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## From São Tomé to Praia: two elections, a different set of expectations

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At a glance, any immediate and swift analysis of both São Tomé and Príncipe and Cape Verde would certainly reach the conclusion that both countries are headed for a quintessential political summer. With presidential elections scheduled for July 17<sup>th</sup> and August 7<sup>th</sup>, easy comparisons between the decisions that these two insular Lusophone states will have to make in the coming months, are thus only expected.

Indeed, similarities abound. For starters, both countries' incumbents, Cape Verdean Pedro Pires and São Toméan Fradique de Menezes, are nearing the end of their second presidential terms and are therefore unavailable to run again for office due to constitutional imperatives. What's more, the mere fact that both leaders did not seek to extend their rule beyond what is legally accepted already provides a striking distinction from other less commendable examples throughout the region and in the remaining African continent.

On the other hand, electoral campaigns in these countries have also come to reflect the maturity of local democratic institutions as well as the embedded respect for the electoral process. As if more proof was needed, Cape Verde's Supreme Court validated a total of four candidacies while in São Tomé and Príncipe, ten – yes,

ten<sup>1</sup> – contenders are currently running for President. Such prolific political diversity amounts to nothing short of a series of paramount evidences that both countries are about to open new chapters in their contemporary history and are notoriously keen to preserve and develop their own hard-earned political achievements.

Still, given this overwhelming level of interest in such a position, one must inevitably wonder what specific and/or significant role Cape Verde and São Tomé and Príncipe's political systems attribute to the Presidency *per se*, that could possibly justify its current appeal. A quick overview of their respective constitutional provisions promptly concludes that the President is seen first and

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<sup>1</sup> See Pedro Seabra, "São Tomé and Príncipe: an election to divide them all?" (*IPRIS Viewpoints*, No. 58, May 2011); João Ricardo Mendes, "São Tomé and Príncipe: follow up of the first round of Presidential elections" (*IPRIS Viewpoints*, No. 64, June 2011). Initially, fourteen candidates presented their candidacies but after they were checked for legal irregularities by São Tomé's Supreme Court, only ten were eventually validated. The full list thus comprises: Aurélio Martins, Delfim Neves, Elsa Pinto, Evaristo Carvalho, Filinto Costa Alegre, Hélder Barros, Jorge Coelho, Maria das Neves, Manuel Deus Lima and Manuel Pinto da Costa. See Abel Veiga, "Só restaram 9 candidatos para às eleições presidenciais de 17 de Julho" (*Téla Nón*, 30 June 2011); "Delfim Neves é candidato às eleições presidenciais" (*Téla Nón*, 8 July 2011).



foremost as a figure of national cohesion, with a subsequent moderating role between governments and political society assuming the larger part of their daily functions. Beyond the usual representative prerogatives in foreign affairs, the office's decisive power essentially lies in the possibility of dissolving the National Assemblies and call new elections.<sup>2</sup> In that sense, both countries, again, appear to have more in common than what initially meets the eye.

Nevertheless, despite such similarities, this situation merits a more careful examination. For all purposes, there are some tenuous but significant distinctions that when fully understood in their context, provide a different set of expectations regarding the final outcome at the ballot in the coming months.

Naturally, as one would expect, internal contingencies are primarily to blame for these variations. Let us then consider both countries on an individual basis. To begin with, it is clear to any outside observer that Cape Verde unquestionably stands in a much better position than its Lusophone peer. Not only are its economic and social indicators frequently the envy of the country's surrounding region but its political class has also consistently demonstrated a notorious commitment to the stability and strength of its stately structures, which in turn provides the international community with enough assurances of local adherence to widely-praised good governance standards. On the other hand, Cape Verde also witnessed legislative elections on February 6<sup>th</sup> which awarded the candidate from the *Partido Africano para a Independência de Cabo Verde* (PAICV), José Maria Neves, a consecutive third term as the country's Prime Minister with a majority of 38 deputies in the National Assembly. A favorable ruling framework is therefore fully expected in the next four years. As far as the presidential election goes, the existence of more than two candidates is also said to probably be related to the clarification of the presidential power to dissolve the Assembly that came with the 2010 constitutional revision, and that subsequently increased the appeal of the office to the current array of presidential suitors: Manuel Inocêncio Sousa, Aristides Lima, Joaquim Jaime Monteiro and Jorge Carlos Fonseca.<sup>3</sup>

Granted, Cape Verde still faces some challenges in the near future. The transition from a Least Developed Country (LDC) to a Middle Income Country (MIC) is an important landmark for the country but also carries with it the need to adjust to a new international framework of regulations for its exports to keep reaching developed markets under favorable terms, including the European

Union's (EU).<sup>4</sup> Moreover, Prime Minister José Maria Neves has already warned that the international financial crisis reflected in Portugal or the natural disasters that hit Japan will most likely directly affect the execution of planned investments on the ground.<sup>5</sup> Nevertheless, by all means, it is not too farfetched to say that any future President will probably not have much room to maneuver 'outside of the box' within in the Cape Verdean political scenario, given the PAICV's predictable control of the legislative power for the time being. A considerable degree of ruling stability is therefore only expected.

As for São Tomé and Príncipe, its election appears to herald much more serious predicaments. Overall, it is not as if São Tomé and Príncipe's institutions will be endangered by whoever becomes President in July. Nor does it appear that any of the current ten candidates harbors any other aspirations than those usually associated to the exercise of the Presidency. But two crucial considerations are in order when regarding this particular race.

First, São Tomé and Príncipe has long demonstrated how a stable institutional relationship between the holders of the country's two highest positions is absolutely instrumental in preventing any deviation from the intended path for national development and social cohesion. Fradique de Menezes' ten years as President were essentially marked by a tense cohabitation to say the least, with an endless number of cabinets and a total of nine Prime Ministers<sup>6</sup> since first taking office in 2001, which naturally had an effect on the conduction of national affairs. Moreover, the brief coup d'état in July 2003 and the failed plot discovered in February 2009 also underscored the debility of the Presidency's influence and authority throughout the country.

Second, São Tomé and Príncipe's political context is not nearly as defined as Cape Verde's. True, the country also held legislative elections in August 2010, but despite the undeniable end of a cycle for former Prime Minister Rafael Branco and his party, *Movimento para Libertação de São Tomé e Príncipe-Partido Social Democrata* (MLSTP-PSD), current Prime Minister Patrice Trovoada's grip on power is considered far from absolute. Indeed, his party *Acção Democrática Independente* (ADI) only managed to secure 26 representatives in the National Assembly and can only count with the unofficial support of the sole representative from the *Movimento Democrático Força de Mudança-Partido Liberal* (MDFM-PL) against the 28 from the two remaining opposition parties combined. In that sense, reflecting this new tense equilibrium, the

2 See Articles 135 to 139 of Cape Verde's Constitution and Articles 80 to 82 of São Tomé and Príncipe's Constitution for each President's respective powers.

3 Even though Sousa, Lima and Monteiro have political roots in the PAICV, only the first is officially backed by the party while the other two claim an independent status. On the other hand, Fonseca is supported by the main opposition party *Movimento para a Democracia* (MpD).

4 "Cabo Verde quer prorrogação do prazo do período de transição dos PMA para PDM" (*Inforpress*, 7 April 2010); "Parceria Especial UE/Cabo Verde em reunião" (*A Semana*, 5 June 2011).

5 "Crise em Portugal afecta investimentos em Cabo Verde, afirma primeiro-ministro" (*África 21*, 8 April 2011).

6 Ten, if we count Patrice Trovoada's first term from February to June 2008, as well as the current one.



approval of the 2011 budget in January inevitably left a feeling of uneasiness in the air, since it only passed due to a gentleman's agreement between all sitting parties.<sup>7</sup> Hence, it is easy to see how meaningful the next President will be in São Toméan daily life.<sup>8</sup> The fact that he will basically hold not only the responsibility of managing eventual political diatribes that are bound to arise, but also the power to dissolve the Assembly and even force the resignation of the government whenever "the regular functioning of the democratic institutions"<sup>9</sup> is not assured, must then be taken into consideration throughout the ongoing electoral campaign.

All in all, it is possible to observe how conjectures and predictions regarding these two upcoming elections are likely to differ. Indeed, in Cape Verde, the next President's is bound to remain an important state figure in the national background – even if the MdP candidate or any of the other two 'independents' win – but his range of action will be invariably dictated by Prime Minister Neves' own management of the country's affairs. It is therefore reasonably safe to assume that the local balance of power will hardly be dealt with any profound cataclysm in any case scenario.

However, the same cannot be said of São Tomé and Príncipe's case. As the African Development Bank (AfDB) itself acknowledges, "prospects for the economy in the short term will depend on the stability of the new government and the success of presidential elections" in July.<sup>10</sup> Taking in consideration that Trovoada is presently politically fragile and that his party's candidate,

Evaristo de Carvalho, faces an uphill battle against such polarizing national figures as former President Manuel Pinto da Costa or former Prime Minister Maria das Neves, it is thus possible to say that the current odds do not bode well for both São Tomé and Príncipe's political stability and economy.<sup>11</sup> In sum, the next few months are certain to provide some clarity on the next stages that Cape Verde and São Tomé and Príncipe will embark on, even if expectations, and ultimately the respective final outcomes, are most likely to imply substantially different consequences for each country's path.

11 Not only is the country dealing with the effects of the international financial crisis, but geopolitical developments in Africa have also added a new uncertainty to the entire situation. See Abel Veiga, "Dinheiro cada vez mais difícil para financiar o OGE 2011" (*Téla Nón*, 29 March 2011); and Ramusel Graça and Cristina Krippahl, "Guerra na Líbia abre buraco no Orçamento de São Tomé e Príncipe" (*Deutsche Welle*, 24 March 2011).

7 Only the MDFM-PL voted favorably alongside the ADI, while the MLSTP-PSD and the *Partido da Convergência Democrática* (PCD) abstained. See "Parlamento de São Tomé e Príncipe aprovou Orçamento de Estado" (*RFI*, 7 January 2011).

8 See Paulo Gorjão, "São Tomé and Príncipe: Heading into political instability as usual?" (*IPRIS Viewpoints*, No. 16, August 2010).

9 Article 117, n. 2 from São Tomé and Príncipe's Constitution.

10 "African Economic Outlook 2011: Africa and its Emerging Partners" (*African Development Bank*, 2011): p. 218.

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