

Document #2039048

Freedom House

Freedom on the Net 2020 - Angola

PARTLY FREE

62

/ 100

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LAST YEAR'S SCORE & STATUS

64 / 100 Partly Free

Scores are based on a scale of 0 (least free) to 100 (most free)

Overview

Internet freedom in Angola has improved under the administration of President João Lourenço, whose political focus on transparency and the fight against corruption has emboldened free speech and reversed a culture of fear that limited the public discussion of governance issues. Angolans are likelier to use social media platforms for the purposes of activism and community building than in the past. An ongoing economic crisis has affected the viability of some online media outlets. The government's perceived ability to monitor and intercept the data and communications of Angolan citizens is a major concern.

Angola has been ruled by the same party since independence, and authorities have systematically repressed political dissent. Corruption, due process violations, and abuses by security forces remain common. Since President Lourenço's 2017 election, the government has taken steps to crack down on endemic corruption and has eased restrictions on the press and civil society. Nevertheless, serious governance and human rights challenges persist.

Key Developments, June 1, 2019 - May 31, 2020

- Angolans experienced connectivity disruptions and slower internet speeds in the first three months of 2020 because of two malfunctions in undersea internet cables (see A1).
- In March 2020, the government issued a decree ordering state-run and private media outlets to collaborate with public agencies as part of Angola's response to the COVID-19 pandemic, raising concerns of media manipulation (see B5 and C1).
- Armando Chicoca, a journalist and union delegate, was charged with insulting a public authority in May 2020, after he criticized the treatment of another journalist by government agents, including in social media posts (see C3).
- A new law introduced in May 2020 significantly expanded the government's legal authority to conduct electronic surveillance, including through spyware and telecommunications interception technology, with minimal safeguards (see C5).
- A new surveillance and data integration center opened in the capital city of Luanda in December 2019; the facility, the first in a planned nationwide network of centers, was reportedly linked to sophisticated surveillance technology (see C5).

A Obstacles to Access

Internet and mobile phone penetration both remain low, largely hindered by high costs and poor infrastructure that limit access, particularly in rural areas. Free Wi-Fi hotspots made some headway in improving connectivity, though people across the country experienced connectivity disruptions and slower speeds because of two malfunctions in undersea internet cables. The government released a plan to privatize state-owned companies, including telecommunications providers.

A1 0-6 pts

Do infrastructural limitations restrict access to the internet or the speed and quality of internet 1 / connections? **6**

Score Change: The score declined from 2 to 1 after two cable breaks in early 2020 resulted in connectivity interruptions and slower speeds throughout the country for a total of six weeks.

Access to the internet in Angola remains very low, but has been growing steadily. According to the Angolan National Institute of Telecommunication (INACOM), the country’s telecommunications regulator, 6.17 million users accessed the internet in 2019, amounting to over 20 percent of the population. Half of the country’s internet users used portable devices to do so.¹

INACOM also reported that there were 14 million mobile phone users in 2019, representing 47 percent of the population; the figure represented a 2 percent increase over the previous year.² 3G and 4G coverage and penetration reached 85 percent and 13.8 percent of the population, respectively.³

Poor infrastructure significantly hampers information and communications technology (ICT) access, though it is improving somewhat. The country’s fractured electricity system serves 73.7 percent of the urban population as of 2018,⁴ but only 8 percent of the rural population as of 2015,⁵ according to the latest World Bank data. Power outages remain frequent. Internet speeds are limited by the ADSL technology most fixed-broadband connections are based on.⁶

Internet connectivity and speed were severely affected in 2020 with two malfunctions in both the West African Cable System (Wacs) and the SAT-3/WASC cables.⁷ The first malfunction lasted for almost a full month between January and February, while the second, which took place in mid-March, lasted two weeks.⁸ Both incidents caused occasional outages, as well as a significant reduction in speed, with Angola Telecom being the most affected provider. International voice communication services were also limited during both periods.⁹

In May 2020, Angola Cables reported a 170 percent increase in data consumption in the first quarter of 2020 compared to the same period in 2019, though the company did not report any congestion or service interruptions.¹⁰

The South Atlantic Cable System (SACS), a submarine fiber-optic cable connecting Brazil and Angola that aims to reduce the bandwidth costs associated with the distance that internet traffic has to travel from Europe and the United States, was completed in May 2018.¹¹ In May 2019, the Angolan government awarded a contract to construct a new telecommunications satellite, AngoSat-3, to European consortium Airbus. The satellite is expected to launch in 2021.¹²

A2 0-3 pts

Is access to the internet prohibitively expensive or beyond the reach of certain segments of the 1 / population for geographical, social, or other reasons? **3**

Internet access remains prohibitively expensive for many people, especially in rural areas. However, the government and some private companies have made efforts to establish free wireless hotspots.

Angola Online, a government-promoted project, has established a number of hotspots in an effort to expand the availability of free internet access.¹³ According to the National Institute for Promotion of the Information Society (INFOSI), 111 free hotspots were established at universities and other locations in 13 of the country’s 18 provinces,¹⁴ serving 30,000 people by July 2020.¹⁵¹⁶¹⁷¹⁸ In Luanda and other cities, free hotspots sponsored by private companies¹⁹ have increasingly become available in public spaces.²⁰ However, lockdown measures instituted during the COVID-19 pandemic limited Angolans’ access to universities, workplaces, and other locations where they could access the internet.

ICT access remains prohibitively expensive for the majority of Angolans, partially due to a lack of competition in the ICT industry (see A4).²¹ President Lourenço has expressed concern about the cost and quality of internet services.²² In early 2019, INACOM fined internet service provider (ISP) ZAP for increasing prices in a way inconsistent with state regulations, though ZAP appealed the fine that March.²³

Home internet prices increased in 2019 and 2020 due to currency devaluations and inflation.²⁴ Monthly subscriptions from Angola’s leading ISPs range from 1,500 kwanzas (\$2.56) for download speeds of 1 Mbps to 118,300 kwanzas (\$202) for download speeds of 50 Mbps as of July 2020.²⁵ Gross national income (GNI) per capita was estimated at \$280.83 per month²⁶ in 2019. Consequently, few Angolan households have internet access. Internet cafés charge approximately \$1 for 30 minutes’ worth of access.

In October 2019, the cost of internet access on mobile networks stood at \$1.60 for 100 MB of data.²⁷ On Unitel and Movitel, the two largest mobile service providers, monthly data prices range from 1,900 kwanzas (\$3.82) to 18,000 kwanzas (\$36.28).²⁸ The government introduced a 14 percent value-added tax (VAT) in October 2019, an increase over the previous 5 percent services consumption tax.²⁹ Mobile service providers, including market leader Unitel, will likely pass the added cost onto consumers.³⁰

Prices for mobile data, call plans, and broadband internet access in Angola are high compared to neighboring countries—10 times higher than South Africa’s, for example. Lower-cost packages, such as those offered by Movitel and NetOne, are associated with poor speeds and overall service quality.³¹

The recent economic downturn has made the internet even less accessible. [32](#) Angola saw a nearly 9 percent increase in unemployment between 2017 and 2019, when it reached 28.8 percent of the working age population. [33](#) According to World Bank data, GNI per capita fell from \$5,010 in 2014 to \$3,370 in 2018. [34](#) The national minimum wage in Angola was increased to 21,454.10 kwanzas (\$67) in March 2019 due to rising inflation. [35](#)

Poor infrastructure particularly affects rural residents. Voice and data services are of much poorer quality, and are subject to frequent cuts and extremely slow connection speeds. Due to the country’s fractured electricity system, urban areas are more likely to have connectivity (see A1).

According to the International Telecommunication Union’s (ITU) latest global analysis of prices for mobile-voice, mobile-data and fixed-broadband services, Angola ranks 142nd among countries with the most affordable plans in terms of GNI per capita, and 127th in terms of low-consumption mobile-data-and-voice baskets. [36](#)

A3 0-6 pts

Does the government exercise technical or legal control over internet infrastructure for the purposes of 5 / restricting connectivity? 6

No restrictions on connectivity to internet or mobile phone networks were reported during the coverage period. The Angolan government’s indirect control of telecommunications infrastructure via state-owned Angola Telecom may enable the government to partially control internet connectivity if desired. [37](#)

Angola’s domestic backbone is currently comprised of microwave, very small aperture terminal (VSAT), and fiber-optic cables. Angola is connected to the international internet through the West Africa Cable System (WACS), which is owned by Angola Cables, the South Atlantic 3 (SAT-3) cable, which is operated by Angola Telecom, the Main One cable, and WASACE. Angola Cables also manages the country’s internet exchange point (IXP), ANGONIX, [38](#) which grew to become the third-largest IXP in Africa in 2017. [39](#) Angola Cables, which is also responsible for the SACS (see A1), is a consortium of the country’s telecommunications operators, with Angola Telecom and Unitel holding the two largest stakes, with 51 percent and 31 percent, respectively.

According to a 2019 World Bank Report, Angola Telecom also controls 12,000 kilometers (7,450 miles) of the 22,000 kilometers of fiber-optic cables in the country. [40](#)

A4 0-6 pts

Are there legal, regulatory, or economic obstacles that restrict the diversity of service providers? 3 / 6

The state and the political-military elite still dominate Angola’s main service providers, in spite of government plans to reduce the state’s presence in the sector. Politicians, government allies, and state-owned oil company Sonangol can exert some control on the ICT sector through direct and indirect ownership of shares in ISPs and mobile service providers.

Sonangol holds 3 of the country’s 18 ISPs (MSTelcom, Nexus, and ACS), is a major shareholder in Angola Cables, and owns 50 percent of Unitel, the country’s largest ISP. [41](#) after purchasing a 25 percent stake in January 2020. [42](#) Angola Telecom owns 51 percent of Angola Cables, and provides internet services. [43](#)

In August 2019, the government introduced a plan to privatize numerous state holdings, including service providers. MSTelcom, Net One, Unitel, TV Cabo Angola, and Multitel are to be privatized in 2020. [44](#) Angola Telecom and Angola Cables are scheduled to be privatized in 2021. [45](#) The government previously announced that it would seek to privatize a 45 percent stake of Angola Telecom’s fixed-network services in November 2019. [46](#)

Two private operators, Unitel and Movitel, provide mobile phone services, but both are owned in part by politically connected individuals. Unitel is the dominant player, with a 73 percent share as of 2019. [47](#) Isabel dos Santos, the daughter of former president José Eduardo dos Santos, controls a 25 percent stake in Unitel, though she announced in August 2020 that she would leave the company’s board amid a criminal investigation and increasing scrutiny of her financial activities. [48](#) GENI SARL, an entity reportedly owned by General Leopoldino do Nascimento, a dos Santos loyalist, also owns a 25 percent stake. [49](#) In January 2020, Sonangol acquired a 25 percent stake in Unitel from Brazilian telecommunications firm Oi SA, bringing Sonangol’s total ownership of Unitel to 50 percent. [50](#)

Movitel retains a 27 percent market share as of 2019. [51](#) The National Social Security Institute (INPS), a state agency, bought 25 percent of Movitel that year, becoming the second-largest shareholder after Lello International, which owns a 38 percent stake. [52](#) Portmil Investimentos, a holding company associated with General Nascimento and other former government officials, sold its stake. [53](#) Under a 2019 agreement, Vodafone is now in charge of Movitel’s operational management. Isabel dos Santos’s half-sister, Welwitschia dos Santos, reportedly holds an indirect stake in Movitel. [54](#)

In March 2020, the government working group announced that Africell Holding SAL, a Gambian company, would be licensed as Angola’s fourth telecommunications operator. [55](#) The government announced the process to choose a new operator in April 2019, after cancelling plans to issue the license to Telstar, a politically connected company with no experience in the industry. [56](#) Angola Telecom announced in July 2020 that it would share infrastructure with Africell, simultaneously abandoning plans for a mobile partnership with Angorascom Telecomunicações. [57](#) Angola Telecom had announced in November 2019 that it would “subconcession” its mobile license to Angorascom to increase competition in Angola’s mobile market. [58](#)

The 2017 Law on Electronic Communications further enhances the government’s ability to control the country’s ICT sector.⁵⁹ On paper, the law aims to ensure that ICTs in Angola are developed to play a fundamental role in ensuring citizens’ universal access to information, transparency in the public sector, and participatory democracy. It also sets broader goals of poverty alleviation, competitiveness, productivity, employment, and consumer rights.⁶⁰ However, it also contains a broadly worded clause allowing the head of government to “intervene” if ISPs jeopardize “social functions” or “gravely compromise the rights of subscribers or users.”⁶¹ Analysts have interpreted this clause as potentially allowing the president to exercise control over the whole sector.

A5 0-4 pts

Do national regulatory bodies that oversee service providers and digital technology fail to operate in a 1 / free, fair, and independent manner? 4

Angola’s powerful ruling party, the Popular Movement for the Liberation of Angola (MPLA), maintains effective control of regulatory bodies.

The Ministry of Telecommunications and Information Technology is responsible for oversight of the ICT sector, while INACOM, established in 1999, serves as the sector’s regulatory body. INACOM determines the sector’s regulations and policies, sets prices for telecommunications services, and issues licenses. The regulatory body is, on paper, an independent public institution with both financial and administrative autonomy from the ministry. In practice, its autonomy is fairly limited.⁶² Its director general is appointed by the government and can be dismissed for any reason.⁶³ In addition, the telecommunications ministry can influence staff appointments. Other ministries often involve themselves in sector policy, leading to politically influenced regulatory decisions.

Under the Lourenço administration, INACOM has exercised its regulatory powers more assertively, chiefly in containing consumer price increases by telecommunications operators.⁶⁴

B Limits on Content

Online content remained unrestricted during the coverage period. Online journalists actively highlight cases of corruption, abuse of power, land grabs, police brutality, and demolitions. However, both state agencies and private-sector actors often deny advertising revenue to media outfits that criticize the political-military elite. Emergency regulations imposed during the COVID-19 pandemic raised concerns of media manipulation. A severe economic crisis has also led to financial constraints at numerous outlets.

B1 0-6 pts

Does the state block or filter, or compel service providers to block or filter, internet content? 6 / 6

Despite a history of censorship in print and broadcast media, there have been no known incidents of the government blocking or filtering online content in Angola, and there are no restrictions on the type of information that can be exchanged through digital media technologies. A set of new media laws that took effect in 2017 has been criticized as restrictive, but no websites have been censored under their provisions to date (see C1). Social media and communications apps such as YouTube, Facebook, Twitter, and international blog-hosting services are freely available.

B2 0-4 pts

Do state or nonstate actors employ legal, administrative, or other means to force publishers, content 4 / hosts, or digital platforms to delete content? 4

There were no public reports of forced content removal during the coverage period, though informal government demands on users to remove content from the internet have been documented periodically.

B3 0-4 pts

Do restrictions on the internet and digital content lack transparency, proportionality to the stated aims, 4 / or an independent appeals process? 4

While some Angolan laws applicable to the digital sphere contain harsh restrictions, in practice these have not been enforced on websites or users.

In January 2017, the government implemented new media laws known as the Social Communication Legislative Package. The package included a new Press Law and also created a regulatory body with the power to ban websites (see C1). Article 10 of the Press Law states that “all social communication media” have the responsibility to inform citizens “in accordance with the public interest.” Article 7 sets limits to the exercise of freedom of the press, including on the internet, with a number of broad provisions.⁶⁵ Critics say these effectively enable the government to control and censor critical information posted on social media or elsewhere online.

B4 0-4 pts

Do online journalists, commentators, and ordinary users practice self-censorship? 3 / 4

In the past, self-censorship has been pervasive and commonly practiced by journalists at both state-run and private print outlets, though bloggers and social media users were less reluctant to express criticism of the president and ruling party. With President Lourenço presenting transparency and the fight against corruption as causes of his administration, journalists and newsrooms, including at public outlets, have begun to more actively highlight cases of corruption, abuse of power, land grabs, police brutality, and demolitions.

B5 0-4 pts

Are online sources of information controlled or manipulated by the government or other powerful actors to advance a particular political interest? 3 / 4

Government efforts to manipulate online content are still sporadically reported. Some independent online news outlets report receiving regular calls from government officials directing them to tone down criticism, or refrain from reporting on certain issues.[66](#)

Under COVID-19 emergency measures imposed in March 2020 (see C1), state and private media outlets are obligated to collaborate with “competent authorities,” which the decree defines as the government bodies responsible for security, civil protection, and public health.[67](#) Though it is not clear how this provision has been put to effect, there are concerns that it may be used to manipulate Angola’s media environment.

Members of the ruling MPLA own and tightly control a majority of the country’s media outlets, including those that are the most widely disseminated and accessed. Of the main dozen or so privately owned newspapers, most are held by individuals connected to the government. Infighting between supporters of president Lourenço and former president dos Santos has spilled over to online media, with most outlets becoming critical of the previous administration. Some analysts suspect that increasingly critical coverage of dos Santos has come as a result of pressure put on outlets since his departure. Members of opposition parties and youth activists in the province of Cabinda, where several independence and autonomy movements are active, are still excluded from state media programs, including online.[68](#)

Bots on social media have become more prevalent and influential in recent years. A study by the political consultancy firm Portland Communications found that during the August 2017 election period, potential bots represented 9 percent of social media “influencers,” and that 94 percent of the bots were based outside of Angola, including in South Africa and the United States. The study found bots second to journalists and media organizations in overall social media influence during the election.[69](#)

B6 0-3 pts

Are there economic or regulatory constraints that negatively affect users’ ability to publish content online? 2 / 3

Both state agencies and private-sector actors often deny advertising revenue to media outfits that criticize the political-military elite.

Separately, a severe economic crisis has led to financial constraints at numerous outlets, and reports of wage arrears and layoffs are frequent. Recent reports indicated that individuals at some smaller, cash-strapped newspapers have accepted bribes to write critical, poorly substantiated stories about government personalities, including the president.[70](#)

B7 0-4 pts

Does the online information landscape lack diversity? 3 / 4

As a result of low rates of ICT access, radio, television, and print outlets remain the primary sources of information for the majority of Angolans. Both online and traditional media suffer from some degree of government interference, especially those with ties to the MPLA, which limits the diversity of viewpoints (see B5).

Nevertheless, news outlets are increasingly willing to scrutinize the political-military elite and report critically on government and power in general. The main sources of alternative and independent online news in Angola include Club-K and Maka Angola. Outlets funded by foreign governments, including Portuguese news agency Lusa, Voice of America (VOA), French broadcaster RFI, and Germany’s Deutsche Welle (DW) Africa, are also widely read.

Many independent newspapers are at risk, especially those that lack the resources to shift online during the economic crisis. In late 2019, printing was suspended, officially due to financial constraints faced by printing companies. Publishers from newspapers such as *Hora H* or *A Republica* believe that publication is being boycotted by the regime due to their critical content, which is circulated widely on social media.[71](#)

While the online information landscape represents an increasing variety of groups and viewpoints across the country, the concentration of internet access in urban areas hampers regional and ethnic representation. The effective decriminalization of same-sex relations in January 2019 has enabled freer online discussion of issues affecting LGBT+ people.

B8 0-6 pts

Do conditions impede users’ ability to mobilize, form communities, and campaign, particularly on political and social issues? 5 / 6

While occasional arrests of protesters and online activists have muted digital activism and mobilization in the past, use of social media to mobilize support for various causes has become more common in recent years. Mobilization platforms are freely available to users, and citizens criticize the government and react to alleged wrongdoings within Angola’s lively social media environment. Youth groups in particular have increasingly flocked to Facebook to call out government corruption, reflecting a gradual weakening of the culture of fear within civil society.[72](#)

After the January 2019 removal of a penal code provision that criminalized same-sex relations,[73](#) a new LGBT+ group, Iris, was legalized,[74](#) and is now active on social networks.[75](#)

C Violations of User Rights

New laws significantly expanded the government's legal authority to surveil, including through spyware and telecommunications interception. Though the state's technical capacity for surveillance is not fully known, the government opened a new surveillance and data integration center in Luanda. A journalist and union delegate was charged with insulting a public authority after he criticized the treatment of another journalist by government agents, including in social media posts.

C1 0-6 pts

Do the constitution or other laws fail to protect rights such as freedom of expression, access to information, and press freedom, including on the internet, and are they enforced by a judiciary that lacks independence? 2 / 6

The Angolan constitution provides for freedom of expression and the press, and the 2011 Law on Electronic Communications and Information Company Services provides for citizens' rights to privacy and security online, among other provisions regulating telecommunications.

Nevertheless, Angolan laws also include problematic language that may infringe on internet freedom (see C2).⁷⁶ In January 2017, former president dos Santos enacted a set of new media laws known as the Social Communication Legislative Package, which included a new Press Law, Television Law, Broadcast Law, Journalists' Code of Conduct, and statutes to establish the Angolan Regulatory Body for Social Communication (ERCA). The latter body was created to regulate journalists' conduct and investigate producers of online content without judicial oversight, and has the power to suspend or ban websites that fail to abide by its standards of "good journalism."⁷⁷

Meanwhile, the judiciary is subject to considerable influence from the ruling political-military elite, with Supreme Court justices appointed to life terms by the president and without legislative approval.

In March 2020, President Lourenço issued a decree for "Provisional and Exceptional Measures to Prevent and Control Propagation of the COVID-19 Pandemic," imposing a lockdown and restricting certain rights enshrined in the Angolan constitution. The decree requires state-operated and private media outlets to collaborate with "competent authorities," which the decree defines as government bodies responsible for security, civil protection, and public health,⁷⁸ raising concerns that the government would use the lockdown to limit the press. The 2010 constitution permits the government to limit certain rights and freedoms in a state of emergency.⁷⁹ The Lourenço administration extended the state of emergency two times, until May 2020.⁸⁰

In May 2020, the parliament unanimously amended the Basic Law for Civil Protection to allow the president to declare a state of calamity to respond to situations of collective risk. Measures taken under a state of calamity may not restrict or limit the constitutional rights of Angolans.⁸¹ After the amendment passed, Lourenço declared a state of calamity, which did not limit the freedom of the press.⁸²

C2 0-4 pts

Are there laws that assign criminal penalties or civil liability for online activities? 1 / 4

Stringent laws regarding state security and defamation run counter to constitutional guarantees. Article 26 of the 2010 State Security Law penalizes individuals who insult the country or president in "public meetings or by disseminating words, images, writings, or sound" with prison sentences of up to three years.⁸³ The 2006 Press Law holds authors, editors, or directors of a publication criminally liable for defamatory content.⁸⁴ If the author does not reside in the country or the text is not signed, the law establishes the circumstances in which the editor, director, or both may be held criminally responsible for such content.⁸⁵ Article 82 of the Press Law criminalizes publication of a text or image that is "offensive to individuals," which would be punished under the penal code as defamation and slander.⁸⁶

The penal code approved in January 2019 contains articles specifically pertaining to media activity. These include fines and up to six months' imprisonment for "abuse of press freedom," which can encompass incitement, the dissemination of hate speech, and the defense of fascist or racist ideologies. The measure also covers those who disseminate texts, images, or sounds obtained by fraudulent means, as well as those who intentionally publish "fake news." Under the new code, those who insult someone through the media can be fined and sentenced to up to six months in prison, and defamation can draw fines and a prison sentence as long as one year.

Computer crimes are also included in the new code, which, for instance, punishes the illegitimate access of information systems. Article 444 stipulates that "if access is achieved by breach of security rules or if it has been carried out to a protected service, the penalty is from two to eight years' imprisonment."⁸⁷ A special investigative police (SIC) unit for cybercriminality is reportedly being formed.

C3 0-6 pts

Are individuals penalized for online activities? 4 / 6

High-profile prosecutions of journalists and activists have taken place in the past. There were no major cases of sentences for legitimate online activity during this report's coverage period, though one journalist faced prosecution.

In May 2020, Armando Chicoca, a VOA correspondent and Journalists’ Union delegate, was charged by the prosecutor general’s office for “insult to a public authority.” Chicoca previously criticized the mistreatment of another journalist by the Namibe governor’s security staff, including in widely shared social media posts on the subject.⁸⁸

Substantial doubts remain about the integrity of the justice system, and people are occasionally penalized for online activities. Hitler “Samussuku” Tshikonde, a member of the “15+2” group of youth activists who were tried and acquitted for an alleged coup attempt in 2016, was detained in May 2019 after he posted a video criticizing President Lourenço on social networks; in the video, Tshikonde asserted that after having been targeted by former president dos Santos, Lourenço “was nothing.” He further warned Lourenço against arresting his fellow activists.⁸⁹ He was detained for 72 hours but ultimately freed.⁹⁰

C4 0-4 pts

Does the government place restrictions on anonymous communication or encryption? 3 / 4

There are no reports of substantial restrictions to encryption. SIM card registration is mandatory, however, and hampers the ability of mobile phone users to communicate anonymously. SIM cards must be registered directly with INACOM, the ICT regulator that operates under government oversight. The process requires an identity card or driving license and tax card for national citizens, or a passport with a valid visa for visitors.⁹¹

C5 0-6 pts

Does state surveillance of internet activities infringe on users’ right to privacy? 2 / 6

Score Change: The score declined from 3 to 2 due to a broad new law that expands the government’s legal authority to conduct electronic surveillance, while the government seeks to bolster its technical capacity for surveillance.

The government’s ability to monitor and intercept the data and communications of Angolan citizens without adequate oversight is a major concern, particularly among human rights activists and journalists. The full extent of the government’s surveillance capabilities and practices is unknown, though developments in the coverage period suggest that the government plans to expand its surveillance capacity.

In December 2019, the government opened the Integrated Center for Public Security (CISP), a surveillance data integration center operated by state security forces, in Luanda. That facility is the first of 16 planned centers to be built around the country.⁹² The initiative is backed by Chinese funding along with technology from Huawei.⁹³

A law that permits law enforcement to conduct electronic surveillance and location tracking with minimal oversight came into force in May 2020. The law authorizes the Public Prosecutor’s Office, the National Police, and judges to order and deploy surveillance technology, including spyware and telecommunications interception, in a broad range of circumstances. The law prohibits surveillance on political grounds or on the basis of discriminatory motivation.⁹⁴ Though it is not yet clear how the law will be applied, Angolans worry it provides legal coverage for existing surveillance practices, with little or no competent oversight of security forces’ use of invasive technology.⁹⁵

A law that came into effect in January 2020 allows for the installation of surveillance cameras by state security forces without prior authorization. Security agencies are exempted from many of the law’s safeguards,⁹⁶ raising concerns that the law will expand the government’s surveillance authority, including its capacity to integrate offline and online surveillance through the CISP. The CISP in Luanda, which is reportedly connected to over 700 cameras installed around the city, is equipped with facial recognition technology.⁹⁷

Recent investigations have revealed increased engagement with the Chinese government on surveillance methods.⁹⁸ According to 2017 research by the Centre for Intellectual Property and Information Technology Law, there is strong suspicion that Chinese companies were providing support to the government’s signals intelligence program on mobile phones and the internet, which aimed to target human rights organizations and defenders as well as grassroots social movements.⁹⁹ Chinese technology companies Huawei and ZTE have been active in Angola since the 1990s;¹⁰⁰ ZTE is reportedly involved with Angola’s military telecommunications.¹⁰¹

In June 2015, WikiLeaks published leaked internal emails from the Italian surveillance equipment company Hacking Team, which revealed efforts by the State Security and Intelligence Service (SINSE) to acquire Hacking Team’s notorious Remote Control System (RCS) in 2013.¹⁰² Sold to numerous repressive regimes around the world, RCS spyware has the ability to steal files and passwords and intercept Skype communications, among other features. The documents did not reveal whether the Angolan government eventually purchased or installed the spyware.

C6 0-6 pts

Are service providers and other technology companies required to aid the government in monitoring 3 / the communications of their users? 6

Strong state influence in the ownership structure of Angola’s telecommunications companies, particularly mobile service providers, suggests that the authorities are likely able to require service providers to assist in the monitoring of communications.¹⁰³ Such interweaving of political and business interests through family connections is compounded by the lack of rule of law.

The 2017 Law on Protection of Information Networks and Systems mandates that telecommunications operators store traffic and location data for the “investigation, detection and repression of crimes.” Article 37 requires the approval of a magistrate for the interception of communications by Angola’s security services.¹⁰⁴ Article 22

mandates that service providers allow the prosecutor general or a magistrate access to data, including location, or systems storing information considered “evidence.”¹⁰⁵ Article 23 requires telecommunications operators store all data for at least one year.

Law 22/11 on Personal Data Protection has been in place since 2011, and provides the right for data subjects to “access, object to, rectify, update and delete their personal data.”¹⁰⁶ Failure to comply with the law by data controllers based or operating in Angola can draw a fine of up to \$150,000.

C7 0-5 pts

Are individuals subject to extralegal intimidation or physical violence by state authorities or any other actor in retribution for their online activities? 4 / 5

Online activists and journalists are sporadically targeted with threats, though they face less violence and harassment than journalists who operate mainly in the traditional media sphere. No incidents of severe violence for online activities were noted during this report’s coverage period.

Women and LGBT+ people face online harassment in Angola. After the February 2019 decriminalization of same-sex conduct, the experience of LGBT+ people has somewhat improved.

C8 0-3 pts

Are websites, governmental and private entities, service providers, or individual users subject to 2 / widespread hacking and other forms of cyberattack? 3

Independent and diaspora news websites have been taken down by technical attacks in the past.

Sources connected to Sonangol state that a June 2019 attack against its servers targeted financial data that may have been left unrecoverable. The attack preceded the results of a journalistic investigation into Isabel dos Santos’s alleged misappropriation of public money along with her apparent ability to misuse her position as the head of Sonangol, in the so-called “Luanda Leaks” of January 2020. ¹⁰⁷

Previously, the critical news blog Maka Angola was a repeated target of distributed denial-of-service (DDoS) attacks before receiving technical assistance from Jigsaw’s Project Shield, which protects websites from powerful technical attacks. (Jigsaw is a technology incubator associated with Google.)¹⁰⁸ Rafael Marques de Morais, who runs Maka Angola, was also a frequent target of technical attacks,¹⁰⁹ but he has received assistance from digital security nonprofits to safeguard his online activities.

Footnotes

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ecoi.net summary:

Report on digital media and
internet freedom (reporting period
June 2019 - May 2020)

Country:

Angola

Source:

[Freedom House](#)

Original link:

<https://freedomhouse.org/country/angola/freedom-net/2020>

Document type:

Periodical Report

Language:

English

Published:

14 October 2020

Document ID:

2039048

Austrian Red Cross
Austrian Centre for Country of Origin and Asylum
Research and Documentation (ACCORD)

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ecoi.net is run by the Austrian Red Cross (department ACCORD) in cooperation with Informationsverbund Asyl & Migration. ecoi.net is funded by the Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund, the Austrian Ministry of the Interior and Caritas Austria. ecoi.net is supported by ECRE & UNHCR.

