

# Despite freedoms, Cabo Verdeans dissatisfied with democracy as economic performance worsens

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**Afrobarometer Dispatch No. 319 | Thomas Isbell and Sadhiska Bhoojedhur**

## Summary

Cabo Verde stands out on the African continent as a paradigm of tolerance and respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms. The country has ratified all major international human-rights conventions; its laws guarantee democratic freedoms; and its government is generally considered effective in respecting and protecting these rights (European Commission, 2018; U.S. Department of State, 2016).

Yet when Afrobarometer asked Cabo Verdeans how they see their democracy, responses suggested a curious mix of appreciation and dissatisfaction. Most citizens said that they feel free to express their views and that political freedoms have been improving in recent years. Yet growing numbers of Cabo Verdeans expressed dissatisfaction with their democracy – a view that may have more to do with the government's economic management than its record on political rights.

## Afrobarometer survey

Afrobarometer directs a pan-African, nonpartisan research network that conducts public attitude surveys on democracy, governance, economic conditions, and related issues in African countries. Seven rounds of surveys were completed in up to 38 countries between 1999 and 2018. Round 8 surveys in 2019/2020 are planned in at least 35 countries.

Afrobarometer conducts face-to-face interviews in the language of the respondent's choice with nationally representative samples.

The Afrobarometer national partner in Cabo Verde, Afrosondagem, interviewed a nationally representative, random, stratified probability sample of 1,200 adult Cabo Verdeans between 20 November and 6 December 2017. A sample of this size yields results with a margin of error of +/-3 percentage points at a 95% confidence level. Previous surveys have been conducted in Cabo Verde in 2002, 2005, 2008, 2011, and 2014.

## Key findings

- Nine out of 10 Cabo Verdeans (90%) said they feel “somewhat” or “completely” free to say what they think, an increase from 84% in 2011 and 2014.
- Compared to “a few years ago,” majorities reported “somewhat” or “much” greater freedom for citizens to speak their minds about politics (70%) and to join political organizations (66%) as well as for the media (59%), the opposition (64%), and independent groups (61%) to function.
- Even if faced with threats to public safety, a majority of Cabo Verdeans said they would oppose a government right to limit people's movement through curfews and

roadblocks (52%), monitor private communications (70%), or regulate what is said in places of worship (59%).

- Despite majority perceptions of political freedoms, a growing number of Cabo Verdeans described their country as “not a democracy” or “a democracy with major problems,” and three out of four (76%) said they were “not at all” or “not very” satisfied with the way democracy is working in Cabo Verde – a dramatic change for the worse from previous surveys.
- A statistical analysis suggests that high levels of dissatisfaction with democracy are more strongly correlated with negative views on the economic situation of the country and government performance in service delivery than with perceptions of political freedoms.

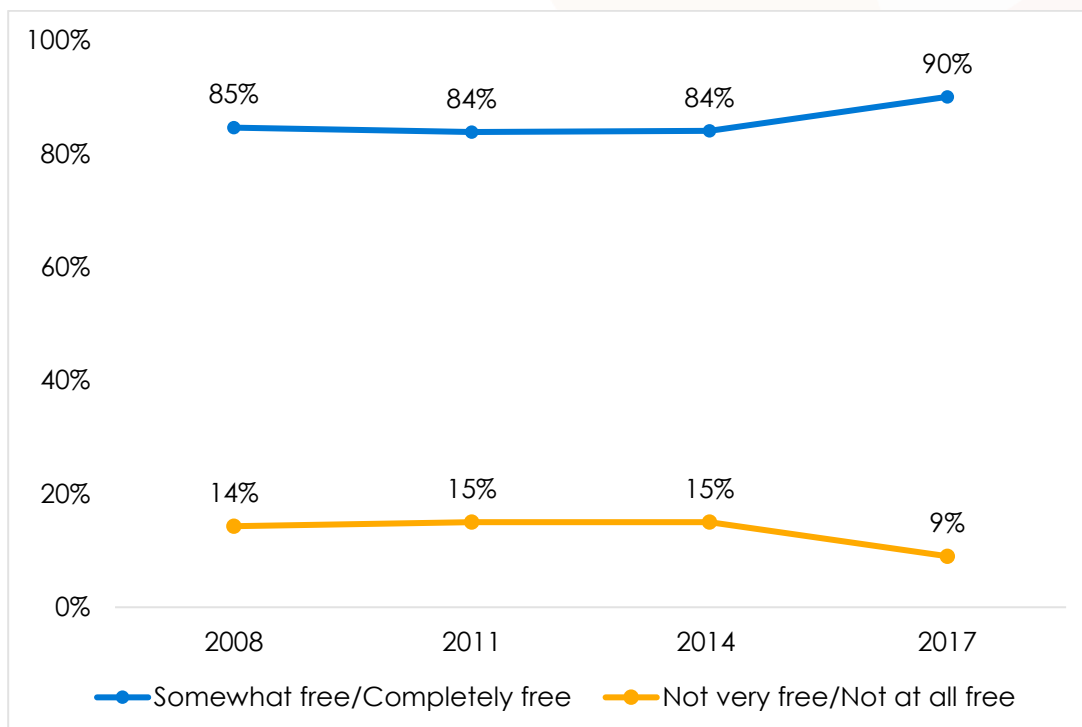
### Political freedoms

As of late 2017, Cabo Verdeans overwhelmingly saw themselves as enjoying freedom of speech: 90% said they feel “somewhat” or “completely” free to say what they think, up from 84% in 2011 and 2014 (Figure 1).

Moreover, most (70%) said they are now “somewhat more free” or “much more free” to speak their minds about politics than they were “a few years ago” (Figure 2).

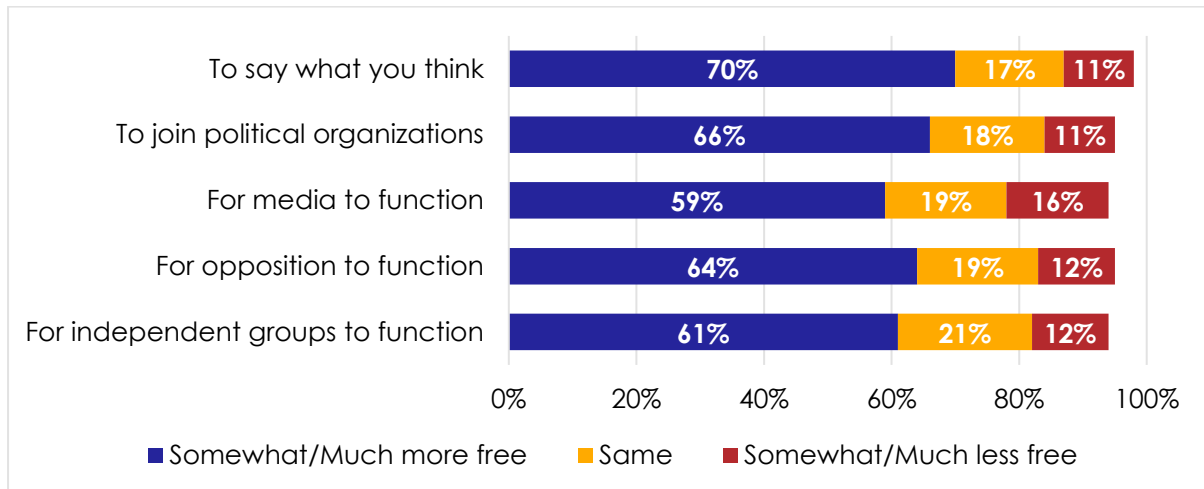
Similarly, majorities reported greater freedom for citizens to join political organizations of their choice (66%), for the media to “investigate and report on government mistakes or to criticize government actions or performance” (59%), and for opposition parties or candidates (64%) and independent groups or non-governmental organizations (61%) to function, including to criticize the government.

**Figure 1: Freedom to say what you think | Cabo Verde | 2008-2017**



**Respondents were asked:** *In this country, how free are you to say what you think?*

**Figure 2: Better or worse: Political freedoms** | Cabo Verde | 2017



**Respondents were asked:** Please tell me if there is more or less freedom now for each of the following things compared to a few years ago, or are things about the same:

Your own freedom to say what you think about politics?

Your own freedom to join any political organization you want?

The media's freedom to investigate and report on government mistakes or to criticize government actions or performance?

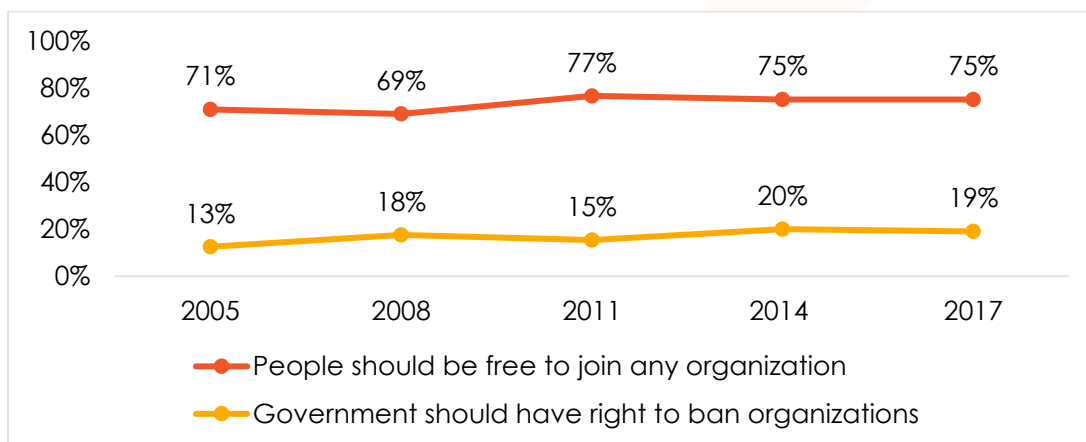
The freedom of opposition parties or candidates to speak or hold rallies, state their views, or criticize the government?

The freedom of independent groups or non-governmental organizations to speak, hold meetings or advocate their views freely, including criticizing the government if they choose?

These rights align with Cabo Verdeans' preference for freedom, even in cases that challenge government policy or threaten public safety.

A strong majority of citizens have consistently said that people should be free to join any organization, regardless of whether the government approves of it (Figure 3). In 2017, only 19% endorsed a government right to ban organizations that go against its policies.

**Figure 3: Views on freedom to join any organization** | Cabo Verde | 2005-2017



**Respondents were asked:** Which of the following statements is closest to your view?

Statement 1: Government should be able to ban any organization that goes against its policies.

Statement 2: We should be able to join any organization, whether or not the government approves of it.

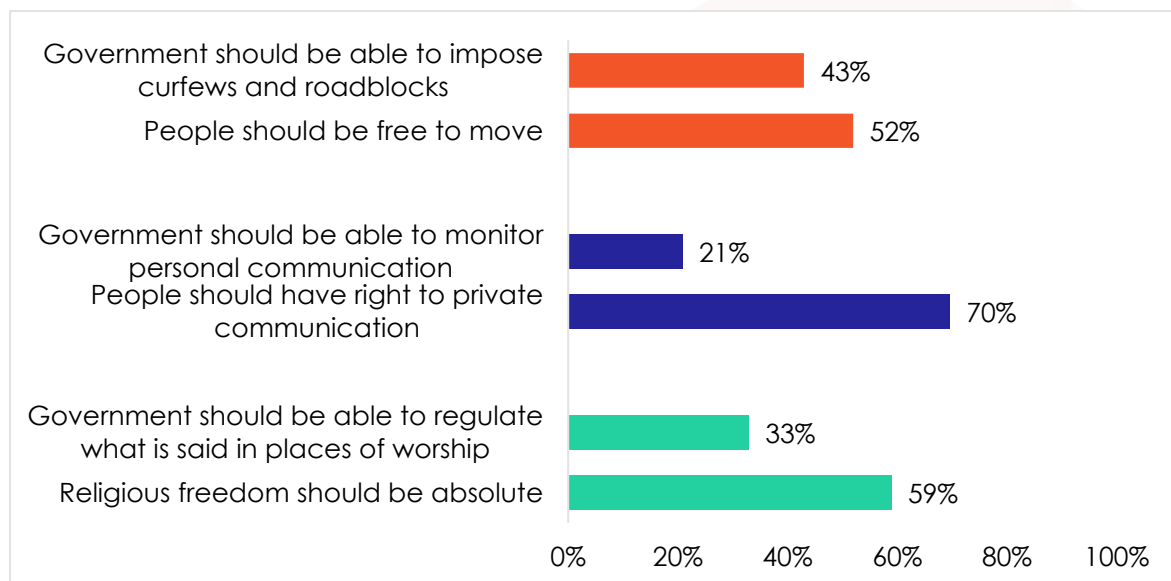
(% who "agree" or "strongly agree" with each statement)

Even if faced with threats to public safety, a majority of Cabo Verdeans would prefer civil freedoms over government interference (Figure 4).

While more than four in 10 respondents (43%) said the government should have the right to limit people's movement through curfews and roadblocks to protect public safety, a slim majority (52%) would insist on freedom of movement even under those circumstances.

Only two out of 10 (21%) agreed that the government should be able to monitor private communications, such as cell-phone calls, to make sure people are not planning violence. And only one in three (33%) agreed that the government should be able to monitor what is said in places of worship, while a majority (59%) said freedom of religion should be absolute.

**Figure 4: Civil liberties vs. government control | Cabo Verde | 2017**



**Respondents were asked:** Which of the following statements is closest to your view? (% who "agree" or "strongly agree" with each statement)

*Statement 1: Even if faced with threats to public security, people should be free to move about the country at any time of day or night.*

*Statement 2: When faced with threats to public security, the government should be able to impose curfews and set up special roadblocks to prevent people from moving around.*

*Statement 1: Government should be able to monitor private communications, for example on mobile phones, to make sure that people are not plotting violence.*

*Statement 2: People should have the right to communicate in private without a government agency reading or listening to what they are saying.*

*Statement 1: Freedom of religion and worship are absolute, meaning that government should never limit what is said in a place of worship.*

*Statement 2: Government should have the power to regulate what is said in places of worship, especially if preachers or congregants threaten public security.*

## Views on democracy

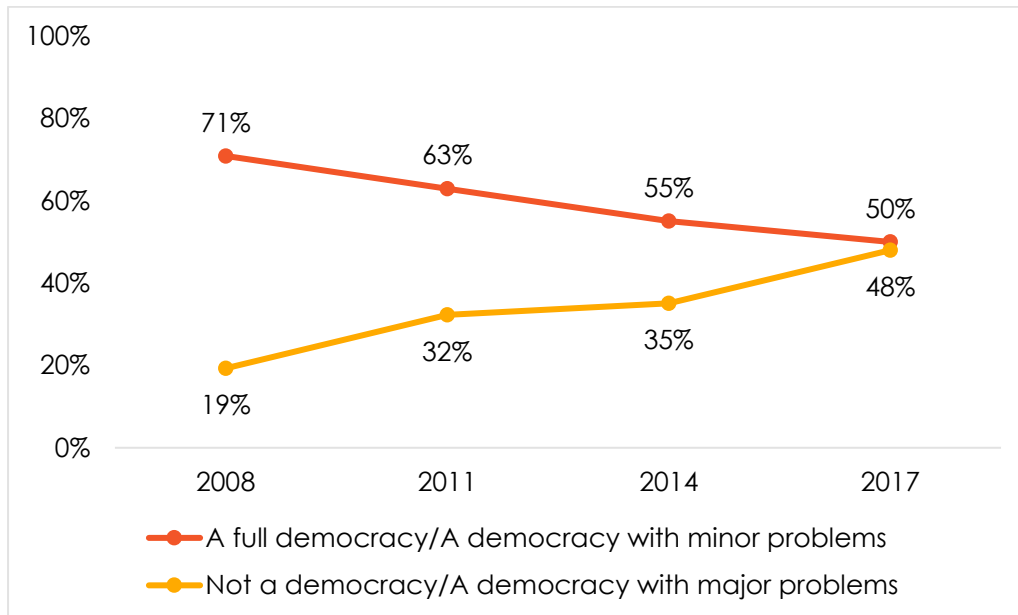
Despite widespread perceptions that they enjoy considerable – and increasing – political freedoms, Cabo Verdeans' perceptions of their democracy are increasingly negative.

As of late 2017, Cabo Verdeans were about evenly divided in their assessment of how democratic their country is – a dramatic shift for the worse over the past decade. Half (50%) of citizens said the country is "a full democracy" or "a democracy with minor problems," but almost as many (48%) were more critical, describing it as "a democracy with major problems" or "not a democracy" at all.

Positive assessments have dropped by 21 percentage points since 2008, when 71% assigned their country a “full democracy/minor problems” label (Figure 5).

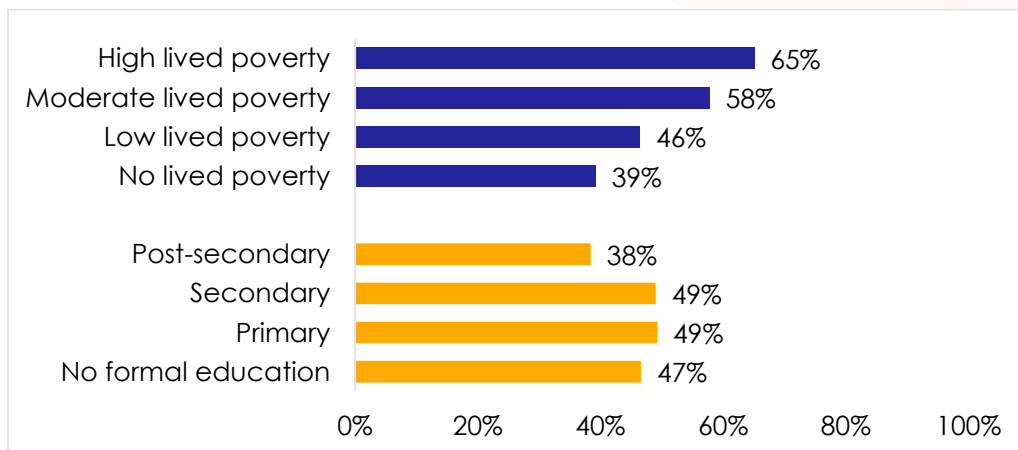
Poor respondents were especially likely to see the country as less than a fully functioning democracy, including two-thirds (65%) of those who experienced high lived poverty.<sup>1</sup> Citizens with post-secondary education were less critical (38%) than their less-educated counterparts (Figure 6).

**Figure 5: Extent of democracy | Cabo Verde | 2008-2017**



**Respondents were asked:** In your opinion, how much of a democracy is Cabo Verde today?

**Figure 6: Major problems or not a democracy | by level of lived poverty and education | Cabo Verde | 2017**

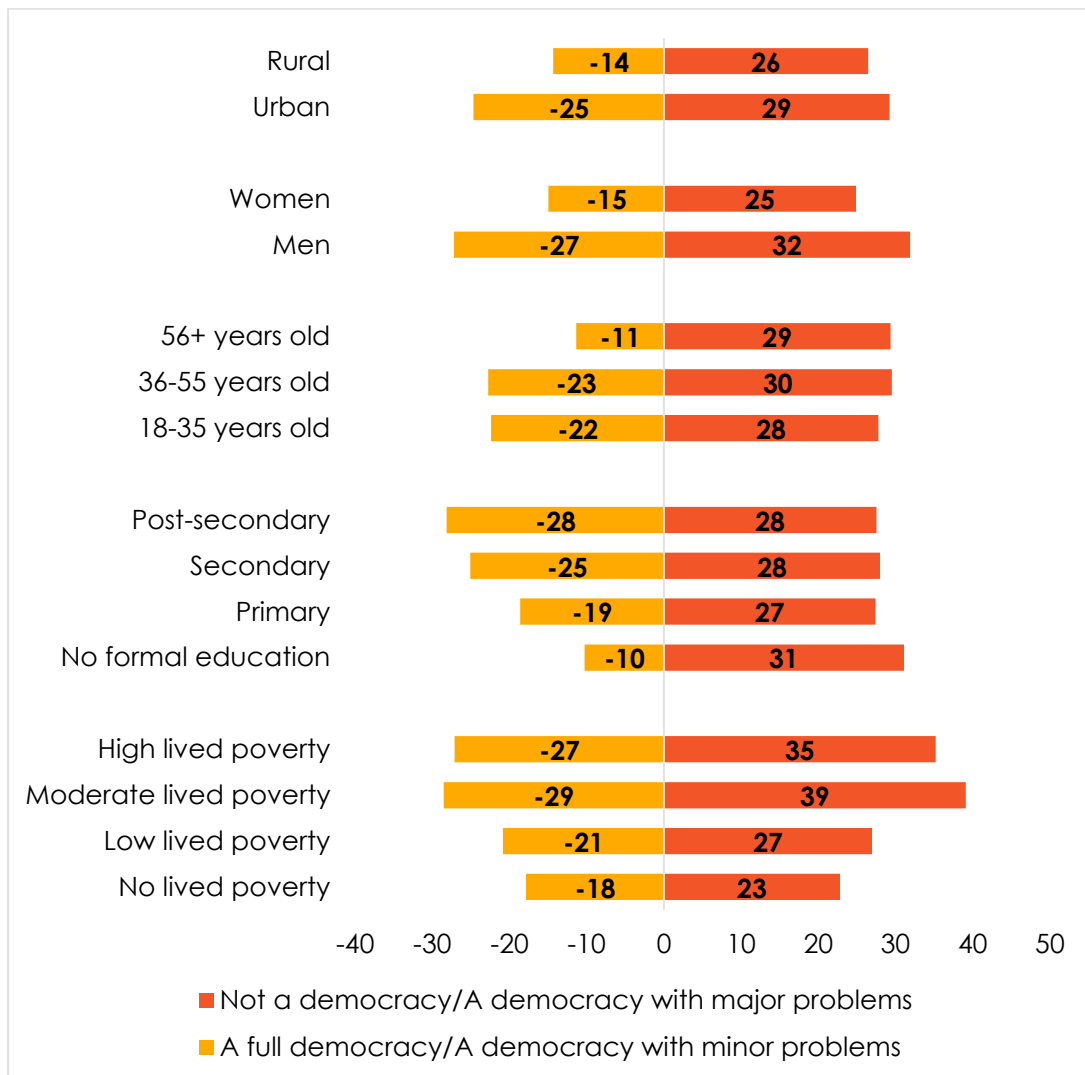


**Respondents were asked:** In your opinion, how much of a democracy is Cabo Verde today? (% who said “a democracy with major problems” or “not a democracy”)

<sup>1</sup> Afrobarometer assesses lived poverty based on responses to the following questions: “Over the past year, how often, if ever, have you or anyone in your family gone without: Enough food to eat? Enough clean water for home use? Medicines or medical treatment? Enough fuel to cook your food? A cash income?”

Figure 7 compares the changes between 2008 and 2017 in the perceived extent of democracy by key socio-demographic groups. It shows that the greatest changes occurred among poor respondents, where perceptions that Cabo Verde is “not a democracy” or “a democracy with major problems” increased by 35-39 percentage points over the decade. Negative assessments also increased in all other groups, especially among men (by 32 percentage points) and respondents with no formal education (by 31 points).

**Figure 7: Change in perceived extent of democracy | by socio-demographic group | Cabo Verde | 2008-2017**

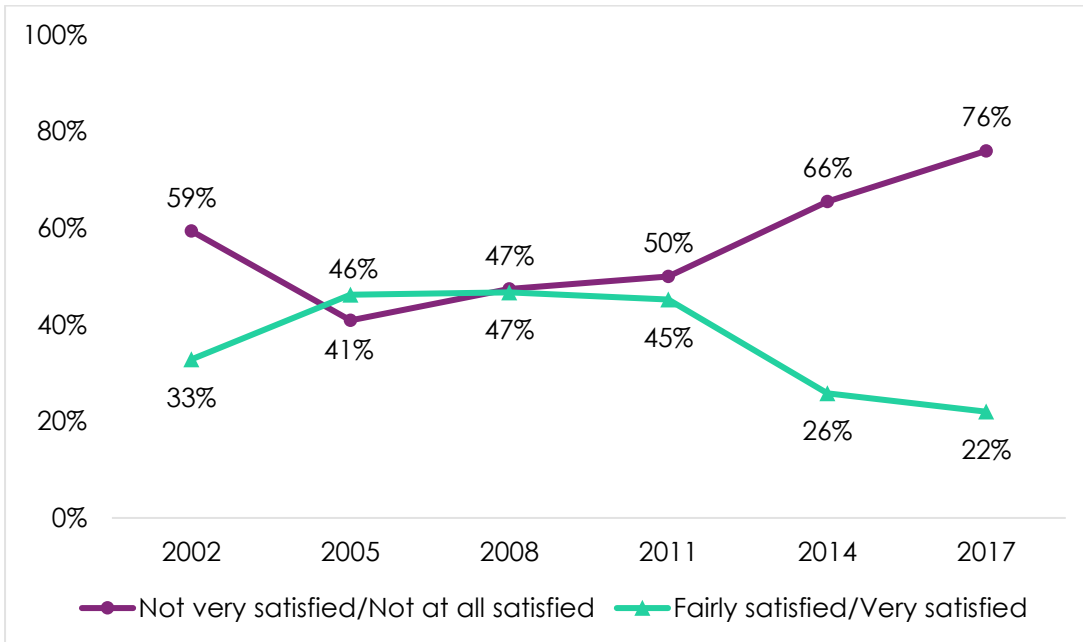


**Respondents were asked:** *In your opinion how much of a democracy is Cabo Verde today? (Figure shows the difference, in percentage points, between 2008 and 2017 proportions who chose each response option.)*

In line with these negative assessments, the share of Cabo Verdeans who are “not very satisfied” or “not at all satisfied” with the way democracy works in their country has been increasingly consistently since 2005, reaching three-fourths (76%) in 2017 (Figure 8).

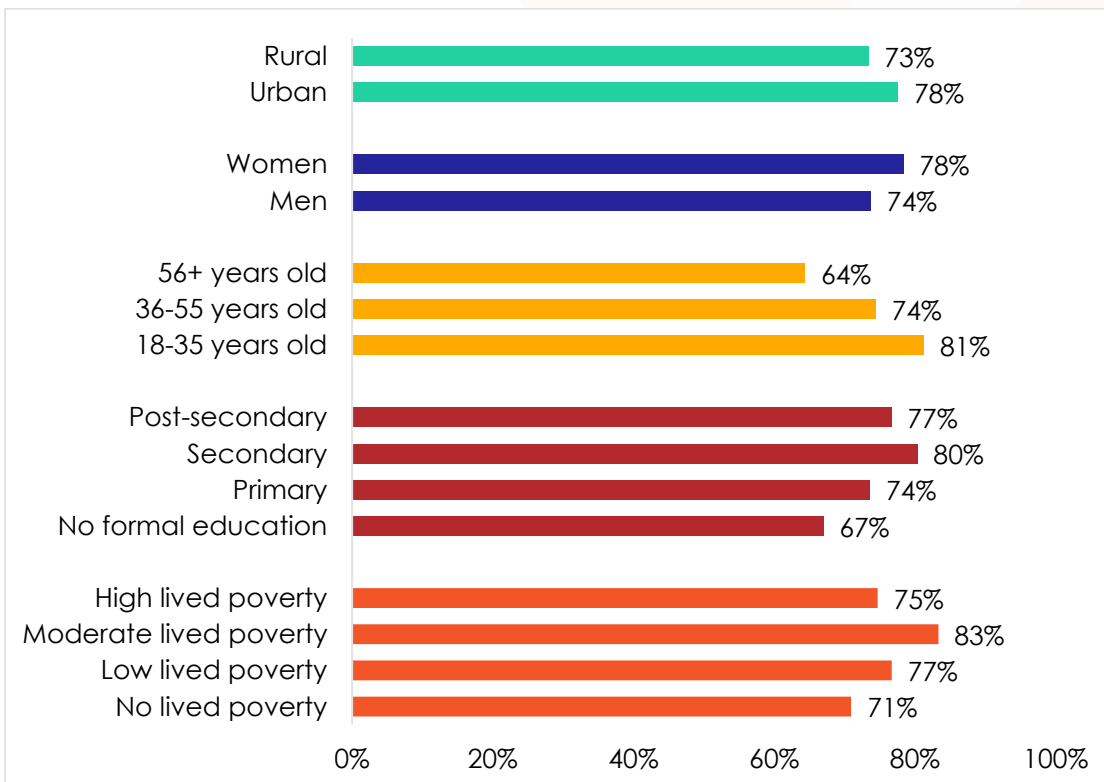
Young Cabo Verdeans were particularly dissatisfied with their democracy (81% among 18- to 35-year-olds, compared to 64%-74% of their elders). Other differences by socio-demographic group were modest or showed no clear pattern (Figure 9).

**Figure 8: Satisfaction with democracy | Cabo Verde | 2002-2017**



**Respondents were asked:** Overall, how satisfied are you with the way democracy works in Cabo Verde?

**Figure 9: Dissatisfied with the way democracy is working | by socio-demographic group | Cabo Verde | 2017**



**Respondents were asked:** Overall, how satisfied are you with the way democracy works in Cabo Verde? (% who said "not very satisfied" or "not at all satisfied")



## Dissatisfaction despite freedoms

Considering international praise for Cabo Verde's democracy and its citizens' perceptions that political freedoms are increasing, why are so many Cabo Verdeans unhappy with the way democracy is working in their country?

One clue may lie in our finding above that poorer Cabo Verdeans are particularly likely to be dissatisfied. From the literature on democratic theory, we know that evaluations of democracy may be based on both intrinsic and instrumental evaluations (Bratton & Mattes, 2001; Mattes & Bratton, 2007; Bratton, 2002). Intrinsic evaluations are based on "what it is," meaning core characteristics of democracy such as political freedoms and free and fair elections. Instrumental evaluations are based on "what it does," meaning measurable outcomes and performance of a democratic regime.

We conducted a correlation analysis to examine whether and how strongly satisfaction with democracy among ordinary Cabo Verdeans was associated with various other perceptions and evaluations. Specifically, we looked at three groups of variables: citizens' perceptions of their political freedoms (a type of intrinsic evaluation) and their views on economic performance and public service delivery (two types of instrumental assessments).

We first looked at the overall population of Cabo Verde. In Table 1, the Pearson's  $r$  correlation coefficients show that perceived freedoms are positively and significantly associated with satisfaction with democracy. This means that Cabo Verdeans who report greater freedom are also more satisfied with democracy. Among the four freedom variables, improved freedom of expression was most strongly associated with greater satisfaction with democracy.

We see far stronger associations, however, between economic evaluations and satisfaction with democracy. This suggests that for ordinary Cabo Verdeans, satisfaction with democracy is more strongly tied to economic performance than to political freedoms. Likewise,

evaluations of service delivery are more strongly correlated with satisfaction with democracy than are perceived freedoms.

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To test whether these findings are true for all Cabo Verdeans regardless of their experience of poverty, we ran separate correlation analyses for each level of lived poverty in the sample. The Pearson's  $r$  correlation coefficients (in the last four columns) suggest that freedoms are most

strongly associated with satisfaction with democracy for those who have experienced no lived poverty, i.e. for those who are economically best off. For example, only for these respondents are all four intrinsic evaluations significantly associated with satisfaction.

For Cabo Verdeans with at least some level of lived poverty, on the other hand, satisfaction with democracy appears less strongly related or unrelated to freedoms and more strongly related to instrumental evaluations, as of delivery of health care and education.

And even among citizens with no lived poverty, evaluations of how the country is doing economically, or how the government is handling educational needs, are more strongly associated with satisfaction with democracy than are perceived freedoms.



**Table 1: Correlates of satisfaction with democracy | Cabo Verde | 2017**

	Satisfaction with democracy				
	National sample	No lived poverty	Low lived poverty	Moderate lived poverty	High lived poverty
<b>Political freedoms</b>					
Freedom to say what you think	.085**	.263**	.108*	NS	-.220*
Better or worse: Freedom to say what you think	.166**	.239**	.116**	.173*	NS
Better or worse: Freedom to join political organizations	.096**	.189**	NS	NS	NS
Better or worse: Media freedom	.097**	.208**	.098*	NS	NS
<b>Economic management</b>					
Country's present economic condition	.401**	.408**	.361**	.395**	.454**
Government managing the economy	.363**	.417**	.315**	.174*	.522**
Government improving living standards of the poor	.245**	.322**	.181**	NS	.426**
Government creating jobs	.249**	.388**	.193**	NS	.235*
Government keeping prices stable	.251**	.348**	.164**	NS	.422**
Government narrowing income gaps	.263**	.330**	.208**	.156*	.418**
<b>Public service delivery</b>					
Government reducing crime	.327**	.371**	.259**	.262**	.516**
Government improving basic health services	.323**	.433**	.262**	.175*	.388**
Government addressing educational needs	.205**	.290**	.118**	NS	.378**
Government providing water and sanitation services	.291**	.373**	.225**	.179*	.336**
Government ensuring enough to eat	.271**	.332**	.236**	.178*	.325**
Government fighting corruption	.218**	.212**	.189**	.230**	NS
Government maintaining roads and bridges	.327**	.371**	.259**	.262**	.516**

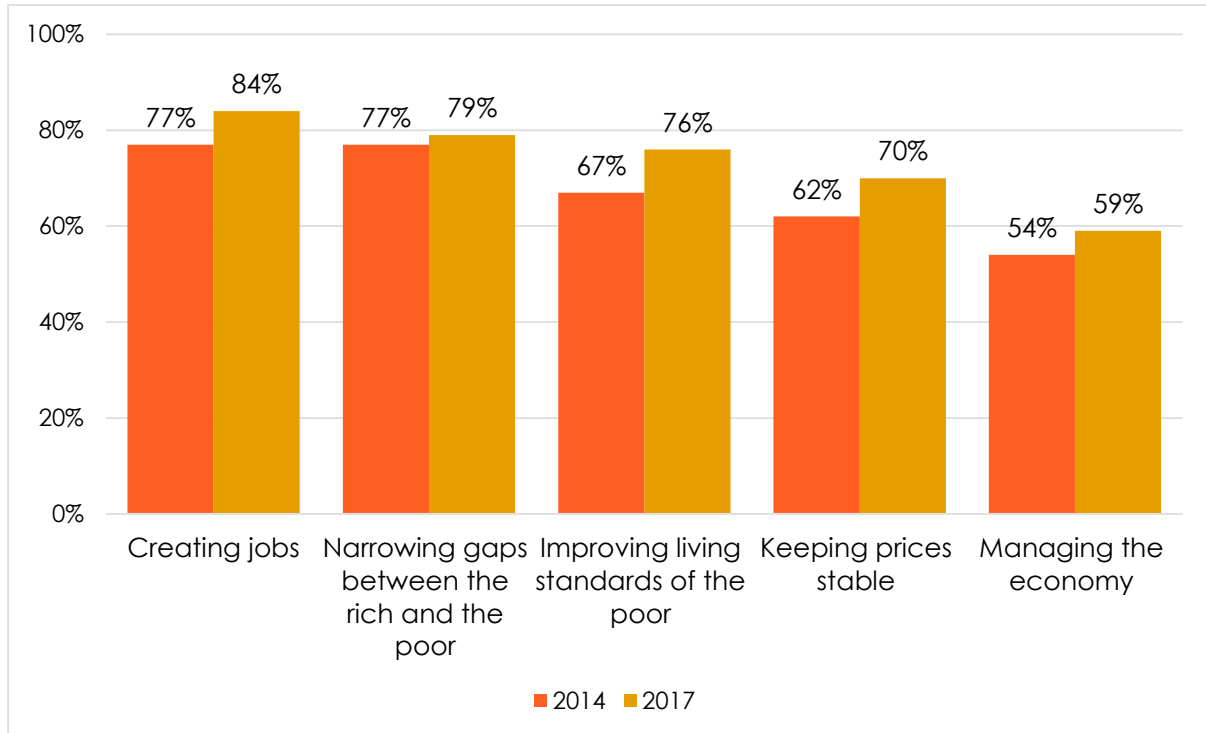
(\* $p < 0.05$ ; \*\* $p < 0.001$ ); "NS" indicates no significant correlation.

The table shows Pearson's  $r$  correlation coefficients reflecting the strength of association between the variable and satisfaction with democracy. The coefficients can range from -1 to 1; coefficients closer to -1 or 1 indicate stronger associations, and coefficients closer to 0 indicate weaker associations.

In light of these findings, we recall Furtado and Semedo's (2018) findings that Cabo Verdeans' evaluations of government performance worsened in key economic policy areas between 2014 and 2017. Large majorities in 2017 said the government was doing "fairly badly" or "very badly" at creating jobs (84%), narrowing gaps between rich and poor (79%), improving living standards of the poor (76%), keeping prices stable (70%), and managing the economy (59%) (Figure 10). Likewise, the authors found Cabo Verdeans considerably less

approving of the government's performance in providing water and sanitation, health care, and enough to eat.

**Figure 10: Negative assessments of government performance on economic issues | Cabo Verde | 2014-2017**



**Respondents were asked:** How well or badly would you say the current government is handling the following matters, or haven't you heard enough to say? (% who say "fairly badly" or "very badly")

## Conclusion

Survey findings show strong and growing political freedoms enjoyed by Cabo Verdeans. And even in the face of threats to public safety, a majority of citizens would oppose trading freedoms of movement, of private communication, and of religious speech for increased security.

Yet despite Cabo Verde's reputation as one of Africa's most stable democracies, a growing number of citizens are dissatisfied with the way democracy is working. Our analysis suggests that this may be associated less with intrinsic evaluations of democracy as such, but rather with the perceived economic and service-delivery performance of the system.

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