

Angola

NOT FREE

28
/100

<u>Political Rights</u>	10 /40
<u>Civil Liberties</u>	18 /60

LAST YEAR'S SCORE & STATUS**30 /100 Not Free**

Global freedom statuses are calculated on a weighted scale. See the methodology.



Overview

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. Some restrictions on the press and civil society were eased after President João Lourenço took office in 2017, but that partial opening has since been reversed.

Key Developments in 2022

- President Lourenço won a second term in August national elections that the opposition and independent civil society organizations criticized as deeply flawed. Military and police forces maintained a highly visible presence on the streets to suppress protests during the postelection period.
- In the months leading up to the elections, the authorities disrupted assemblies and civil society activity. Two well-known activists were arrested in January and remained in detention at year's end.

Political Rights

A. Electoral Process

A1 0-4 pts

Was the current head of government or other chief national authority elected through free and fair elections?

0 / 4

There is no separate election for the president, either by voters or by the legislature. Under the 2010 constitution, the head of the national list of the political party that receives the most votes in legislative elections automatically becomes president, without any parliamentary confirmation process. Despite this lack of an individual mandate, the constitution permits the president to unilaterally appoint and dismiss the vice president, cabinet, and provincial governors, among other important powers. The president may serve up to two five-year terms.

The intraparty procedures for choosing presidential candidates are not competitive. At a December 2021 congress of the ruling Popular Movement for the Liberation of Angola (MPLA), incumbent president João Lourenço was confirmed as the head of

the party's 2022 electoral list, receiving 98 percent of the votes from party delegates; there were no other nominees. He then secured a new presidential term after the MPLA won the August 2022 parliamentary elections. Lourenço had similarly faced no opponents at a 2016 party congress that set the stage for his first presidential term.

A2 0-4 pts

Were the current national legislative representatives elected through free and fair elections?

2 / 4

Members of the 220-seat, unicameral National Assembly are elected to five-year terms by proportional representation.

In the August 2022 elections, the MPLA won 51.2 percent of the vote and 124 seats, while the opposition National Union for the Total Independence of Angola (UNITA) and its coalition took 44.0 percent and 90 seats. Three smaller parties won the remainder.

The African Union Election Observation Mission reported that the elections were generally peaceful, but noted limits on the right of access to information and freedom of the press as well as reports of an uneven playing field. Civil society organizations found that biased progovernment media, deficiencies in voter registration processes, and the MPLA's use of public resources in its campaign disadvantaged the opposition. The observation mission of the Community of Portuguese-Speaking Countries, while praising some aspects of the process, pointed to the fact that voter lists contained many deceased individuals.

A legal complaint in which UNITA and other opposition parties challenged the election results was rejected by the MPLA-controlled Constitutional Court in September. Opposition lawmakers took up their seats in the National Assembly but vowed to continue questioning the results.

A3 0-4 pts

Are the electoral laws and framework fair, and are they implemented impartially by the relevant election management bodies?

1 / 4

The law states that the makeup of the National Election Commission (CNE) should reflect the disposition of power in the National Assembly, which gives an advantage to the MPLA. Voter registration is carried out by the government through its Ministry of Territorial Administration. Ahead of the 2022 elections, the voter list was audited to assess its integrity, but stakeholders raised concerns about a lack of transparency in the audit firm's appointment and findings. The CNE is legally required to disclose voter lists for each polling station at least 30 days prior to election day, but it failed to comply with this provision in 2022.

Articles 11 and 27 of the Law on Elections Observation empowered the CNE to limit the number of national and international observers, and it set a ceiling of 2,000 national observers for the 2022 elections, further undermining electoral transparency.

A joint statement signed by civil society groups and delivered to the CNE in August pointed to irregularities in electoral preparations. After the elections, civil society observers also cited failures to display voter lists and publish summary minutes at many polling stations. The final results were reportedly disclosed without prior notification of political parties, in violation of the law; UNITA said it had been excluded from the disclosure process.

B. Political Pluralism and Participation

B1 0-4 pts

Do the people have the right to organize in different political parties or other competitive political groupings of their choice, and is the system free of undue obstacles to the rise and fall of these competing parties or groupings?

1/4

While there is a multiparty system in place, competition is limited. The process for creating new political parties is fraught with bureaucratic obstacles and attempts at co-optation, factors that severely hinder public confidence in new parties.

Citing irregularities in the process, the Constitutional Court in 2020 rejected the legalization of a new opposition party, PRA-JA Servir Angola, led by Abel Chivukuvuku.

The decision also placed limits on the ability of Chivukuvuku and the party's other promoters to attempt to establish a new, different party ahead of the 2022 elections.

Separately, the Constitutional Court ruled in October 2021 that the election of Adalberto da Costa Jr. as UNITA party leader in 2019 had been illegal. Delegates at a UNITA party congress in December 2021 then reelected Costa as their leader; he ran unopposed and took more than 96 percent of the votes.

B2 0-4 pts

Is there a realistic opportunity for the opposition to increase its support or gain power through elections?

1 / 4

The MPLA has governed without interruption since Angola secured independence in 1975, and the country has never experienced a transfer of power between rival parties. However, opposition parties have been building public support in recent years, and the UNITA-led coalition increased its representation by 39 seats in the 2022 elections; the MPLA lost 26 seats.

The authorities have repeatedly postponed plans to hold the country's first-ever municipal elections, and no such balloting was held during 2022. Some analysts have argued that the administration is reluctant to relinquish its power to appoint subnational officials, as it would risk giving the opposition an opportunity to win office and demonstrate an ability to govern.

B3 0-4 pts

Are the people's political choices free from domination by forces that are external to the political sphere, or by political forces that employ extrapolitical means?

1 / 4

MPLA-aligned economic oligarchies nurture a system of dependency and patronage that can subvert candidates' and voters' ability to freely express their political choices.

B4 0-4 pts

Do various segments of the population (including ethnic, racial, religious, gender, LGBT+, and other relevant groups) have full political rights and electoral opportunities?

2 / 4

While societal pressures can discourage women from active political participation, women's rights advocates have an increasingly vocal presence in political life. Women held 74 seats in the National Assembly after the 2022 elections, and members elected the body's first woman speaker in September.

Government and state institutions are controlled by the MPLA, which draws much of its support from the Kimbundu ethnic group. The Ovimbundo and Kikongo ethnicities are predominant, respectively, in UNITA and the National Liberation Front of Angola (FNLA).

Issues affecting LGBT+ people have historically been excluded from political debate. This changed somewhat with the parliament's 2019 adoption of a new penal code that decriminalized same-sex relations.

C. Functioning of Government

C1 0-4 pts

Do the freely elected head of government and national legislative representatives determine the policies of the government?

1 / 4

Governmental power is highly centralized in the presidency. The president is able to legislate by decree on key subjects without public discussion, and Lourenço regularly does so in practice. The National Assembly, which remains under the control of the ruling MPLA, acts largely as a rubber stamp in approving the president's policies.

C2 0-4 pts

Are safeguards against official corruption strong and effective?

1 / 4

After decades of MPLA rule, corruption and patronage have become entrenched in nearly all segments of public and private life. A few high-profile associates of former president José Eduardo dos Santos have been convicted of corruption in recent years, including his son, José Filomeno dos Santos, whose 2020 guilty verdict was upheld by the Supreme Court in 2021. The former president's daughter, Isabel dos Santos, has been accused of siphoning public funds from the state oil firm, Sonangol; she was

ordered to return \$500 million in shares to the company by an international arbitration court in 2021. However, senior officials who are not directly connected to the family of former president dos Santos have rarely been brought to trial.

C3 0-4 pts

Does the government operate with openness and transparency?	0 / 4
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Government operations are generally opaque. In 2018, the government announced the formation of the National Oil, Gas, and Biofuels Agency (ANPG) to oversee the industry beginning in 2019. However, its leadership was drawn from that of Sonangol.

Civil Liberties

D. Freedom of Expression and Belief

D1 0-4 pts

Are there free and independent media?	1 / 4
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The Angolan state owns most media in the country, and such outlets report favorably on the government, rarely carrying critical coverage. Most ostensibly private outlets also act as mouthpieces of the regime. However, content produced by foreign news agencies is widely consumed.

Insult and defamation are considered criminal offenses. Journalists accused of engaging in incitement, hate speech, defense of fascist or racist ideologies, or dissemination of “fake news” can be charged with “abuse of press freedom.” Government officials regularly file criminal complaints as well as civil lawsuits against members of the press in practice. Journalists also face physical violence in the course of their work, with several assaults reported during 2022.

D2 0-4 pts

Are individuals free to practice and express their religious faith or nonbelief in public and private?

2/4

The constitution guarantees religious freedom, but the government imposes onerous criteria on religious groups for official recognition, which is required for the legal construction of houses of worship. Many Pentecostal churches remain unregistered.

There are no registered Muslim groups, though Muslim communities have been vocal in their demands for recognition and the right to worship freely.

D3 0-4 pts

Is there academic freedom, and is the educational system free from extensive political indoctrination?

2/4

Academics must maintain a façade of agreement with the MPLA's preferred narratives and refrain from open criticism of the party, or risk losing their positions. Those who voice dissent are often monitored by security services.

D4 0-4 pts

Are individuals free to express their personal views on political or other sensitive topics without fear of surveillance or retribution?

2/4

Fear of retribution for expressing criticism of the government or controversial opinions in private conversations persists in Angola, and self-censorship is common. Known surveillance of civil society groups, journalists, and academics can leave ordinary citizens reluctant to speak out. The government actively monitors online activity.

Opposition parties' youth organizations claim that repression of political dissent has increased in recent years, citing several instances of arbitrary arrests and intimidation of government critics by state security forces.

E. Associational and Organizational Rights

E1 0-4 pts

Is there freedom of assembly?

1/4

Constitutional guarantees of freedom of assembly are poorly upheld. While the Lourenço administration initially showed more tolerance for public demonstrations than its predecessor, peaceful marches are still frequently met with arrests and violence by the security forces, at times resulting in the deaths of protesters.

Authorities broke up or prevented planned protests on multiple occasions in 2022, both before and after the August elections. In April, for example, police in the capital disrupted a protest calling for free and fair elections and the release of political prisoners, arresting 22 people for disobeying police orders. Two organizers were convicted and made to pay fines, but the rest were acquitted.

In September, police prevented a demonstration against election fraud on the outskirts of Luanda and arrested three people after they were interviewed by reporters at the scene. Several others were detained or chased away by officers as they passed by. There were also reports that civic activists had been arrested at their homes. The army and police generally maintained a heavy and visible security presence on the streets in the wake of the August elections, contributing to a climate of fear that may have further deterred assembly.

E2 0-4 pts

Is there freedom for nongovernmental organizations, particularly those that are engaged in human rights– and governance-related work?

1/4

Nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) that work on human rights and governance issues are closely monitored. The MPLA has historically made vocal attempts to discredit their work and sometimes threatened such groups with lawsuits and outright closure, prompting many to curtail their activities.

Ahead of the August 2022 elections, authorities worked to prevent planned civil society meetings from taking place. In May, for example, police physically blocked two NGOs from hosting a conference on peacebuilding. In September, authorities announced the arrest of 12 civic activists for “financing and promoting the dissemination” of videos on social media to “sow insecurity, hatred, and panic among the population.” They were released without charge after several days of detention.

Two prominent activists who were arrested in January remained in detention at year’s end. Luther Campos was arrested for promoting a socioeconomic protest by taxi drivers and was still awaiting trial as of December. Gilson da Silva Moreira was then arrested after attempting to publicize the harsh conditions of Campos’s confinement; he received a suspended prison sentence of one year and three months in October, but he continued to be held pending an appeal.

Score Change: The score declined from 2 to 1 because authorities disrupted civil society events and arrested activists to suppress dissent ahead of national elections.

E3 0-4 pts

Is there freedom for trade unions and similar professional or labor organizations?

1/4

Certain employees who provide services considered essential—including prison guards and firefighters, but also workers in the oil sector—may not legally strike. Unions not associated with the MPLA have faced interference and harassment.

In May 2022, police intervened in a strike over pay and working conditions at the construction site for a hydroelectric dam in Kwanza Norte Province, killing at least three workers. According to the NGO Friends of Angola, several other workers were injured, and some were illegally detained inside the facilities of the construction firm, China Gezhouba Group Corporation. The authorities accused the strikers of vandalizing equipment and threatening Chinese citizens. State media reported in June that the government had brokered a new contract between the two sides, though it was unclear whether the agreement was freely negotiated or properly implemented.

Score Change: The score declined from 2 to 1 because a strike by workers constructing a hydroelectric dam was met with police violence, resulting in at least three deaths.

F. Rule of Law

F1 0-4 pts

Is there an independent judiciary?

1 / 4

The president appoints Supreme Court judges to life terms without legislative input. Corruption and political pressure from the MPLA contribute to the judiciary's general inefficacy and undermine its independence.

F2 0-4 pts

Does due process prevail in civil and criminal matters?

1 / 4

Constitutional guarantees of due process are poorly upheld. Many defendants are unable to afford legal counsel, and the state largely fails to provide qualified legal aid to those who need it. Arbitrary arrest and lengthy pretrial detention remain problems. Due process violations have been reported in recent cases involving political activists who seek autonomy or independence for the provinces of Cabinda and Lunda Norte.

F3 0-4 pts

Is there protection from the illegitimate use of physical force and freedom from war and insurgencies?

1 / 4

Security forces enjoy impunity for violent acts, including torture and extrajudicial killings committed against detainees, activists, protesters, and others. Angolan prisons are reported to be overcrowded, unhygienic, lacking in necessities, and plagued by sexual abuse. According to government statistics, violent crime, including robberies, assaults, and homicides, has increased in Luanda in recent years.

The low-level separatist insurgency in Cabinda continues to pose a security threat. The Front for the Liberation of the Enclave of Cabinda (FLEC) claims to have engaged in guerrilla activity against Angolan soldiers, but the government typically does not confirm these claims.

F4 0-4 pts

Do laws, policies, and practices guarantee equal treatment of various segments of the population?

2/4

Women face discrimination in the workplace that makes it difficult for them to rise to senior positions. There have been reports of abuse of women and children who are accused of practicing witchcraft.

In 2019 the parliament decriminalized same-sex sexual relations and banned discrimination based on sexual orientation, though enforcement is reportedly inadequate. There are no specific protections against bias based on gender identity.

Seminomadic Khoi and San tribes in the country's southern provinces have often suffered from neglect by the government and a lack of access to services, particularly in the context of prolonged droughts and the COVID-19 pandemic.

Security forces allegedly harass and abuse immigrant communities, and the government has failed to adequately protect refugees and asylum seekers. UN representatives expressed concern about the forced expulsion of Congolese migrants in 2020, suggesting that it violated international directives on the treatment of refugees.

G. Personal Autonomy and Individual Rights

G1 0-4 pts

Do individuals enjoy freedom of movement, including the ability to change their place of residence, employment, or education?

1/4

Several organizations have been working to remove land mines that were placed during Angola's 1975–2002 civil war. The mines inhibit agriculture, construction, and freedom of movement, particularly in rural areas.

There have been reports by local NGOs that the authorities and private security groups guarding Lunda Norte Province's diamond mines restrict the movements of local residents.

The process for securing entry and exit visas remains difficult and mired in corruption. Bribes are frequently required in order to obtain employment and residence.

G2 0-4 pts

Are individuals able to exercise the right to own property and establish private businesses without undue interference from state or nonstate actors?

1 / 4

Predatory elites tend to either disrupt or co-opt emerging new businesses. Authorities have at times expropriated land and demolished homes without providing compensation. Customary law practices can leave women with unequal inheritance rights.

G3 0-4 pts

Do individuals enjoy personal social freedoms, including choice of marriage partner and size of family, protection from domestic violence, and control over appearance?

1 / 4

While residents enjoy some freedom with respect to personal status issues like marriage and divorce, child marriage remains common, particularly in rural areas. Same-sex marriage is not recognized. Domestic violence is widespread in Angola, and perpetrators are rarely prosecuted.

G4 0-4 pts

Do individuals enjoy equality of opportunity and freedom from economic exploitation?

0 / 4

Public oil revenues are not equitably distributed or used to benefit the entire population. Rural regions in particular have inadequate infrastructure and access to services, leading to inequities in economic opportunity.

Child labor is a major problem, and foreign workers are vulnerable to sex trafficking and forced labor in the construction and mining industries. The authorities have failed to effectively investigate human trafficking or prosecute offenders.



On Angola

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Country Facts

Global Freedom Score

28/100 **Not Free**

Internet Freedom Score

61/100 **Partly Free**

Other Years

2022

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