

Afrobarometer Releases: The State of Democracy

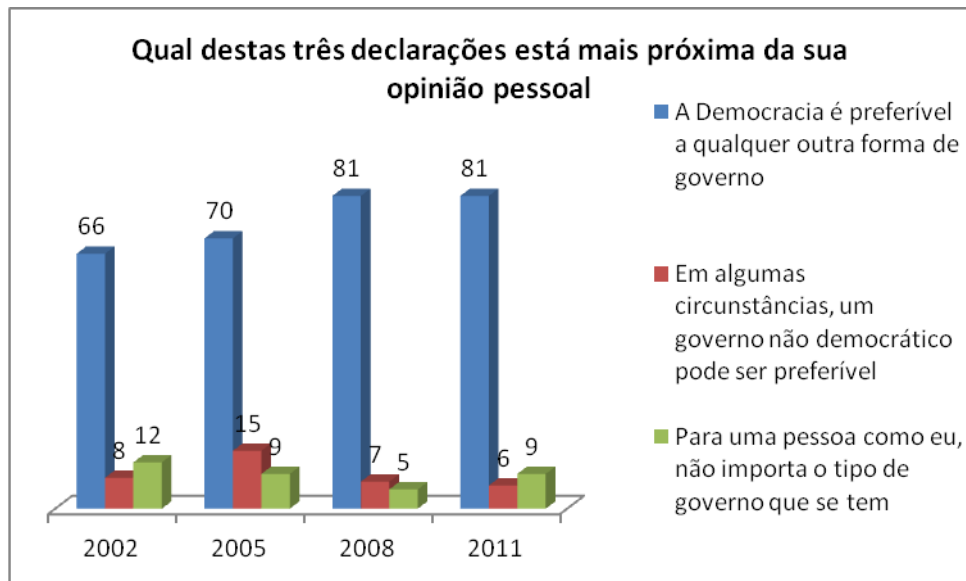
Since 1990, with the achievement of the first free multiparty elections, democracy has assumed a central place in the Cape Verdean political sphere, constituting one of the greatest achievements in the course of our history as an independent nation.

This issue gains centrality in the political debate when considering, among other things, the perception that Cape Verdeans have regarding the quality of our democracy. The question becomes even more relevant if we take into account the drop in the reliability of democracy as a political system, not only in developed countries in Europe and North America, but also in States that have seen recent re-democratizations both in countries in Latin America and in Eastern Europe.

According to Carvalho (2004), a study published by UNDP in April 2004 reveals the existence of a certain despondency towards democracy among Latin Americans as 55% of the 18,643 people surveyed across 18 countries said they would accept authoritarianism if that would improve the economy (...). Among the countries surveyed, Brazil was the one where support for democracy seems the weakest: only 37% of respondents said that "democracy is preferable to any other form of government;" 63% would accept authoritarianism if it would mean an improvement in their lives. (Carvalho, 2004: 7-8)

A more recent study conducted by the Institute of Social Sciences in Portugal also points to a certain dissatisfaction among the Portuguese with the way democracy works in that country, with only 55.5% considering that democracy is preferable to any other form of government (Pinto , 2012).

In Cape Verde, the data from the Afrobarometer / Afrosondagem study on the quality of democracy suggests that Cape Verdeans reveal themselves to be democrats with conviction, with 8 out of 10 respondents defending democracy as preferable to any other form of government, which puts us in a distinct position relative to that recorded in the aforementioned countries. In 2002, the proportion of the population that shared this opinion stood at 66%. In 2011, according to this same study, that proportion has reached 81%, repeating the results reported in 2008.



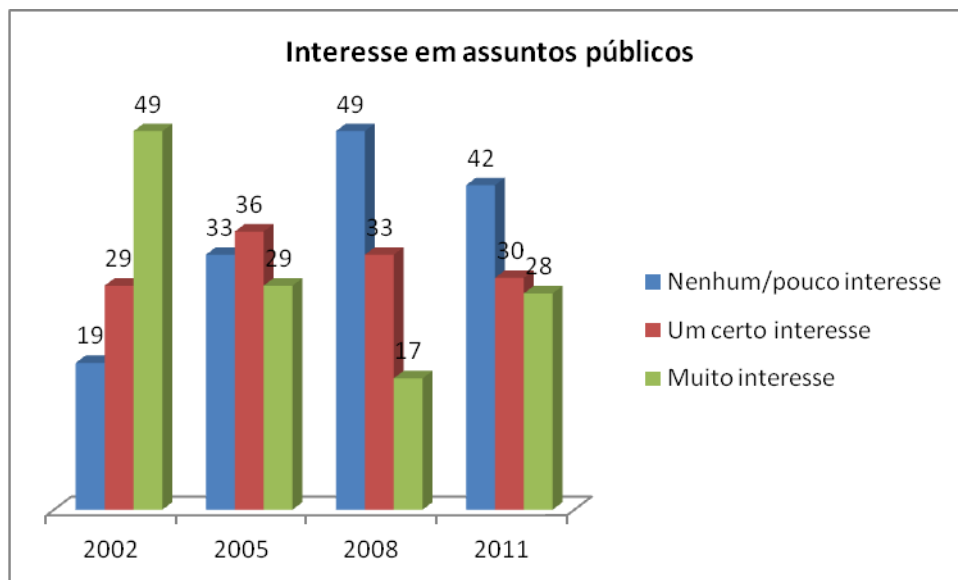
Other features that corroborate the idea of a greater commitment to democracy among Cape Verdeans are expressed through the defense of the principle that the existence of many political parties is necessary to ensure that Cape Verdeans have real opportunities to choose who governs them. About 7 in every 10 respondents assume this position. Another feature that corroborates the idea of this greater commitment to democracy is the great support behind the idea that we should be able to join any organization, whether or not the government approves it. This latter view is shared by 76% of respondents.

Further, in regards to the various forms of freedom that shape our democratic system, the majority of Cape Verdeans understand that we enjoy these freedoms fully. Thus, over 57% of respondents believe that people are completely free to say what they think, against only 15% who believe that we are minimally or not at all free in that regard; 60% believe that freedom of association is completely free, against 12% who express the contrary opinion; 77% believe there is total freedom in the vote, ie, that people choose who to vote for without feeling pressured. It should be noted that there has been progress in these regards, because the proportion of those who complain that there is little or no freedom of association or expression has decreased over time.

However, there is a clear indication that there are some other aspects that deserve some attention, either from the standpoint of the elected or the voters. Cape Verdeans "denounce" the little willingness on the part of elected politicians, whether national or local, to listen to the concerns of voters as they exercise their functions. Thus, 74% of

respondents believe that the national parliamentarians never do their best to listen to what the people have to say to them, with a similar proportion reporting the same in relation to local councilors.

On the other hand, there is a noted tendency towards a decrease in interest in public affairs. In 2002, about 78% of respondents answered that they were interested in public affairs, but this proportion dropped to 58% in 2011. In addition to this, most Cape Verdeans (77%) state that they never discuss political issues when they get together with friends and/or family, which could possibly be associated with this "distance" with which the representatives present themselves to the community.



Cape Verdeans essentially associate democracy with freedom of expression, free choice of representatives and with the government's ability to reduce social differences. However, when asked to choose a single aspect as the most essential characteristic of a democracy, they place first the ability to ensure employment opportunity for all, which was cited by 43% of respondents, followed by the existence of competition and equal treatment of political parties in elections, referenced by 27% of respondents.

Afrosondagem / Afrobarometer