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The Politics of Seychelles

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Introduction

Seychelles is an archipelago state situated in the azure waters of the Indian Ocean, celebrated for its natural beauty and unique biodiversity. Yet beyond its idyllic beaches and lush landscapes lies a nation shaped profoundly by its political journey. The Republic of Seychelles, a sovereign democratic state, has experienced dramatic shifts in its political system and governance over the past half-century, from colonial subjugation to one-party socialist rule, and finally to a dynamic multiparty democracy. This book, "The Politics of Seychelles: A Guide to Politics and the Political System in Seychelles," offers a comprehensive exploration of the country's political landscape—its history, institutions, challenges, and ongoing evolution.

Seychelles' story is one of resilience and adaptation. Following independence from the United Kingdom in 1976, the nation's early years were marked by profound political upheaval, most notably the 1977 coup d'état that installed a one-party government under France-Albert René. The period of single-party socialist governance fundamentally shaped the Seychelles, affecting everything from economic policy and international relations to the personal freedoms of its citizens. The transition back to multiparty democracy in the early 1990s was both a response to domestic pressures and part of broader global shifts, resulting in a new constitutional framework and revitalized political competition.

Central to understanding politics in Seychelles is its 1993 Constitution, which created the foundations for the country's modern political system. This living document enshrines key principles such as the separation of powers, fundamental human rights, and democratic governance, while also reflecting the nation's desire for unity and stability. The political institutions that have developed under this constitution—the Executive, Legislature, and Judiciary—each play vital roles in maintaining balance, accountability, and the rule of law. However, as this book will explore, the continued development and strengthening of these institutions are crucial for the consolidation of democracy.

Electoral politics in Seychelles have evolved significantly over time, with increased political pluralism manifesting in recent elections. The historic opposition victory in the 2020 general election marked a pivotal moment, resulting in the country's first peaceful democratic transfer of power since independence. Alongside such achievements, however, remain persistent challenges: concerns about government transparency and corruption, the need for greater judicial independence, and the ongoing pursuit of justice and reconciliation for past abuses.

Seychelles' approach to governance also intersects with broader issues of social

justice, human rights, local administration, and national identity. As a relatively small nation with limited resources, balancing these priorities amidst the pressures of globalization and regional security threats requires pragmatic leadership, active civic participation, and resilient institutions. Initiatives such as the Seychelles Human Rights Commission and the Truth, Reconciliation, and National Unity Commission demonstrate both the country's ambitions and the complexity of its journey towards inclusive governance.

Through the chapters that follow, this book seeks to provide readers with an insightful and up-to-date guide to Seychellois politics. By tracing historical trajectories, examining key players and policies, and assessing contemporary developments, "The Politics of Seychelles" aims to enrich understanding of this vibrant island nation's political system, its achievements, its ongoing challenges, and its prospects for the future.

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CHAPTER ONE: The Archipelago Nation: Geography and Demographics of Seychelles

To truly grasp the intricacies of Seychellois politics, one must first appreciate the very foundation upon which this nation is built: its unique geography and the people who call it home. Seychelles is not a single landmass, but a scattering of islands, a constellation in the vast Indian Ocean. This fundamental characteristic, being an archipelago, has profoundly influenced everything from settlement patterns and economic development to national identity and, consequently, the political landscape. Imagine trying to govern and unite a nation spread across such a considerable maritime area, where the sea is both a connector and a separator.

The Republic of Seychelles officially comprises 115 islands, though some sources mention 155 or even more, including small islets and reclaimed land. These islands are broadly divided into two distinct groups: the Inner Islands and the Outer Islands. The Inner Islands, clustered around the main island of Mahé, are granitic in origin, characterized by dramatic, lush green peaks and narrow coastal strips. These ancient landforms offer stunning scenery, with boulder-strewn hillsides plunging towards pristine beaches. The highest point in Seychelles, Morne Seychellois, reaching 905 meters, is found on Mahé.

In contrast, the Outer Islands are predominantly flat coral atolls, many rising just a few feet above sea level. These islands, spread over a much larger area of the Exclusive Economic Zone, are generally less fertile and lack reliable sources of fresh water, making many of them uninhabited. Despite the difference in composition and appearance, both groups of islands contribute to Seychelles' considerable maritime territory, an Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) that spans over 1.3 million square kilometers of ocean. This vast marine area, significantly larger than the total land area of merely 455 square kilometers, highlights the nation's deep connection to the sea.

The sheer number and dispersion of the islands mean that while Seychelles might be one of Africa's smallest countries in terms of land area and population, its maritime domain is substantial. This geographic reality presents both opportunities and challenges for governance. Managing and protecting such a vast marine territory requires significant resources and international cooperation, particularly in areas like fisheries management and combating illegal activities. The "blue economy," focusing on sustainable use of ocean resources, is thus not just an economic strategy but a geographical imperative for Seychelles.

The climate of Seychelles is, perhaps unsurprisingly for an equatorial archipelago,

tropical marine. Temperatures remain relatively stable throughout the year, typically ranging between 24°C and 32°C, without significant extremes. There are two main seasons influenced by monsoon winds: the wetter northwest monsoon from December to March and the cooler, drier southeast monsoon from May to September. While rain is possible throughout the year, the period from December to February generally sees the most rainfall. High winds and cyclones are rare as most of the islands lie outside the main cyclone belt. This consistent, warm climate, while a boon for tourism, also presents environmental vulnerabilities, particularly in the face of rising sea levels and changing weather patterns associated with climate change.

This geographical isolation and the variety of island types have contributed to a remarkable level of biodiversity, both terrestrial and marine. Seychelles is recognized as a biodiversity hotspot, with a significant number of endemic species – those found nowhere else on Earth. The Vallée de Mai on Praslin, a UNESCO World Heritage site, is home to the iconic Coco de Mer palm, known for its massive, suggestively shaped double nut. The Aldabra Atoll, another World Heritage site, is a refuge for a vast population of giant tortoises, a species once driven to near extinction. The surrounding coral reefs teem with marine life, making the protection of these fragile ecosystems a crucial aspect of national policy.

The population of Seychelles, estimated to be around 100,000 to 121,000 people in recent years, is concentrated on a few islands, primarily Mahé, Praslin, and La Digue. Over 90% of the population resides on Mahé, where the capital city, Victoria, is located. The other inhabited islands host significantly smaller communities, and many islands remain uninhabited, often serving as nature reserves. This demographic distribution means that political and economic activity is largely centered on Mahé, with the other islands having varying degrees of connectivity and access to services.

The Seychellois people are a vibrant mix of different ethnicities, reflecting the islands' history as a melting pot of cultures. The population is primarily of Creole descent, a blend of African and European, particularly French and British, origins. Over centuries, people from India, China, and other parts of the world have also settled in Seychelles, contributing to the nation's diverse cultural tapestry. This intermingling has resulted in a largely harmonious society, though the legacy of slavery and colonialism has undoubtedly shaped social structures and identities.

Seychelles has three official languages: Seychellois Creole (Kreol), English, and French. Seychellois Creole, a French-based Creole, is the most widely spoken language and is considered the mother tongue of the majority of the population. English is also widely used, particularly in government and business, a lingering influence of British colonial rule. French, with its historical ties and similarity to Creole, also maintains its presence in the linguistic landscape. This trilingual reality is a practical necessity for a nation with historical ties to different European powers and a modern economy reliant on international engagement, particularly tourism.

Despite its relatively small size and population, Seychelles has achieved a high level of human development and boasts the highest nominal per capita GDP in Africa. The economy is heavily reliant on tourism and fisheries, sectors intimately linked to the country's geography and marine resources. While this has brought prosperity, it also makes the economy vulnerable to external shocks, such as fluctuations in global tourism or changes in fish stocks.

The concentration of the population on a few islands and the reliance on a few key economic sectors have implications for political representation and development. Ensuring equitable access to services and opportunities across the archipelago, and diversifying the economy to build resilience, are ongoing challenges for any Seychellois government. The geography of the islands, with its inherent dispersion and dependence on the sea, remains a defining factor in the political and economic life of the nation.

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