



Angola — Va-PoReg Country Report

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01/25/1575 Start Direct Rule Colonial Regime [of Portugal]: From 01/25/1575 onward, Portuguese settlers gradually occupied territories along the west African coast. At the beginning of the systematic observation period on 01/07/1900, the colonial economy expanded despite recurrent episodes of domestic unrest.¹ Policies of civil administration in the colony were introduced by a governor general between 1907 and 1910. Colonial rule increasingly ensured a high dependence of Angola on metropolitan Portugal insofar that Lisbon held wide-ranging control over its colony (Oliver/Sanderson 2004). Portugal's approach to Angola during the 1930s and 1940s centered on the concept of national integration. In terms of economy, society, and politics, the goal was for Angola to be seamlessly incorporated into the Portuguese nation (Roth 1979). There was no form of self-government through elections (LIED). Although nominal legislative bodies existed, they were dominated by Portuguese settlers and did not provide genuine representation for the indigenous population. Voting rights were restricted by literacy and property qualifications, effectively excluding most Angolans. In addition, the colonial parliament had little influence over policies, which were determined by the Portuguese government. Hence, any semblance of a parliament was a façade, and the colonial power ruled directly. Both LIED and V-Dem's PCLI classify political liberties as absent. This period is thus coded as direct colonial rule. Until the year 1972, V-Dem's JCE is classified as limited, indicating weak judicial oversight. Concurrently, V-Dem's LCE shows no value, which can be cautiously interpreted as indicating an absence of legislative constraints on the executive. For 1973-1975 V-Dem's JCE is interpreted by us as indicating that judicial constraints on the executive were limited, while V-Dem's LCE is classified by us as indicating that legislative constraints on the executive were absent. Angola became a Portuguese overseas province in 1953, while Liberation movements began forming in the late 1950s (Kaplan 1979). A civil war started when the People's Movement for the Liberation of Angola (MPLA), the National Front for the Liberation of Angola (FNLA) and the National Union for the Total Independence of Angola (UNITA) started a guerrilla campaign against Portuguese rule on several fronts. They also fought with each other after the 1974 coup in Portugal (Kaplan 1979). On 10/23/1975, South Africa intervened in Angola (Dobert 1979, Oliver/Sanderson 2004, Keltie 2014b, Roth 1979, Kaplan 1979). Based on our observations, no multiparty, executive or legislative elections were held during this period, in accordance with the observations of LIED. The only exception are brief and limited legislative elections held in 1973 after the Portuguese passed the Organic Law for overseas territories, leading up to the civil war in 1975. Thus, in accordance with LIED, we classify legislative elections present in that two-year period.

11/11/1975 End Direct Rule Colonial Regime [of Portugal, Liberal Democracy]/Start No Central Authority: On this date, independence from Portugal was declared. This marked the beginning of the Angolan Civil War.² Following the Alvor Agreement³, MPLA, FNLA and UNITA agreed to a transitional government with equal representation and left Angola run by a provisional independence government headed by the leftist MPLA during the lead up to independence. The US-backed rightist and nationalist National Front for the Liberation of Angola insurgents broke the Alvor Agreement cease fire and drove the provisional Government out. Hence, at the date of independence Angola had no self-government to receive control from the Portuguese: High Commissioner Admiral Leonel Cardoso declined to relinquish power to the MPLA and opted to grant independence to the people of Angola. In response, the MPLA declared the establishment of its

government in Luanda, naming the controlled territory the People's Republic of Angola. Meanwhile, FNLA and UNITA declared a distinct regime, headquartered in the southern city of Huambo, designating their territory as the Democratic People's Republic of Angola (Dobert 1979, Warner 1991, Geddes/Wright/Frantz 2014: 40). Universal suffrage was introduced with independence.⁴ The MPLA was backed by the Soviet-Union and Cuba in the civil war (Valenta 1978). Political liberties remained absent (V-Dem PCLI, LIED). For the relevant regime period, V-Dem's JCE is interpreted by us as indicating that judicial constraints on the executive were limited, while V-Dem's LCE is classified by us as indicating that legislative constraints on the executive were absent. Based on our observations, no multiparty, executive or legislative elections were held during this period, which aligns with the observations of LIED.

01/02/1976 End No Central Authority/Start One-Party Autocracy: After months of civil war, the MPLA established its rule over the entire country. After taking power, the MPLA set out to radically transform Angolan agriculture through villagization and collectivization of peasant farmers. Nationalization of property and companies began in 1976 within a year of taking power (Heywood 2000: 205-7, Scott 1988, Somerville 1984, Zafiris 1982, Casey et al. 2020: 60). However, in essence the regime failed to pursue genuine ideological transformation despite formal Marxist-Leninist rhetoric. MPLA leader and first President Agostinho Neto declared as late as August 1975 that „The MPLA is not a Marxist-Leninist organisation“ and the first constitution of 11/11/1975 made no reference to socialism, with Marxism-Leninism adopted only at the 1977 party congress before Neto immediately purged „orthodox communism“ followers after the Alves coup attempt and declared the MPLA would follow the socialist, not communist, model (Vidal 2024).⁵ After Neto's 1979 death, successor José Eduardo dos Santos transformed Angola's socialism into a system of political and economic inequality where access to privileges depended on relationships to presidency and MPLA rather than ideological commitment, with dos Santos ring-fencing state oil company Sonangol to report directly to the presidency, giving him personal control over four-fifths of government revenues to create patronage and clientelism systems. The Va-PoReg codebook requires Communist Ideocracy to pursue radical societal transformation through genuine mobilization. Angola's regime instead practiced clientelistic patronage politics with Marxist-Leninist rhetoric maintained primarily for Soviet Cold War alignment, constituting classic one-party autocracy. According to Polity5, during this period, the executive encountered slight limitations on decision-making power imposed by other institutions. Per FH, for this regime period, the country scores between 11 and 14 as not free, which we also interpret as not free. Moreover, following LIED and V-Dem's PCLI political liberties were still not present. During this regime period, V-Dem's JCE is classified by us as indicating that judicial constraints on the executive were limited, whereas V-Dem's LCE is classified by us as indicating that legislative constraints on the executive were absent. President Agostinho Neto died in 1979. In 1980 the members for the People's Assembly were elected, with the People's Movement for the Liberation of Angola (MPLA) as the sole legal party. José Eduardo dos Santos was elected as the 2nd president of Angola by the People's Assembly in 1980. According to LIED no multiparty executive and legislative elections were held until 1978, in 1979 only executive elections were held, from 1980 onward executive and legislative elections, which were not multiparty were held. Hence, Angola under MPLA rule shows the characteristic pattern of one-party autocracies in which elections occur but do not provide the basis of political legitimacy. Legislative elections in 1980 and subsequent electoral exercises in the 1980s were conducted under conditions of complete MPLA dominance. Voter choice was restricted to MPLA-approved candidates, and official results regularly reported approval rates in the range typical for single-party systems, often above 95 percent and presented as expressions of national unity. These figures functioned as symbolic demonstrations of regime cohesion rather than as mechanisms of competitive authorization. The regime never claimed that its authority rested on electoral endorsement. Legitimacy was tied instead to the MPLA's institutional role as the agent of national liberation and the guardian of state continuity during civil conflict. The presence of elections, including those with near unanimous official results, therefore did not alter the institutional and party-centered foundation of rule. This places Angola clearly within the category of one-party autocracy and not within electoral autocracy, which uses electoral procedures as a primary source of

legitimacy, or within ideocracy, which requires doctrinal transformation as the core of political authority.

11/09/1990 End One-Party Autocracy/Start Non-Electoral Transitional Regime: On this date, the Permanent Commission of the People's Assembly passed a resolution which established a commission tasked with the revision of the Angolan constitution (Amnesty International 1991). The new constitution was to abolish the one-party state and include elections and participation by all.⁶ In April 1991 the MPLA denounced Marxism-Leninism in favor of social democracy.⁷ On 05/06/1991, the parliament amended the constitution by passing law 12/91 which was aimed at eradicating the one-party state (Assembleia Nacional de Angola 1991). Per FH, Angola is classified as not free with a score between 11 and 14 and falls under the not free category in our interpretation. In 1991 the country scores between 9 and 10 as not free and is categorized as rather not free in our interpretation. No political liberties existed until 1991 per V-Dem's PCLI and are classified as not really present in 1992. For the relevant regime period, V-Dem's JCE is interpreted by us as indicating that judicial constraints on the executive were limited, while V-Dem's LCE is classified by us as indicating that legislative constraints on the executive were absent. LIED considers political liberties as absent for the entire time. On 08/25/1992, constitutional revisions were enacted, the country was renamed Republic of Angola and all explicitly Marxist elements (including the words People's or Popular) were removed from the constitution and from the names of institutions (Lea/Rowe 2001, Geddes/Wright/Frantz 2014: 40).⁸ Based on our observations, executive and legislative elections, which weren't multiparty, were present during this period, which aligns the observations of LIED.

09/29/1992 End Non-Electoral Transitional Regime/Start Electoral Autocracy: Parliamentary elections on this date were endorsed by foreign observers and the UN as free and fair.⁹ Nevertheless, an official observer reported that there was very little UN supervision, around 500.000 UNITA voters had been disenfranchised and there had been over 100 clandestine polling stations.¹⁰ In the presidential elections the MPLA's José Dos Santos won 49.6% of the vote and UNITA's Jonas Savimbi 40.7%. The second round of elections never took place because Savimbi rejected the results as fraudulent. Based on our observations, multiparty, executive and legislative elections were present during this period, which aligns the observations of LIED. According to LIED the elections were not competitive. Moreover, V-Dem's CEI indicates no clean elections. V-Dem's EF&FI scores the freedom and fairness of this election as ambiguous. Political liberties are absent in 1992 per LIED and can be interpreted as not really present per V-Dem's PCLI.

10/31/1992 End Electoral Autocracy/Start No Central Authority: On this date, government troops attacked UNITA in Luanda.¹¹ A brutal war between the two camps followed. While the capital and parts of the territory were under the control of the MPLA, UNITA controlled the rest of the country.¹² In almost all datasets this period is classified as a multiparty autocracy (e.g. HWF, MCM). This is a misclassification. Parts of the country were ruled by one party, while the rest of the country was ruled by the opposing party. This does definitely not constitute a multiparty regime. However, an alternative approach from the coding as no central authority would be to code the regime in the MPLA and UNITA controlled territories separately as one-party regimes. In accordance with FH, the country is designated as not free, with a score between 11 and 14, and is thus categorized as not free in our analysis. Political liberties remained absent per LIED and not really present per V-Dem's PCLI. During this regime period, V-Dem's JCE is classified by us as indicating that judicial constraints on the executive were limited, whereas V-Dem's LCE is classified by us as indicating that legislative constraints on the executive were absent. Therefore, while the People's Assembly and the elected President continued their terms, the period cannot be classified as multiparty. According to LIED multiparty executive and legislative elections were held during this period.

11/20/1994 End No Central Authority/Start One-Party Autocracy: On this date, the Lusaka Protocol was negotiated and signed in Lusaa, Zambia. We code this regime change event as a negotiated transition. It was a second peace agreement, similar to the Alvor Agreement of 1975. The accord aimed to bring peace between the Angolan government and the rebel group UNITA. As part of the agreement, former UNITA insurgents were to be integrated into the government and armed forces. UNITA was to be disarmed and demobilized. The agreement awarded UNITA politicians homes and offices. The agreement additionally created a joint

commission consisting of officials from the Angolan Government, UNITA and the UN including the governments of Portugal, the United States and Russia in order to oversee the implementation of the protocol. All in all, the protocol integrated UNITA into a coalition government.¹³ MONUA and the United Nations Angola Verification Mission III spent \$1.5 billion on the oversight of the implementation. Nevertheless, the provisions aimed at the prevention of armed UNITA forces were largely disobeyed. Both the government and UNITA continued buying arms from abroad.¹⁴ However, localized incidents of violence and fighting resumed in 1995. Nevertheless, this period is coded as one-party autocracy and not as „no central authority” because overall, the cease fire was respected. The period following the Lusaka Protocol saw attempts at creating a coalition government, integrating UNITA into the political framework. This integration, including the provision of homes and offices for UNITA politicians and the creation of a joint commission, indicates an effort towards a transitional regime rather than a one-party autocracy by MPLA. The presence of international oversight, including the United Nations and other foreign governments, further suggests a transitional nature. It can be considered as an attempt at a transition to peace with an integrated coalition government. After an incident, where UNITA fighters shot down a government helicopter in March 1995 dos Santos and Savimbi met four times to secure the peace. Dos Santos offered the vice-presidency to Savimbi on each of these occasions. Savimbi declined the vice-presidency that was offered to him and again renewed fighting on 12/04/1998.¹⁵ The Angolan military launched a large-scale offensive in 1999, which resulted in the destruction of UNITA’s conventional military capabilities and the recapture of major cities previously held by Savimbi’s forces. Following this, Savimbi declared that UNITA would resort to guerrilla tactics, causing continued turmoil throughout the country.¹⁶ On 04/04/2002 a ceasefire between UNITA and the MPLA was negotiated after government troops had killed Jonas Savimbi (UNITA) and on 02/22/2002. UNITA’s new leadership declared the rebel group a political party and officially demobilized its armed forces in August 2002. The civil war ended.¹⁷ Nevertheless, the government had to deal with separatist movements in the oil-rich region of Cabinda, a conflict which intensified in 2004. A peace agreement was reached in 2006.¹⁸ While the political situation in Angola started to stabilize, it was not until the 2008 elections that regular electoral processes were fully established in the country.¹⁹ Between 09/29&30/1992 and 09/06/2008 there have been no elections in Angola. Hence, it seems problematic that LIED, MCM and AF classify the regime as multiparty/electoral. The political process was dominated from the violent conflict between MPLA and UNITA. However, the regime was non-electoral and apart from a short period the MPLA ruled alone. While the legitimization of power came largely from the transitional aspect this arrangement de facto failed. In accordance with FH, the country is designated as not free, with a score between 11 and 14, and is thus categorized as not free in our analysis. After 2002, we interpret V-Dem’s PCLI as reflecting an ambiguous situation regarding political liberties. LIED still codes them as absent. According to Polity5, during this period, the executive encountered slight limitations on decision-making power imposed by other institutions. Given the absence of regular elections in this period, based on our observations no multiparty, executive or legislative elections were present during this period, which contradicts the observations of LIED. According to LIED multiparty executive and legislative elections were held during this period. For the relevant regime period, V-Dem’s JCE is interpreted by us as indicating that judicial constraints on the executive were limited, while V-Dem’s LCE is classified by us as indicating that legislative constraints on the executive were absent.

09/06/2008 End One-Party Autocracy/Start Electoral Autocracy: On this date, the first elections since the end of the civil war were held, securing the MPLA’s hegemony with 82% of the vote (Roque 2009). President José Eduardo dos Santos continued to rule the country. In 2010, direct presidential elections were abolished by the constitution, instead the leader of the national list of the political party that gets the highest outcome is entitled to the Presidency, without any confirmation process by the elected legislature. The powers of the president are broad and the parliament is very weak, acting „largely as a rubber stamp in approving the president’s policies”.²⁰²¹ Although a multiparty electoral system exists since 1991, the regulation of political parties is very strict (Lansford 2015). Following his election in 2017, President João Lourenço initiated a prominent anti-corruption campaign targeting high-profile figures, including the family of his predecessor, José Eduardo

dos Santos, despite the MPLA maintaining its strict political control.²² There was no transition of power to the opposition until the most recent elections on 08/24/2022 and although parliamentary elections are held regularly, they are neither free nor fair. Government authorities have consistently suppressed political dissent. Corruption, violations of due process, and misconduct by security forces persist as prevalent issues.²³ Angola was at rank #121 out of 180 in the Corruption Perceptions Index in 2023.²⁴ Based on our observations multiparty, executive and legislative elections can at least formally be classified as present during this period, which aligns with the observations of LIED. LIED has never classified any election in the country as competitive. While V-Dem's EF&FI classifies the freedom and fairness of elections as ambiguous, the CEI indicates that the elections were not really clean. As classified by FH for this regime period, the country is scored from 11 to 14 as not free, which corresponds to our interpretation of not free. LIED classifies political freedoms as absent for this period. According to V-Dem's PCLI political liberties were ambiguous until 2017 and somewhat present from 2018 onward. According to Polity5, during this period, the executive encountered slight limitations on decision-making power imposed by other institutions. For 2009-2017, V-Dem's JCE is interpreted by us as indicating that judicial constraints on the executive were limited, while V-Dem's LCE is classified by us as indicating that legislative constraints on the executive were absent. Since the year 2018, V-Dem's JCE is interpreted by us as indicating that judicial constraints on the executive were limited, and V-Dem's LCE is similarly interpreted as indicating that legislative constraints on the executive were also limited.

Electoral Autocracy as of 07/01/2025 continued.

Additional sources (Clemente-Kersten 1999a, Collelo 1989, Dobert 1979, Kaplan 1979, Keltie 2014a, Macmillan 2022, Oliver/Sanderson 2004, Roth 1979)

Notes

¹ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/1900s_in_Angola

² https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Angolan_Civil_War

³ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Alvor_Agreement

⁴ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Elections_in_Angola

⁵ <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/MPLA>

⁶ <https://www.britannica.com/place/Angola/Independence-and-civil-war>

⁷ <https://www.sahistory.org.za/article/angolan-civil-war-1975-2002-timeline-events>

⁸ <https://constitutionnet.org/country/angola>

⁹ <https://www.eisa.org/wep/angoverview9.htm>

¹⁰ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Angolan_Civil_War#1990s

¹¹ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Angolan_Civil_War#1990s

¹² <https://www.eisa.org/wep/angoverview9.htm>

¹³ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lusaka_Protocol

¹⁴ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lusaka_Protocol#Implementation

¹⁵ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lusaka_Protocol#Implementation; https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Angolan_Civil_War#1990s; https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jonas_Savimbi

¹⁶ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/History_of_Angola

¹⁷ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Angolan_Civil_War

¹⁸ <https://www.britannica.com/place/Angola/Independence-and-civil-war>

¹⁹ <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Angola>

²⁰ <https://freedomhouse.org/country/angola/freedom-world/2022>; https://www.constituteproject.org/constitution/Angola_2010?lang=en; <https://freedomhouse.org/country/angola/freedom-world/2022>

²² https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Politics_of_Angola#History

²³ <https://freedomhouse.org/country/angola/freedom-world/2022>

²⁴ <https://www.transparency.org/en/cpi/2023/index/ago>

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