Voices of the People
Synopsis of an Innovative Research Project

The Voices of the People initiative was designed by DEMOS, a research center, to generate knowledge in support of Guinea-Bissau's democratic development. It organized the country's first public opinion survey in 2018. A second project phase was adopted the following year to pursue scientific research based on the survey findings and disseminate the new information through publications, presentations, and trainings. These undertakings were devised to produce actionable knowledge for development strategies, democracy promotion and political risk assessments. As such, the project sought to strengthen scientific capabilities in Guinea-Bissau and create instruments for social accountability and evidence-based public dialogue and policy-making.

In pursuit of these objectives, DEMOS prepared and delivered three substantive reports, an edited volume in Portuguese, produced in collaboration with ten scholars, a translation of the book manuscript into English, and two project workshops. Its main project accomplishments are:

• **Data mining and analysis inquiry**. This study generated unique insights from the 2018 survey data set, based on a national sample of 1,184 interviews. It devised an original method using statistical instruments to develop 55 indexes clustered around six themes: social strata, support for democracy, engagement in public life, capacity for social coexistence, disposition towards social equality, and risk of religious sectarianism. All these indexes were combined with a variety of demographic and identity indicators to produce an informational 'gold mine', of exceptional value for understanding life conditions, perceptions, opinions, and values among the Bissau-Guinean people. This report includes nine annexes (mostly Excel tables) that amount to 6,190 pages.

• **Focus group study**. This enquiry helped contextualize and enrich the findings produced in the 2018 survey. Group interviews were conducted in ten different localities across the country and among people of varying social backgrounds, between October and November 2019. This research, involving 89 Bissau-Guinean citizens, led to an open-ended conversation over the main survey results. It allowed participants to discuss the country's general situation, people's capacity for social coexistence, women's participation in public life, and popular perceptions of the state and political elites. The report includes four transcripts of 16,5 hours of recorded interviews. One transcript in Creole and the other three in Portuguese, two of which are organized thematically.

• **Comparative review with other African countries**. This is the first study to situate Guinea-Bissau in the constellation of public opinion surveys carried out in the region. It integrates the results of the Guinea-Bissau survey with those produced by Afrobarometer in 17 African countries. This assessment encompasses all member countries of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and all Portuguese-speaking African countries, except Angola. The inquiry includes 193 questions, covering a wide array of subjects. This report contains 314 tables and graphs, based on 83,817 survey interviews and the processing of close to 4.7 million data points.

• **Edited volume, *Voices of the People: Society, Politics and Public Opinion in Guinea-Bissau***, organized by Miguel Carter and Carlos Cardoso. This 324-page book was produced in collaboration with ten African, European, North and South American scholars, from various academic fields. It includes 13 chapters divided into two sections. One presents the *Vozes do Povo* research project and key findings, and the other provides novel interpretations of Bissau-Guinean society and politics based on this data. The book was prepared for publication in Portuguese and translated into English. Both texts include 161 graphs, tables and maps. The volume contains the following chapters:
Part I. Voices of the People: The Study and Results. (1) Public opinion study in Guinea-Bissau: Highlights and methodology, (2) Public life: democracy, civic engagement, and political parties, (3) Social attitudes: Gender equality and interpersonal trust, (4) Ethnicity, politics, and religion in a heterogenous society, (5) Popular perceptions about politics and society, (6) Public opinion in Guinea-Bissau and West Africa. All six chapters were authored by Miguel Carter.

Part II. Analysis and Reflections. On Bissau-Guinean society: (7) Ethnicity, religion, and the history of popular power, by Toby Green; (8) Life conditions, territory, and social coexistence, by Miguel Carter, Carlos Cardoso and Nafiou Inoussa; (9) Gender relations, by Birgit Embaló. On Bissau-Guinean politics and the state: (10) Big man politics and regime instability, by Miguel Carter; (11) State fragility and corruption, by Carlos Cardoso and Ismael Sadilú Sanhá; and (12) Political parties, elections, and citizen participation, by Rui Jorge Semedo and Paulina Mendes. The conclusion, (13) State-society disjuncture, was written by Philip J. Havik and Joshua B. Forrest.

The inquiry undertaken to produce these four studies proved to be complex, innovative, and ambitious. Complex due to the scope of the research, which involved more than three and a-half years of labor and dozens of researchers. Innovative in its methodology, combining quantitative, qualitative, comparative and interpretive approaches. Ambitious in the breadth and quality of the knowledge produced. As far as the authors know, no other country in Africa has carried out a public opinion study of this scope and originality.

Summary of key results. The people of Guinea-Bissau share a general feeling of malaise about their country, due to their precarious living conditions, state absence in most people's lives, feelings of injustice, perceived corruption and abuse of power by dominant actors, and widespread dissatisfaction with the nation’s governance. Popular distress over the country’s political decay and chronic regime instability are striking. These sentiments explain notable reluctance among Bissau-Guineans to make demands on the state and their willingness to emigrate.

While only half of the population understands the word “democracy”, a clear majority identifies with values associated with this form of government, such as the need to protect freedoms of association and expression, conduct free and fair elections, and hold the president accountable to the rule of law. Support for democracy in Guinea-Bissau is widespread yet rather shallow. Anti-authoritarian views prevail over democratic attitudes. Those who defend democracy display higher levels of civic engagement, religious toleration, and support for gender equality.

Bissau-Guinean society exhibits several qualities that explain its social resilience, cohesion and stability. Nine of ten citizens share a distinct sense of national identity.

Despite the country's great ethnic and religious diversity, Bissau-Guineans exhibit remarkable levels of interfaith and interethnic toleration. People who are more religious tend be more ecumenical and accepting than those who hold more secular views. Most citizens share an egalitarian ethos and are sympathetic to the idea of equal gender rights.

Conclusions and recommendations. Efforts to boost Guinea-Bissau's democratic development should consider actions designed to: (1) bolster civic education, (2) promote citizen engagement, (3) support ecumenical collaboration among religious groups, (4) organize and empower women to participate in the nation's public life, (5) assist political parties and help prepare a new generation of Bissau-Guinean leaders, (6) enhance access to reliable news, (7) prioritize national endeavors rather than focus solely on local ones, (8) foster inter-ethnic cooperation, (9) boost confidence and motivations, (10) improve research capabilities, (11) review the political system's institutional practice and design, and (12) pursue bottom-up state-building strategies, by strengthening local governance.