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HRW – Human Rights Watch (Author)

World Report 2023 - Angola

President [João Lourenço was elected](#) for a second term in highly disputed elections held on August 24. The ruling People's Movement for the Liberation of Angola (MPLA) extended its five-decade long rule but [lost its two-thirds majority](#) in parliament. The coalition led by the National Union for the Total Independence of Angola (UNITA), for the first time received more votes in the capital, Luanda, than the ruling party.

Voting was largely peaceful but marred with severe restrictions on freedom of expression and assembly, and limited access to information due to government repression and censorship in state media and in private media outlets controlled by ruling party officials.

The [president pledged to prioritize](#) the creation of jobs for the youth and to respect human rights, especially those of minorities and marginalized groups, such as children and older people.

Security forces continued to use excessive force, intimidation, and arbitrary detention against peaceful protesters with impunity. The press was under attack on several occasions throughout 2022.

In July, Angola's long-term former President [José Eduardo Dos Santos died](#) in Barcelona, Spain, at age 79, after years of prolonged illness.

Abuses by State Security Forces

Angolan state security forces continued to be implicated in serious human rights abuses, including excessive and unnecessary use of force against peaceful protesters, as well as intimidation and arbitrary detentions of activists.

On January 10, [police arbitrarily arrested](#), at least 17 people in Luanda, among them peaceful taxi drivers who had gathered for an announced nationwide strike to protest Covid-19 regulations, which limited the number of passengers allowed on public and private transportation. The Covid-19 restrictions, according to [the taxi drivers association](#), negatively impacted the income and livelihoods of their members. A police spokesman [claimed that the taxi drivers](#) had attacked an office of the ruling MPLA and set a bus on fire. Yet various taxi drivers told Human Rights Watch the attack on the bus and office was started by local residents, before the strike began.

On April 9 in Luanda, police [arrested and charged](#) 22 people who were peacefully protesting the detention of political prisoners and calling for free and fair elections in August. Those detained included [Laurinda Gouveia and her 6-month-old](#) baby boy. Both mother and son were kept in a crowded cell without food or water for more than 48 hours. On April 14, a judge at the Luanda provincial court [ordered the release of 20 of the 22](#) protesters for lack of evidence linking them to the crimes of rioting and disobeying an order to disperse. The other two were [sentenced for civil disobedience](#) and ordered to pay the equivalent of \$135 in fines.

On July 31, [police used batons and sticks](#) to prevent a group of peaceful activists from gathering to protest the detention of political prisoners in Luanda. Police also detained at least 10 activists, who were [later released at the police station](#).

On August 17, police [arrested dozens of](#) protesters and civil society activists who had gathered near the Santa Ana cemetery to protest alleged election irregularities. Among those arrested was the Voice of America (VOA) correspondent Coque Mokuta.

On August 29, Angolan rights group [Friends of Angola denounced](#) acts of police intimidation against members of the civic movement “Mudei” (I changed). In a letter to the Office of the Ombudsman, the Commission for Human Rights, and to the Ministry of Justice and Human Rights, [the group demanded](#) the unconditional release of six activists, among them two women, who were arbitrarily detained while trying to protest elections, in Uije province, on August 25 and 26.

On September 14, a day before the president’s inauguration, [police prevented a protest](#) against the election results near the Santa Ana cemetery, and arbitrarily arrested three political activists during a radio interview at the local of the protest. Friends and family of Zola Mandela, a political activist, told Human Rights Watch that on the same day, he was forcibly taken from his house by men who identified themselves as police officers.

Freedom of the Media

The press was under attack on several occasions throughout 2022. In some cases, members of the public and security forces were implicated in cases of intimidation, physical and verbal attacks as well as arbitrary detention of reporters.

On January 10, six journalists working for news outlets TV Zimbo and TV Palanca [were assaulted by unidentified people](#) and forced to flee to safety while reporting on a nationwide strike by taxi drivers in Luanda. The secretary-general of the Journalists Union, [Teixeira Cândido, told](#) the Committee to Protect Journalists that public media journalists in Angola are increasingly becoming the targets of people’s anger because of the perceived bias against the government and ruling party.

On February 10, a correspondent for the German outlet Deutsche Welle (DW) in Cuanza Norte, [was brutally assaulted](#) by private security guards of a major regional supermarket, while investigating a case of food poisoning. The security guards [also seized the equipment](#) of the DW reporter and of two others working for the local radio station Ecclesia.

On August 17, the Voice of America (VOA) correspondent in Luanda, [Coque Mokuta, was arbitrarily detained](#) by police while filming a protest. He told Human Rights Watch that he was kept inside a car

that drove around Luanda for several hours while he was being questioned. He was later released without charges and was allowed to take his equipment.

On August 25, DW [submitted an official complaint](#) to the Ministry of Social Communications, after one of its reporters was arbitrarily arrested and questioned for an hour by police officers in Malange, for filming proceedings at a voting station during the August 24 elections.

Millions of Angolans across the country remained without access to free, diverse, and impartial information. This is because [Angola remained the only southern African](#) country without community radio stations. The Angolan broadcasting act, currently under review, stipulates license fees of over \$100,000 for local and community stations, an amount that local [media rights groups consider prohibitive](#).

Ahead of the August 24 general elections, [activists and media rights groups accused](#) the state sponsored media, which has the largest coverage of Angolan territory, of bias toward the ruling party and its candidates. The representative of media rights group Misa-Angola, [Andre Mussano, said](#) in some cases, “90 percent of the airtime [during the election campaign] was dedicated to one side [the ruling party].”

Women's and Girls' Rights

Widespread gender inequalities, especially at the highest levels of political power, persisted in Angola. However, the [country registered significant progress](#) in the number of women holding ministerial portfolios and positions of relevance, following the August 24 election. The top state positions, including vice-president and speaker of parliament will be occupied by women. At government level, women will control 10 out of 28 ministerial positions.

In May, Angola launched its national chapter of the African Women Leaders Network (AWLN), a movement of African women leaders implemented with the support of the Office of the African Union Special Envoy on Women, Peace, and Security, and of the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN Women). This national chapter aims to enhance the leadership of women in the transformation of Africa.

Angola lacks a reentry or continuation policy that protects a pregnant girl's right to education. This has led to uneven enforcement of education rights, where school officials can decide what happens to girls' education, or where discriminatory attitudes and social barriers pressure girls to drop out altogether.

Key International Actors

Several countries and international bodies, including the [African Union](#) (AU), [Southern African Development Community](#) (SADC), the [European Union](#) (EU), and the [United States](#) (US) congratulated Angolans for the “peaceful environment” during elections in August. The EU also [urged Angolan authorities](#) to respond to the complaints of the opposition.

In his inaugural speech, Angolan President [Joao Lourenco reiterated his government's](#) commitment to peace resolutions in the SADC region and the Central African Republic, as well as in the borders between the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Rwanda, and Uganda.

Earlier in July, President Felix Tshisekedi of the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) and his Rwandan counterpart, Paul Kagame, [agreed at a summit](#) organized by Angola to [de-escalate tensions from a rebel insurgency](#) at the border of the two countries.

In August, while in Kinshasa, US Secretary of State [Antony Blinken expressed his support](#) for the mediation efforts between the DRC and Rwanda, which were led in part by Angola.

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