

CABO VERDE'S  
**FAKE  
NEWS**  
ECOSYSTEM  
AN OVERVIEW

Aleida Mendes Borges

FEBRUARY 2022



Centre for Democracy & Development  
Centre pour la démocratie et le développement



---

# Table of Contents

---

Executive Summary	1
Introduction	2
Understanding Information Flows	4
Key Actors and Enablers	6
Fake News Influence	8
External Shapers	10
Addressing The Problem	11
Conclusion	13
Recommendations	14

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

---

Aleida Mendes Borges is a research associate at the Global Institute for Women's Leadership at King's College London. Her research focuses on the political participation and engagement of women, youth and the diaspora.



## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This study, which draws on 16 key informant interviews with academics, journalists, lawyers and social media users and an extensive review of relevant reports, documents and social media posts, provides one of the first comprehensive overviews of the, increasingly digital, information eco-system in Cabo Verde.

Technology advancements and the emergence of social media have brought the issue of fake news or '*informações falsas*' (fake information) as it is referred to by citizens of Cabo Verde, to the centre of debates on communication and the dissemination of information. Overall, the consensus remains that although the frequency of online fake news is increasing, such information remains largely peripheral. The same analysis applies to newspapers which despite having a political slant are not widely read in the country.

Where fake news does tend to emerge is during electoral campaigns as leading political parties try to compromise the legitimacy of the opposition or boost their own candidates' chances by spreading falsehoods. Covid-19 has also brought significant challenges when it comes to keeping the population informed about fast-changing circumstances on infection rates and general prevention measures. In this context social media has become the place for 'on-the-minute-information' which has, and continues to be, of varying accuracy.

The actors engaged in the dissemination of false information include, members of the diaspora, online media houses and journalists who increasingly use social media as a source for news content and those with links to political parties. Whilst propaganda is not a new feature of politics in the archipelago, the advent of social media has enabled political elites, and their supporters, to spread rumours and politically motivated messages faster than they were able to do through door-to-door, leaflets and loudspeakers loaded on cars.

There are currently no restrictions to the online media space and there has never been any internet shutdowns. In Cabo Verde press freedom is guaranteed by Article 60 of the Constitution. Whilst there appears to be public support for the passing of regulatory legislation to prohibit the general dissemination of fake information leading media practitioners argue that instead of proposing to criminalise those disseminating fake news the government should work more closely with journalists and civil society to improve quality information flows and better educate citizens. These are some of the recommendations laid out in the conclusion to this study.





# INTRODUCTION

**A**lthough the problem of ‘fake news’ has reached undeniable significance in contemporary global society, it is not new. However, unlike in the past, where it was somewhat possible to attempt to ensure, even if minimally, that sources were checked, the advent of the rapid and overarching evolution of information technologies has enabled new dimensions in the production, dissemination and consumption of news<sup>1</sup>.

In the last decade, social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, WhatsApp and Instagram have become a fertile ground for the spreading of all sorts of information, often with little regard for the credibility of their sources. Although these platforms can be powerful tools for the emancipation of citizens around the globe, they have also been instrumentalised for the dissemination of both misinformation and disinformation.

## Misinformation, disinformation and “fake news”

Misinformation involves the spread of falsehoods without a deliberate attempt to mislead whilst disinformation is manipulated narrative or facts—propaganda deliberately intended to mislead. Both are more commonly captured under the term ‘fake news’, a term used in this report as a catch all term. These kinds of information pose a significant threat to liberal democracy because as they are allowed to spread and flourish, they disinform and misinform people about a range of civic issues from voting to political accountability, and corruption.

Seeking to shape a civic process using falsehoods is not new. Before the internet, people shared disinformation and misinformation through word of mouth and rumour networks, with information spreading slowly from one person to the other before diffusing through communities. Traditional media and propaganda outlets also broadcasted or published news meant to mislead people and promote agendas.

Although the internet did not start the spread of fake news it has further enabled it. The availability of the internet has made it far cheaper and easier to produce and disseminate fake news to a wider audience and much harder to sort fact from fiction. Social media platforms like Facebook and Twitter, alongside messaging applications like WhatsApp, have served as popular conduits. With these platforms enabling people to share a myriad of information in a range of audio, text and visual formats.

---

1. Eni Mustafaraj and Panagiotis Takis Metaxas, ‘The Fake News Spreading Plague: Was It Preventable?’, in Proceedings of the 2017 ACM on Web Science Conference (WebSci ’17: ACM Web Science Conference, Troy New York USA: ACM, 2017), 235–39.





Cabo Verde is a small insular state of ten islands, off the coast of Senegal in West Africa with a population of just over half a million people<sup>2</sup>. It ranked second in Africa for good governance on the Ibrahim Index of African Governance<sup>3</sup> in 2020 and is one of only two West African countries to be classified as “free” by Freedom House<sup>4</sup>. Although there is collective memory of a time when freedom of speech was restricted during the single party regime, which ended in 1991<sup>5</sup>, today press freedom is guaranteed by the constitution with physical attacks on journalists or citizens engaging in public debate not common. Although the persecution of journalists is rare, there is certainly hostility towards those who are critical of political elites. Social activist Mia Luz believes that everyone knows that there is a price to pay for speaking against the government, even if this price is not physical violence. This, along with the fact that the state remains the largest employer in the country, can partially explain why self-censorship is widely practiced<sup>6</sup>.

Drawing on 16 key informant interviews with academics, journalists, lawyers and social media users, hundreds of Facebook and

“

***...these platforms can be powerful tools for the emancipation of citizens around the globe...***

YouTube posts, news stories on the websites and Facebook pages of traditional media outlets and existing literature, this report analyses the fake news ecosystem in Cabo Verde. Although the phenomenon of fake news or ‘informações falsas’ (fake information) as it is referred to by citizens, is gaining relevance, it is not yet widespread. However, as the former president of the Cabo-Verdean Trade Union for Journalists (AJOC), Carlos Santos stated in 2019<sup>7</sup> whilst the risk of proliferation of ‘fake news’ in the country is low, it is important to recognise that no country is immune to the problem.

2. INE, ‘Projeções Demográficas’, INE, 2021, <https://ine.cv/>.

3. The other is Ghana. See Freedom House. (2021). ‘Freedom in the World 2021: Democracy under Siege’. Available at [https://freedomhouse.org/sites/default/files/2021-02/FIW2021\\_World\\_02252021\\_FINAL-web-upload.pdf](https://freedomhouse.org/sites/default/files/2021-02/FIW2021_World_02252021_FINAL-web-upload.pdf).

4. The other is Ghana. See Freedom House. (2021). ‘Freedom in the World 2021: Democracy under Siege’. Available at [https://freedomhouse.org/sites/default/files/2021-02/FIW2021\\_World\\_02252021\\_FINAL-web-upload.pdf](https://freedomhouse.org/sites/default/files/2021-02/FIW2021_World_02252021_FINAL-web-upload.pdf).

5. José Santana Pereira, Susana Rogeiro Nina, and Danielton Delgado, ‘Elections in Cape Verde, 1991-2016: Testing the Second-Order Election Model in a Consolidated Semi-Presidential African Democracy’, *Cadernos de Estudos Africanos*, no. 38 (1 December 2019): 67–91,

6. Reporters Without Borders. (2021). ‘Cabo Verde: The Vice Tightens on State-Owned Media. Available at <https://rsf.org/en/cabo-verde>.

7. Inforpress. (2019). ‘Risco de “fake news” em Cabo Verde é baixo, mas arquipélago não está imune. Available at <https://inforpress.cv/risco-de-fake-news-em-cabo-verde-e-baixo-mas-arquipelago-nao-esta-imune/>.





# UNDERSTANDING INFORMATION FLOWS

Most of the information in circulation in Cabo Verde is provided by institutional actors. The media landscape is dominated by state-owned *Televisão de Cabo Verde* (TCV), the main TV channel, and *Radio de Cabo Verde* (RCV). Combined they form the *Radio Televisão de Cabo Verde* (RTC). Although their content is not controlled by the state the leadership of these media organisations was, until 2019, appointed directly by the government<sup>8</sup>. This is a legacy of the single party period, whereby the state was invested in controlling the information that the population was exposed to. Despite the general lack of trust towards politicians, political parties and, to a lesser extent journalists, individuals tend to trust the information disseminated through RTC<sup>9</sup> as it is perceived to be more independent than the media houses that are often driven by party interests. In part the credibility of RTC derives from the fact that it is perceived as being close to the action. They rarely engage in the so-called *Fladu Fla*<sup>10</sup> which newspaper journalists often are accused of perpetuating by disseminating rumours that align with political ideologies.

A 2019 study by the National Institute of Statistics<sup>11</sup> found that 82% of respondents used television to inform themselves, with radio reaching 33%, and printed newspapers accounting for only 1%<sup>12</sup>. According to sociologist and director of consultancy firm AFROSONDAGEM José Semedo, individuals in Cabo Verde tend to rely on television and

the radio for their news because people do not have the habit of reading. In addition, many Cabo Verdeans have difficulty reading Portuguese, and thus prefer to listen to or watch the news. For those who do engage with print content there are clear political divisions. Newspaper *A Semana*, is seen as close to the *Partido Africano Para a Independência de Cabo Verde* (PAICV), while *Expresso das Ilhas* is viewed as linked to the *Movimento para a Democracia* (MpD). Alfredo Pereira, a member of the communications regulatory body *Autoridade Reguladora para a Comunicação Social* (ARC), argues that it is not so much that certain newspapers are against specific political parties, it is mostly that they are more supportive of a specific party and prioritise content that supports their political views.

Most traditional media houses now have Facebook pages where they share news snippets with links to their online publications. *A Nação* is the most popular with 141,000 followers, *Inforpress* has 44,552, *O País* 31,468, *Expresso das Ilhas* 27,303 and *A Semana* 6,080. But across West Africa, social media has become a space where individuals can create a Facebook page and call themselves a media house in a form of citizen journalism. In Cabo Verde *Empresa de comunicação e notícias* include *Jornalismo de Verdade*<sup>13</sup> (Real Journalism) and *Notícias de Terra CV* (News of the Land)<sup>14</sup> are two examples.

8. Under the new statutes for Radio Televisão Cabo-verdiana (RTC), the government lost its power to appoint its executives and consequently RTC gave itself a new independent board of governors in July 2020 which aims to ensure that it has greater autonomy and independence.

9. Personal interview with José Semedo, 28 July 2021.

10. Loosely translated from Cabo-Verdean Creole as 'said of what was said', it also often used to mean gossip.

11. Inforpress. (2019). 'Risco de "fake news" em Cabo Verde é baixo, mas arquipélago não está imune. Available at <https://inforpress.cv/risco-de-fake-news-em-cabo-verde-e-baixo-mas-arquipelago-nao-esta-immune/>.

12. Ibid.

13. Reporters Without Borders. (2021). 'Cabo Verde: The Vice Tightens on State-Owned Media. Available at <https://rsf.org/en/cabo-verde>.

14. Notícias de Terra CV, 'Notícias de Terra CV', n.d., <https://www.facebook.com/CaboVerdeNoticiasTerra>.





*Notícias de Terra CV* has 2,691 Facebook followers and describes itself as a media house but on the contact information list provides a private e-mail and a website which does not work. *Jornalismo de Verdade* has 3,671 followers, offers a private e-mail as contact but does not even include a website. Although some of these pages such as *Notícias de Cabo Verde ao Minuto*<sup>15</sup>, with 135,196 followers, can have positive impacts including reminding citizens to watch parliamentary debates, these citizen-driven media operations create unrestricted spaces for the dissemination of fake news. One of the main challenges with pages such as *Notícias de Cabo Verde ao Minuto* is that any member can post information without first having it fact checked or verified. There can be as many as 200 posts per day.

Considering 75% of Afrobarometer survey respondents said they not happy with democracy in Cabo Verde<sup>16</sup>, and that society is divided along party lines, social media is emerging as a much-needed space for debate and discussion<sup>17</sup>. A 2019 survey<sup>18</sup> demonstrated that 89% of respondents were aware of social media and 77% agreed that social media helps more people become informed. In the same year<sup>19</sup>, there were 318,000 internet users (57% of the population) and 270,000 social media users (48% of the population). This was a 20% and 8.3% increase respectively from 2018.

Social media is becoming an increasingly important source of information for many on

the islands. It provides new affordances in terms of accessing news 'by the minute' (*notícias ao minuto*), which is particularly important in the context of an archipelagic state with poor transportation links. It was through use of social media that successful protest movements such as #MAC114<sup>20</sup> were coordinated to take place simultaneously across multiple islands in 2015. Thus, social media is growing as a powerful and useful instrument to keep citizens informed, engaged, and connected to the wider discussions that happen in society. But it is also a growing space for the proliferation of falsehoods, and these are not always confined to the online realm. Rumours that start online often make their way to the offline dimension through word of mouth. In fact, often individuals will say, 'oh I saw this on Facebook, did you see it?' Conversations that happen on Facebook after being triggered by a news item or a post can continue to be discussed in offline forums, among friends and with family.

But when it comes to the search for 'truth' many Cabo Verdeans still turn to TV or radio as a point of reference, as highlighted by teacher Laura Borges: "when they see news on Facebook or YouTube, individuals often say 'this was not on the radio' or 'I did not see this on the television'"<sup>21</sup>. There remains a certain level of suspicion of information found online, as it is seen as a place instrumentalised for political party interests. Alfredo Pereira of ARC, the communications regulatory agency, argues that "there is a strong belief in the

15. Notícias de Cabo Verde ao Minuto. (2021). 'Incêndio Deflagra No Palácio Da Justiça Na Praia', 23 July. <https://www.facebook.com/groups/434008576663533>.

16. Aleida Mendes Borges and José António Semedo, 'Juventude (Des)Interessada? Perspetivas Dos Jovens Sobre a Democracia e a Governança Em Cabo Verde', Afrobarometer Dispatches, Afrobarometer Dispatches, no. 438 (2021), <https://afrobarometer.org/publications/ad438-juventude-desinteressada-perspetivas-dos-jovens-sobre-democracia-e-governanca-em>.

17. Aleida Mendes Borges, 'Youth and Politics: Is There Space for Youth in Cabo-Verdean Politics?', Journal of Cape Verdean Studies, Virtual Commons, 4, no. 1 (2019): 75–91.

18. Afrobarometer, 'Resumo Dos Resultados', 2019, <https://afrobarometer.org/publications/summary-results-afrobarometer-round-8-survey-cabo-verde-2020>.

19. Kemp, S. (2021). 'Digital 2021: Cabo Verde'. Datareportal. Available at <https://datareportal.com/reports/digital-2021-cabo-verde>

20. The Economist Intelligence Unit. (2015). 'Controversial Bill Leads to Widespread Protests'. Available at [http://country.eiu.com/article.aspx?articleid=793076063&Country=Cabo%20Verde&topic=Politics\\_1](http://country.eiu.com/article.aspx?articleid=793076063&Country=Cabo%20Verde&topic=Politics_1).

21. Personal Interview with Laura Borges, 14 July 2021.





population that RTC is the only media house which can remain impartial” in the polarised environment of the news ecosystem as “the press media is strongly linked to political parties from their inception”<sup>22</sup>. However, others like journalist Daniel Silva have argued that the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic has tested and continues to test this reliability on traditional media as the population demands information and guidance. When they do not receive effective communication from the official bodies, they rely more on family

members in the diaspora and on digital information about the virus and vaccines. But for now, in the view of university lecturer and information technologies expert Celestino Barros, most of the population remains more a consumer of news than a creator.

## KEY ACTORS AND ENABLERS

Journalists are viewed as enablers of fake news in the country. 39% of respondents to a 2019 Afrobarometer survey believed that journalists disseminate fake news<sup>23</sup>. This is in part explained by the fact that there are very few news outlets in the nation that are perceived to be free from political manipulation and pressure. Carlos Santos, the former president of AJOC argues that the model of journalism in Cabo Verde is still very institutional. It relies on information sent by entities such as state bodies, political parties, the government and the unions as it considers these to be official sources. For Santos this means that “it is difficult to produce fake news”<sup>24</sup>. However, the assumption that sources such as political parties and the government are to be trusted with the truth, when in fact, these actors are often heavily invested in the dissemination of information that benefits their interests, is problematic.

The same 2019 survey<sup>25</sup> found that 42% of respondents believe that members of the government disseminate ‘fake news’ and fake information, while a further 55% believe that politicians and political parties also share falsehoods. In Cabo Verde, the false news information eco-system is primarily shaped and driven by political actors or supporters. The focus is predominantly on disseminating misleading information to tarnish the reputation of opposing politicians or their party. In recent years hacking of the social media accounts of high profile individuals has become more common. Politicians and public figures have been targeted including the vice-prime minister, the ministers for education, tourism and transport and the outgoing first lady, Lígia FONSECA<sup>26</sup>. On 1 July 2021, the Facebook page of the digital newspaper Inforpress was hacked, unearthing compromising information about their collaborators<sup>27</sup>.

22. Personal Interview with Alfredo Pereira, 4 August 2021.

23. Afrobarometer, ‘Resumo Dos Resultados’, 2019, <https://afrobarometer.org/publications/summary-results-afrobarometer-round-8-survey-cabo-verde-2020>.

24. Inforpress. (2019). ‘Risco de “fake news” em Cabo Verde é baixo, mas arquipélago não está imune. Available at <https://inforpress.cv/risco-de-fake-news-em-cabo-verde-e-baixo-mas-arquipelago-nao-esta-imune/>.

25. Afrobarometer, ‘Resumo Dos Resultados’, 2019, <https://afrobarometer.org/publications/summary-results-afrobarometer-round-8-survey-cabo-verde-2020>.

26. Record TV Cabo Verde, ‘OS PERIGOS E OS IMPACTOS NEGATIVOS DAS FAKE NEWS NAS REDES SOCIAIS’.

27. Expresso das Ilhas. (2021). ‘Hackers apoderam-se da página de facebook da Inforpress’. <https://ilhas.li/aJjh>.





The president of the data protection commission, *Comissão Nacional de Proteção de Dados* (CNPD), Faustino Varela, admitted that it has already received six complaints about accounts being hacked and that these were being investigated<sup>28</sup> but no conclusive proof of who was behind the take downs has been released to date.

The advent of social media has enabled political elites, and their supporters, to spread rumours and politically motivated messages faster than they were able to do through door-to-door, leaflets and loudspeakers loaded on cars propaganda campaigns. The credibility of the actors involved stems from their party affiliation. It is almost the same passion as football teams, with supporters doing whatever it takes to defend 'their team'. The editor of the newspaper, *A Nação*, Daniel Almeida believes that during elections social media outlets are used for "political party propaganda and lies designed to keep politicians in power"<sup>29</sup>. They use official pages on Facebook, as well as their influence over certain media houses to disseminate falsehoods. As a result, during elections and during periods of crisis, fake news has become more pronounced.

For instance, during the last municipal elections in 2020, PAICV took to Facebook<sup>30</sup> to publicly condemn the party in power, the MpD, for using a newspaper as its 'errand boy' to deliberately misinform the population and weaken the party's campaign. Even outside of election periods, political party supporters and sympathisers stir up trouble. The recently elected president of Câmara Municipal da

Praia, the local authority responsible for the capital, Francisco Carvalho has been on the receiving end of several miscaptioned and old pictures, published online that show rubbish all over the capital. These are designed to deliberately mislead the public and discredit the mayor, who has become popular with measures he introduced to curb corruption in local administration.

Social media influencer and educator Fredilson Melo argues politicians take advantage of online platforms to disinform citizens because they know that they can get away with it. The comments sections of social media posts are dominated by political party supporters, from both sides, often using fake profiles that cannot be verified. Individuals will engage in heated discussions both online and offline but according to Daniel Almeida, the lines of discussion rarely diverge from political alliances and individuals rarely engage in fact checking. The concept of independent social media influencers in Cabo Verde remains nascent. Although individuals such as Fredilson Melo, Rosário da Luz and Adilson Cruz have gained popularity through their pages on Facebook where they discuss news items and undertake rudimentary 'fact checking' with the aim of taking news analysis away from the control of political parties they are not yet as influential as politically aligned users.

28. Record TV Cabo Verde.

29. Personal Interview with Daniel Almeida, 15 July 2021.

30. PAICV. (2020). 'DESMENTIDO E DIREITO DE RESPOSTA "O PAÍS" "FABRICA NOTÍCIA" FALSA PARA TENTAR FRAGILIZAR A CANDIDATURA DO PAICV NA PRAIA, LIDERADA POR FRANCISCO CARVALHO', 18 September. Available at <https://www.facebook.com/Paicv.cv/posts/2745583022330698/>.





# FAKE NEWS INFLUENCE

The most notorious examples of fake news are linked to the Covid-19 pandemic and pre-existing prejudice towards certain immigrant communities.

One of the most polemic cases of fake news in the nation spread because it tapped into pre-existing sentiments and beliefs held toward the Chinese immigrant community. In 2018, there were several instances of children disappearing in the capital city. As the authorities were not able to reassure the population that the situation was under control, rumours continued to spread. Building on pre-existing prejudice towards the Chinese community, these claimed that children were being kidnapped by Chinese individuals. This built on other false narratives that continue to circulate in the country that Chinese people must eat people because there have never been funerals for members of the community in Cabo Verde. This led to an incident where two Chinese men, who were parked on the road near a group of children, were accused by agitated residents of wanting to kidnap the children. It was only after the police intervened that the situation was de-escalated.

But the news that was shown on Record TV, a Brazilian station, further escalated the situation by claiming that the Chinese individuals were in fact taken to the police station for investigations to be continued.

The report included voices from concerned parents about what they claimed was an unfolding situation. Although this was false, social media accounts spread this narrative widely. The police subsequently had to release a press statement denying the involvement of Chinese individuals in the kidnapping of children and asking for calm<sup>31</sup>. So too did leaders of both the Chinese community in the country and government officials. This appears to have been more a case of poor journalism than a deliberate effort to engender anti-Chinese sentiment by Record TV. But it provides a rare example of how rumours that start offline can make their way not only to online platforms such as Facebook but also to institutionalised media such as television, which remain extremely influential.

In the area of health, like many other countries, Cabo Verde has been exposed to global conspiracy theories about the origins of Covid-19 and possible non-medical cures. This information, according to educator Fredilson Melo, came mostly from Brazil through Facebook and experienced widespread acceptance mostly because it played into existing narratives about the supremacy of traditional plant-based medicine over medical drugs. The impact was so significant that at some point many people rushed to the local market to seek a certain plant that was said to cure or prevent Covid-19, causing supplies to run out.

---

31. Eugénio Texeira. (2018). 'Chineses em Cabo Verde preocupados com boatos sobre rapto de crianças', VOA, 9 February. <https://www.voaportugues.com/a/chineses-cabo-verde-boatos-raptos-criancas/4246994.html>.





“

**...there were several instances of children disappearing in the capital city. As the authorities were not able to reassure the population that the situation was under control, rumours continued spread. Building on pre-existing prejudice towards the Chinese community, these claimed that children were being kidnapped...**

An increasingly serious issue is the question of vaccine related fake news. Social media influencer Fredilson Melo<sup>32</sup> highlighted the risks posed by so-called 'epidemic of Facebook Live' as an increasing number of individuals go live on the platform to 'inform' or give their opinion about a topic. Although some of these 'lives' can be helpful and informative to citizens, it remains an unregulated space where all sorts of information can be spread by self-styled 'Facebook Scientists'. One particularly prominent voice on social media around Covid-19 has been US resident Alexandre

Évora.

A recent 'Facebook live', with 9,300 viewers offered an analysis of a national TV programme in which the National Health Director was seen informing the population about vaccinations. Évora provides commentary, in Creole, of the communication which was being broadcast in Portuguese. He plays on the fears of people by saying that the government cannot be trusted as they provide no jobs, no water, no basic services, so why does it provide vaccines. At one point he says: "Tell your mum like I told mine, mama if you take this vaccine, you will die"<sup>33</sup>. In another post he accuses the current prime minister, Ulisses Correia e Silva, of "poisoning his people" by forcing them to take the vaccine.

It is worth noting that Évora speaks and writes in Creole to connect to the people. Portuguese, the official languages, is seen mostly as the language of government and political elites. Yet, this is the language that the government has chosen to communicate crucial information about the pandemic on national television. As the nation embarks on its vaccination programme many individuals have heard "misleading information and fake news from family members in the diaspora"<sup>34</sup>. In May 2021, the online newspaper *A Semana* reported that according to a study conducted by the National Health Service, one in every five Cabo-Verdeans (19%) were refusing to take the vaccine<sup>35</sup>. Fake news and rumours circulating on social media and other internet channels are behind this hesitancy, particularly among the youth and the elderly<sup>36</sup>.

32. Personal Interview with Fredilson Melo, 17 July 2021.

33. Alexandre Évora, BASTA MATA POVO, 2021, <https://www.facebook.com/groups/434008576663533/user/100053604489253/>.

34. Personal Interview with Daniel Almeida, 15 July 2021.

35. *A Semana*. (2021). 'Covid-19: Um Em Cada Cinco Cabo-Verdeanos Rejeita Tomar Vacinas e Pede Mais Informação', 7 May. Available at <https://www.asemana.publ.cv/?Covid-19-Um-em-cada-cinco-cabo-verdeanos-rejeita-tomar-vacinas-e-pede-mais&ak=1>.

36. Deutsche Welle. (2021). 'Notícias falsas levam cabo-verdeanos a recusar vacinas contra covid-19 I', 14 July. Available at <https://www.dw.com/pt-002/not%C3%ADcias-falsas-levam-cabo-verdeanos-a-recusar-vacinas-contra-covid-19/av-58267811>.





## EXTERNAL SHAPERS

Cabo Verde has a large diaspora, with a parliamentary representation of 8.3% - the highest in the world<sup>37</sup> - and thus diaspora individuals and groups have been historically influential. As argued by the journalist Geremias Furtado, the diaspora is highly regarded in the country and thus has a lot of power to influence public opinion. One example of this is the Facebook page: CV Diaspora Movement. Created in July 2019 their goal "is to unite Cape Verdeans around the globe to collaborate, participate, and deliver better social and economic opportunities to improve the lives of all"<sup>38</sup>. They have 21,135 followers and a website where they often share information criticising the government on a range of issues.

Outside of the diaspora, for the most part, Cabo Verde does not feature in the international eco-system of news and thus there is not much influence that is external. The main external actors in its news sphere are from Brazil, Portugal and the Lusophone African countries - Guinéa-Bissau, São Tomé e Príncipe, Angola and Mozambique. But it was highlighted by all the individuals who were interviewed that there is no perception that actors such as Brazil, China or Russia for instance are creating and disseminating misinformation in the country. Although there is a growing presence of Chinese influence in the country, this is expressed mainly through infrastructure development and partnerships.

However, there was one recent incident where Cabo Verde found itself at the crossroads of geopolitical tension which resulted in external actors creating and disseminating fake news. This related to the ongoing case of Alex Saab, a Colombian businessman close to Venezuelan President Nicolas Maduro, who was detained in Cabo Verde when the private plane he was traveling on from Venezuela to Iran made a fuel stop on the island of Sal. Authorities said they made the arrest in response to an INTERPOL red notice of money-laundering charges. His detention resulted in parties, in the US, Nigeria and Venezuela seeking to influence public opinion in Cabo Verde through paid influencer campaigns on social media<sup>39</sup>. Pressure was also applied to journalists by members of Saab's team to report certain aspects of the case. It is however important to stress that Saab's case is the exception rather than the rule as it is rarely the case that external players want to influence public opinion in Cabo Verde. And for most people on the islands this case was of minor relevance. Many still do not even know who he is and why he was arrested.

“

***Cabo Verde does not feature in the international eco-system of news...***

37. Aleida Borges, 'Emigration and Citizenship: A Case Study of Cabo-Verdean Emigrants' Political Participation in the Home-Country' (Masters' Dissertation: MSc Research for International Development, London, U.K., School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS), 2017).

38. CV Diaspora Movement, 'CV Diaspora Movement', accessed 4 August 2021, <https://www.facebook.com/DiasporaMovementCV/>.

39. Silverman, C. (2021). 'Why do a bunch of Nigerian Twitter influencers want this alleged money laundered to go free? They're being paid'. BuzzFeed. 9 April. Available at <https://www.buzzfeednews.com/article/craigsilverman/nigerian-twitter-campaign-alex-saab>





## ADDRESSING THE PROBLEM

There are currently no restrictions to the online media space and there has never been any internet shutdowns. In Cabo Verde press freedom is guaranteed by Article 60 of the Constitution. The activities of journalists are regulated through the statute of the journalist, approved by Law no 72/VII/2010. Article 2 states: “the exercise of the activity of professional journalist and those equivalent to them shall be free throughout the national territory, under the conditions and in the manner established in these statutes and in other applicable legislation”<sup>40</sup>. The main regulatory agency, ARC, was established in 2011 and became fully functional in 2015. The ARC is constitutionally created as an independent authority and is not subject to any directives or guidelines by the political power, allowing it to exercise the necessary powers of regulation and supervision of all entities that pursue media activities in Cabo Verde, without prejudice to freedom of the press. It supervises the activities of news agencies, radio and television operators, online content subject to editorial treatment and organised as a coherent whole, advertising agents and companies, companies engaged in opinion polling and survey activity and foreign correspondents. As it stands it does not regulate personal content published on social media such as Facebook. Furthermore, it also does not regulate content posted by journalists in their personal capacity on social media.

Nonetheless, there is support for the passing

of regulatory legislation. 75% of respondents surveyed by a 2019 Afrobarometer survey stated that they agree that the government should pass legislation to prohibit the general dissemination of fake information. When asked if the government should restrict information which incites hatred such as information which intends to attack or are defamatory against certain groups in society, 52% agreed that the government should do so<sup>41</sup>.

In March 2020, the government announced that “information providers that publish untrue information during the state of emergency [introduced to tackle Covid-19] may be held judicially responsible”. The AJOC replied that it considered unjustifiable the government’s ‘threat’ to hold the media responsible for disseminating ‘untrue information about Covid-19 and that the focus should be on collaborating with journalists to ensure a good flow of information’<sup>42</sup>. The current president of the AJOC argues that instead of proposing to criminalise journalists for disseminating ‘fake news’ the executive should work more closely with journalists to improve quality information flows. The current president of the Union of Journalists, Geremias Furtado agrees that “the main challenge is the availability of credible information due to the deficiencies in communication by the government and its agencies”<sup>43</sup>. The focus should be on combating ‘fake news’ and misinformation through improving media culture and literacy, starting with schools.

40. ARC, ‘Estatuto Do Jornalista’, 2010, <https://www.arc.cv/arc/atividade-jornalistica/2>.

41. Afrobarometer, ‘Resumo Dos Resultados’, 2019, <https://afrobarometer.org/publications/summary-results-afrobarometer-round-8-survey-cabo-verde-2020>.

42. Expresso das Ilhas. (2020). ‘AJOC considera injustificável a ameaça do governo de responsabilizar judicialmente os OCS’. 23 March. <https://ilhas.li/aHuD>.

43. Personal Interview with Geremias Furtado, 16 July 2021.





## “Relentlessly undermined”: The online experiences of women in Cabo Verde

Despite significant progress towards gender equality, Cabo Verde remains a society characterised by toxic masculinity with little acceptance for women’s leadership. A Parity Law was passed in November 2019 and before that a gender-based violence legal framework was developed to criminalise not only gender discrimination but more specifically violence which is based on gender. Some respondents argued that fake news in Cabo Verde is very circumstantial, and that gender is not a factor in how politicians or individuals are targeted.

However, Janira Hopffer Almada, the former leader of the opposition party, PAICV, described facing relentless attempts to undermine her reputation. One incident involved a photo montage with a picture of the leader in a pornographic setting, which was shared widely on Facebook. This was publicly condemned by political figures across the political spectrum, including the president<sup>44</sup> but nobody was held accountable.

Although several individuals interviewed felt that fake news affects public figures more, and not specifically women, it is unthinkable that pornographic fake news would be produced in relation to male politicians.

---

44. Diário de Notícias. (2019). “Fake News”: Líder da oposição em Cabo Verde ‘vítima’ de fake news defende justiça mais célere’. Available at <https://www.dn.pt/lusa/fake-news-lider-da-oposicao-em-cabo-verde-vitima-de-fake-news-defende-justica-mais-celere--10540683.html>.





# CONCLUSION

In Cabo Verde the general perception is that online fake news has a limited impact on society. Despite the availability of the internet and the high levels of social media penetration in society, most Cabo-Verdeans rely on traditional media to inform themselves. This in turn means that there is a significant focus on the activities of journalists as the key agents in the dissemination of information. Nonetheless, journalists remain mostly institutionalised and depend on the government and political parties as sources of information and rarely engage in investigative journalism to critically engage with the information provided by political elites. Furthermore, as outgoing president, Jorge Carlos Fonseca, noted when speaking at a 2017 conference about fake news in Cabo Verde<sup>45</sup>, it is “important to stay alert about fake news in Cabo Verde as increasingly social media networks are becoming a source of information for journalists”.

This is particularly true when it comes to political matters. Politics is the most contested field of information, with newspapers already tainted by claims of fake news due to their party allegiances.

Some newspapers are seen as almost propaganda machines of political parties. Whilst radio and television stations operate outside these dynamics, they remain close to political power given that until 2019 the leadership boards were appointed by the government. These connections have been sustained informally since.

Therefore, whilst fake news is far from a new phenomenon in the nation, the rapid dissemination of misleading and false information has reached new audiences, faster and in Creole, through increased social media engagement and activity. ‘Facebook Scientists’ have emerged as a new phenomenon in the context of Covid-19 with actors in the diaspora playing an important role in the dissemination of misleading information. Although it is not clear exactly how much influence these actors have the proliferation of fake news is a cause of concern which ought to be taken more seriously by the government.

---

45. INFORPRESS. (2017). ‘Presidente da República defende cautela por parte de Cabo Verde em relação às “fake news”’. Available at <https://inforpress.cv/presidente-da-republica-defende-cautela-parte-cabo-verde-relacao-as-fake-news/>.





# RECOMMENDATIONS

The report proposes the following recommendations to key stakeholders operating in Cabo Verde's information eco-system:

- 1** The government can do more to share credible information. In Mozambique a government website has been created that aims to allow journalists and other entities to verify information provided by official sources and other entities. The portal displays a set of documents and messages, labelled with the stamp "false" or "true" according to the case, and the indication of the social platform of disclosure. This initiative could be replicated in Cabo Verde.
- 2** The functions of the regulatory agency, ARC, need to be expanded to include monitoring content produced on social media platforms such as Facebook. Instead of being a body that simply reacts to complaints it needs to take a more pro-active role.
- 3** A taskforce should be created to include members of ARC, academics and other interlocutors to conduct research and inform the government on the direction of future policy on fake news.
- 4** The government should place more emphasis on digital citizenship in schools and universities to empower youth to engage more critically with their 'online experiences'.
- 5** The government needs to work more closely with platforms such as Facebook to monitor accounts that disseminate Covid-19 related fake news to have them suspended or taken down for violating user terms and conditions.
- 6** Independent civil society groups and community associations should be encouraged to play a prominent role in working with communities to develop initiatives to discuss news items and enhance fact checking literacy.
- 7** Considering the high levels of credibility that TV and radio already have, these should be used as instruments to increase levels of media awareness and literacy. Including youth and civil society organisations in such initiatives will be key.





**Centre for Democracy & Development**  
Centre pour la démocratie et le développement

---

16, A7 Street, CITEC Mount Pleasant Estate,  
Jabi Airport Road, Mborah District, Abuja, FCT

---

[www.cddwestafrica.org](http://www.cddwestafrica.org)



---

[cddav@cddwestafrica.org](mailto:cddav@cddwestafrica.org)



---

@cddwestafrica



---

[facebook.com/centrefordemocracy.anddevelopment/](https://facebook.com/centrefordemocracy.anddevelopment/)

---