

# Cape Verde's presidential elections: time for round two

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On August 7<sup>th</sup>, Cape Verdeans went to the ballot to choose a successor for outgoing President Pedro Pires, in office for the past ten years and thus constitutionally forbidden from running for a third term. In a country so used to the tense political dichotomy between the ruling PAICV (Partido para a Independência de Cabo Verde) and main opposition party MpD (Movimento para a Democracia), the mere existence of four different candidates effectively managed to provide a glimpse of diversity for such an election, but the results of the first round highlighted once more the deep fracture lines dividing the country in terms of political representation.

On this occasion, Cape Verdean voters had four candidates to choose from: Aristides Lima, a former Parliament Speaker with deep ties to the PAICV but running on an independent basis; Manuel Inocêncio Sousa, former Minister of Infrastructure, Transport and Telecommunications and fully supported by the PAICV apparatus; Jorge Carlos Fonseca, a former Foreign Minister officially backed by the MpD; and Joaquim Jaime Monteiro, a relatively unknown with a previous minor affiliation to the PAICV.

From this array of possibilities, the PAICV's extended presence immediately stands out among all the other factors. Curiously enough, much of the electoral campaign's heated debate was precisely reserved for both

Lima and Sousa who frequently exchanged barbs over each other's political agendas.<sup>1</sup> However, such internal divisions within Cape Verde's ruling party did not exactly come as a surprise since they basically reflected an internal generational struggle that remained essentially idle until the time came to choose an official party candidate. Lima, backed by Pedro Pires himself and other important party members, quickly threw his hat in the race, but the PAICV – reflecting the predominance and sway of Prime Minister José Maria Neves, fresh from his third consecutive victory in the legislative elections of last February – opted instead to support Sousa. Unsurprisingly, that did not thwart Lima who went ahead with his candidacy as an independent.

Subsequently, the public bitterness between the two candidates somewhat overshadowed the campaign, with some negative consequences for MpD pick Jorge Carlos Fonseca, who appeared to trail behind in polls and even risk not making it to the second round, if one were to be

<sup>1</sup> For example, Prime Minister José Maria Neves considerably lowered the bar when he brought up indirect accusations over PAICV's previous leaders' responsibility in the assassination of Cape Verdean independence hero Amílcar Cabral. See Jorge Montezinho, "Cuidado com os intriguistas", alerta José Maria Neves" (*Expresso das Ilhas*, 23 July 2011).



needed.<sup>2</sup> Although he remained a national figure – he had already run unsuccessfully for office back in 2001 – the truth is that Fonseca could never match up the potential of a candidacy by MpD President Carlos Veiga, who had lost the prior legislative elections and refused to run for the Presidency this time around. In that sense, significant questions remained as to his capability and effectiveness in going up against not only one, but two experienced PAICV political heavyweights.

However, contrary to such initial predictions, the results from August 7<sup>th</sup> provided a different outcome from what many would have probably expected. Even though the election was marked by a 46.8% abstention rate and by some complaints regarding “pressures and conscience manipulations”,<sup>3</sup> Fonseca was able to lead all the other candidates with 60,438 votes corresponding to 37.3%. Not too far behind, Sousa held the second position with 51,970 votes and 32% while Lima only managed 44,500 votes and 27.4%. For his part, Monteiro did not go as high as 3,169 votes, accounting for a mere 2% of the total casted.

The underlying assessment here present is obvious. Only Fonseca and Sousa will dispute the second round, scheduled for August 21<sup>st</sup>. Aristides Lima, an apparently clear frontrunner, was left behind and his presidential aspirations have come to an end. Consequently, two considerations must be taken into account. First, it is undeniable that the

divisive effect of two PAICV-originated candidacies was by far overly underestimated by both Sousa’s and Lima’s political strategists. When a huge national party breaks into two significant sides backing different candidates –

together with the inherent political acrimony that frequently comes with such campaigns – it is only natural that its traditional followers will also find themselves equally disunited, with natural reflections on voting patterns favoring the remaining opposition.

This, in turn, leads to a second reflection regarding Jorge Carlos Fonseca’s actual nationwide appeal. Indeed, one could certainly enter into a lengthy debate regarding each candidate’s merits, but the truth is that Fonseca successfully managed to skillfully exploit his opponents’ public differences and build on his own résumé while taking advantage of the MpD’s resources, all to his own political gain. Unsurprisingly, this recent win has infused his candidacy with a new dose of confidence that the Presidency is indeed within his reach.

However, for what it is worth, such a goal is not entirely dependant on Fonseca’s allure or on the MpD’s national reach for that matter, but on whether the PAICV will be able to patch up its internal scars in time to provide a seemingly cohesive front behind Sousa’s candidacy. Indeed,

Neves quickly acknowledged this reasoning and immediately called for the party’s internal union,<sup>4</sup> even if initial indications do not appear to bode well for such prospects. For example, Felisberto Vieira, an active and vocal supporter of Aristides Lima but also the Minister of Social

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2 See Daniel Almeida, “Presidenciais: Sondagem anima Aristides Lima” (*A Nação*, 31 March 2011); “Aristides Lima lidera sondagem para eleições presidenciais em Cabo Verde” (*PANA*, 1 July 2011).

3 “Observadores da Cedeao criticam “manipulação de consciências” nas eleições em Cabo Verde” (*África 21*, 9 August 2011). See also, “Suspeitas de compra de votos mancham escrutínio” (*Expresso das Ilhas*, 15 August 2011).

4 “Cabo Verde/Eleições: Líder do PAICV apela à união do partido e abre portas a Aristides Lima” (*Lusa*, 8 August 2011). Former Cape Verdean President and PAICV leader Aristides Pereira also replicated such a plea. See “Cabo Verde/Eleições: Ex-Presidente Aristides Pereira apela à unidade do PAICV em torno de Inocêncio” (*Lusa*, 18 August 2011).



Development and Family from Neves' government, immediately tendered his resignation the day after the elections along with a number of veiled critics to the latter's conduct of the PAICV campaign.<sup>5</sup> Moreover, Lima himself does not appear too keen on explicitly backing his former opponent, given that he has stated that he does "not own anyone's vote".<sup>6</sup> Still, it is also not too farfetched to assume that local PAICV structures that supported Lima in the first round will eventually overcome such predicaments and gradually realize the need to quickly get behind Sousa's candidacy – as some have already started doing.<sup>7</sup>

All in all, the central issue for both Sousa and Fonseca will most certainly reside in their ability to distinguish themselves from one another in the hopes of definitely clarifying the voters: while the first intends to become "a President who is not an extension of the government",<sup>8</sup> the second aims to become a "President of action" while guaranteeing "the country's stability and the functioning of the governing system".<sup>9</sup> Be that as it may, after the initial sorting on August 7<sup>th</sup>, the sides in this presidential election have become clearer and the choices available more easily discernible. As such, one can only expect that the next President of Cape Verde will be granted an expressive mandate by his constituencies, while confirming yet again another milestone in the country's burgeoning democratic credentials.

5 "Saída de Felisberto Vieira do governo é "irreversível"" (*Expresso das Ilhas*, 14 August 2011).

6 "Aristides Lima dá liberdade de voto aos seus apoiantes" (*Lusa*, 13 August 2011).

7 "Cabo Verde/Eleições: Grupo do PAICV apoiante de Lima apela ao voto em Inocêncio na segunda volta" (*Lusa*, 17 August 2011).

8 Jorge Montezinho, "Entrevista Jorge Carlos Fonseca: "Não quero ser amigo nem inimigo do governo, nem líder da oposição"" (*Expresso das Ilhas*, 14 August 2011).

9 Jorge Montezinho, "Entrevista Manuel Inocêncio Sousa: "Não vou transformar a campanha numa luta entre partidos"" (*Expresso das Ilhas*, 15 August 2011).

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