, with decriminalized homosexuality and some anti-discrimination protections, but lacks rights like same-sex marriage, adoption, and protections against conversion therapies and medical interventions on intersex minors.⁷ Cape Verde is a democracy with a dual executive. The system is characterized as a semi-parliamentary democracy that holds multi-party, competitive elections. The judiciary is independent from the executive and legislative branch. The constitution, last revised in 1992, provides the basis of government and guarantees civil liberties and political rights.⁸ In 2022 Cape Verde declared a state of social and economic emergency due to the effects of the war in Ukraine and of COVID-19 on food and other essential supplies. Notably, however, this did not lead to restrictions of civil liberties or political rights.⁹

Liberal Democracy as of 07/01/2025 continued.

Additional sources (Clemente-Kersten 1999b)

Notes

¹ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cape_Verde

² https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/1975_Cape_Verdean_parliamentary_election

³ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Politics_of_Cape_Verde

⁴ [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cape_Verde#Independence_\(1975\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cape_Verde#Independence_(1975))

⁵ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/1991_Cape_Verdean_presidential_election

⁶ <https://freedomhouse.org/country/cabo-verde/freedom-world/2022>; <https://www.britannica.com/place/Cabo-Verde/Trade#ref54911>

⁷ <https://database.ilga.org/cape-verde-lgbti>

⁸ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Politics_of_Cape_Verde

⁹ <https://freedomhouse.org/country/cabo-verde/freedom-world/2023>

References

Haggard, Stephan/Kaufman, Robert/Teo, Terence (2016): Distributive Conflict and Regime Change: A Qualitative Dataset (Codebook). San Diego/Rutgers: University of California/State University of New Jersey.

Lansford, Tom (2021): Political Handbook of the World 2020-2021. Thousand Oaks: CQ Press.