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Freedom House

## Freedom in the World 2020 - Angola

NOT FREE

32

/ 100

Political Rights (<https://freedomhouse.org/country/angola/freedom-world/2020#PR>) 11 / 40

Civil Liberties (<https://freedomhouse.org/country/angola/freedom-world/2020#CL>) 21 / 60

LAST YEAR'S SCORE & STATUS

31 / 100 Not Free

Global freedom statuses are calculated on a weighted scale. See the methodology. (<https://freedomhouse.org/reports/freedom-world/freedom-world-research-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 all remain common. Since President João Lourenço's election in 2017, the government has taken steps to crack down on endemic corruption and eased restrictions on the press and civil society, but serious governance and human rights challenges persist.

### Key Developments in 2019

- In January, the parliament adopted a new criminal code that no longer penalized same-sex relations, along with new antidiscrimination statutes.
- In August, Angola finalized an agreement with the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) allowing for the voluntary departure of Congolese migrants, a year after the government launched an operation that forcibly expelled over 520,000 people by September.
- Family members and officials who served under former president José Eduardo dos Santos faced corruption trials and investigations during the year. Former

transport minister Augusto da Silva Tomás received an 8-year sentence for fraud after he was convicted in August, while the president's son, José Filomeno dos Santos, was tried for embezzling public funds in December.

## Political Rights

### A Electoral Process

#### A1 0-4 pts

**Was the current head of government or other chief national authority 0 / elected through free and fair elections? 4**

The 2010 constitution abolished direct presidential elections. Instead, the head of the national list of the political party receiving the most votes in general elections becomes president, without any confirmation process by the elected legislature. The constitution permits the president to serve a maximum of two five-year terms, and to directly appoint the vice president, cabinet, and provincial governors.

In 2016, the ruling Popular Movement for the Liberation of Angola (MPLA) announced that Defense Minister João Lourenço, who was also the MPLA vice president, would be its presidential candidate in 2017. The decision was made by the MPLA's political bureau, without public consultation. The MPLA retained power in the 2017 legislative elections, and Lourenço succeeded dos Santos, who had been in power for 38 years.

#### A2 0-4 pts

**Were the current national legislative representatives elected through free 2 / and fair elections? 4**

Angola's 220-seat, unicameral National Assembly, whose members are elected to five-year terms by proportional representation, has little power, and most legislation originates in the executive branch.

In the 2017 legislative polls, the MPLA won 61 percent of the vote and 150 seats, while the opposition National Union for the Total Independence of Angola (UNITA) took 27 percent and 51 seats, and the Broad Convergence for the Salvation of Angola-Electoral Coalition (CASA-CE) won 9 percent and 16 seats. Two smaller parties won the remainder. An African Union (AU) monitoring mission praised the elections' conduct, noting that they were peaceful and that there was a broad consensus that polling preparations and processes were better organized than in past elections. However, the prevalence of biased progovernment media, deficiencies in voter registration processes, and the MPLA's use of public resources in its campaign hampered the opposition. There were also reports of postelection violence in some locations.

Alleging grave irregularities at the National Election Commission (CNE), including manipulation of the vote count, opposition leaders called the polls fraudulent and jointly disputed the results. The Constitutional Court dismissed their claim, citing a lack of evidence. Opposition figures elected to the National Assembly ultimately took their seats—a move that prompted intense criticism from their political base.

#### 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 CNE should reflect the disposition of power in the National Assembly, which gives an advantage to the MPLA. The political opposition, in its challenge of the 2017 election results, cited serious misconduct and a lack of transparency on the part of the CNE.

## **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? 2 / 4**

There is a multiparty system in place, but competition is limited. The process for creating new political parties is fraught with bureaucratic obstacles and attempts at cooptation, factors that severely hinder public confidence in new parties.

The ruling MPLA maintains direct control of the Business Management and Participation Company (GEFI), a holding company that is active in sectors including banking and real estate; the firm is believed to provide as much as \$5 million in monthly funding to the party.

### **B2 0-4 pts**

**Is there a realistic opportunity for the opposition to increase its support or gain power through elections? 1 / 4**

There is little space for the opposition to increase its parliamentary representation, much less gain power through elections. Angola has never experienced a transfer of power between rival parties. Nevertheless, opposition parties have built public support in recent years, particularly in Luanda.

No municipal elections are held in the country for opposition parties to contest, though the national government has been working to change this since 2015. In August 2019, the parliament passed a local authorities bill that observers called vital for holding those contests, which are expected in 2020.

### **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, 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. In 2018, Luísa Damião became the deputy president of the MPLA, making her the highest-ranking woman in the party leadership at the time. Women hold 30 percent of the legislature's seats.

Discussion of issues affecting LGBT+ people have historically been considered taboo, and such topics have been absent from political debate. This has changed somewhat with the parliament's adoption of a new penal code that decriminalized same-sex relations in January 2019.

## **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

The country has been ruled by the MPLA since independence, and the president is expected to consult routinely with the party's political bureau. Former president dos Santos retained his position as head of the MPLA for a year after President Lourenço's election. In 2018, dos Santos was finally replaced by Lourenço as party leader, enabling the new president to consolidate his authority.

Executive powers are broad and varied, leaving the parliament to act largely as a rubber stamp in approving the president's policies. Like his predecessor, President Lourenço frequently adopts legislation by presidential decree.

### **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. President Lourenço stressed his willingness to fight endemic corruption since his 2017 election campaign, and high-profile dos Santos-era officials have been convicted of corruption in 2019. In August, former transport minister Augusto da Silva Tomás was handed a 14-year sentence for fraud, though that sentence was later reduced to 8 years. In November, former Military Intelligence and Security Service (SISM) head General António José Maria was handed a three-year prison sentence for stealing confidential documents. However, former vice president Manuel Vicente did not face trial in 2019. Vicente, who is considered an ally of President Lourenço, was investigated for corruption by Portuguese authorities before Portugal agreed to transfer his case to Angola in 2018.

Dos Santos's family also faced scrutiny in 2019. In December, the former president's son, José Filomeno dos Santos, was tried for embezzling \$1.5 billion in public money between 2013 and 2017. Filomeno dos Santos, who was arrested in 2018, pleaded not

guilty; his trial was ongoing at the end of 2019. An Angolan court froze the assets of Isabel dos Santos, a daughter of the former president, in December 2019, after the government accused her of siphoning public funds when she was the head of state oil firm Sonangol.

### **C3 0-4 pts**

#### **Does the government operate with openness and transparency? 0 / 4**

Government operations are generally opaque, though the Lourenço administration has moved to improve transparency in the corrupt oil sector. In 2018, the government announced the formation of the National Oil, Gas, and Biofuels Agency (ANPG) to oversee the industry beginning in February 2019. However, its leadership has been sourced from Sonangol; ANPG head Paulino Jerónimo previously served as the state oil firm's chief executive in the 2010s.

## **Civil Liberties**

### **D Freedom of Expression and Belief**

#### **D1 0-4 pts**

##### **Are there free and independent media? 1 / 4**

The Angolan state owns most media in the country. Many ostensibly private outlets are owned by senior officials of the MPLA and act as mouthpieces of the regime. Foreign news outlets, including Portuguese news agency Lusa, French news agency RFI, and Voice of America (VOA), are widely read. Since 2018, more voices have gained access to the media, including civil society groups and opposition figures, and news outlets have shown a greater willingness to carry criticism of the government.

Insult and defamation are both considered criminal offenses under the code that was enacted in January 2019. The criminal code also includes "abuse of press freedom," a charge that can be levied against those accused of engaging in incitement, hate speech, defense of fascist or racist ideologies, or "fake news."

#### **D2 0-4 pts**

##### **Are individuals free to practice and express their religious faith or nonbelief 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. Notably, many Pentecostal churches—which have had a profound social impact in Angola—remain unregistered.

There are no registered Muslim groups, and Muslim communities have been more vocal in their demands for recognition and the right to worship freely. Despite these calls, Muslims' ability to worship is subject to interference; in May 2019, a local Muslim leader reported that 39 mosques in Lunda Norte Province had been closed by authorities in two stages since 2018, and that as many as 10,000 worshippers would observe Ramadan in the DRC.

**D3 0-4 pts**

**Is there academic freedom, and is the educational system free from 2 /  
extensive political indoctrination? 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 2 /  
sensitive topics without fear of surveillance or retribution? 4**

In recent years, there has been somewhat less fear of retribution for expressing criticism of the government or controversial opinions in private conversations. However, self-censorship persists, fueled by concerns that a perceived intent to organize against the government could result in reprisals. While internet access is increasing in Angola, the government actively monitors online activity. Known surveillance of civil society groups, journalists, and academics can leave people reluctant to speak out.

## **E Associational and Organizational Rights**

**E1 0-4 pts**

**Is there freedom of assembly? 2 / 4**

Constitutional guarantees of freedom of assembly are poorly upheld. The Lourenço administration showed more tolerance for public demonstrations, but authorities still used arrests to inhibit protests in 2019. In July, police arrested seven minors after they protested a water shortage in the municipality of Lobito; the seven were convicted of charges including public disobedience and contempt, and were fined. In September, the National Police arrested at least 23 people over a demonstration against Gonçalves Muandumba, the governor of Moxico Province, during a visit by President Lourenço. One of the organizers accused officers of arresting bystanders and using excessive force against protesters.

Individuals who call for or publicly organize demonstrations also risk arrest. In May 2019, activists Arante Kivuvu and Benedito Jeremias were arrested after they led a demonstration against forced evictions in Luanda. Later that month, police arrested another activist, Hitler Tshikonde, after he called for their release in a video posted to social media; Tshikonde was charged with insulting the president before his release several days later.

Separatists in the oil-rich Cabinda region were also targeted by the government in 2019. In late January, 63 activists were arrested ahead of a planned proindependence demonstration, and faced charges including rebellion and criminal association. Another 10 were arrested in early March when they demonstrated for the activists' release, and were detained for one day. Later that month, 13 of the original 63 activists were released, but the remaining 50 remained imprisoned.

**E2 0-4 pts**

**Is there freedom for nongovernmental organizations, particularly those that are engaged in human rights– and governance-related work? 2 / 4**

Nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) working on human rights and governance are closely monitored. The MPLA traditionally made vocal attempts to discredit their work and sometimes threatened such groups with lawsuits and outright closure, prompting many to curtail their activities. However, the environment for NGOs has improved since 2018, with a reduction in interference and a greater willingness on the part of the government to engage in dialogue with civil society groups.

**E3 0-4 pts**

**Is there freedom for trade unions and similar professional or labor organizations? 2 / 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. However, the government has allowed more strikes to proceed without interference or repression.

**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 ineffectiveness 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.

**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, and others, although the frequency of politicized abuses has apparently decreased in recent years. 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.

A low-level separatist insurgency in the isolated Cabinda region 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 has not verified 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 accused of practicing witchcraft.

Same-sex relations were banned in Angola until January 2019, when the parliament adopted a new criminal code that did not include a historical “vices against nature” statute. Lawmakers also banned discrimination based on sexual orientation that same month.

Security forces allegedly harass and abuse immigrant communities, and the government has failed to adequately protect refugees and asylum seekers. In late 2018, authorities expelled more than 400,000 primarily Congolese migrants, allegedly killing dozens and setting fire to homes during the removal operation; they claimed that irregular migrants were involved in illegal mining and diamond smuggling. The government reported expelling a total of 520,000 people by September 2019. The month before, Angola finalized an agreement with the DRC and the UNHCR to organize the voluntary returns of Congolese residents. In November, the UNHCR reported that 1,400 migrants left Angola as part of the operation, which is scheduled to end in the first quarter of 2020.

*Score Change: The score improved from 1 to 2 due to the National Assembly’s passage of a new criminal code that decriminalized same-sex relations and made discrimination based on sexual orientation illegal.*

## **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. Land mines inhibit agriculture, construction, and freedom of movement, particularly in rural areas.

In March 2019, the Justice, Peace, and Democracy Association (AJPD), a local NGO, reported that the authorities and private security groups that guard Lunda Norte Province’s diamond mines restrict the movements of local residents, and some local farmers abandoned their land.

The process for securing entry and exit visas remains difficult and mired in corruption. Individuals who are critical of the government have faced problems when attempting to leave or enter the country. 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 Angolan elites tend to either disrupt or coopt emerging new businesses. Authorities at times have 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

Domestic violence is widespread in Angola, and perpetrators are rarely prosecuted. Child marriage remains common, particularly in rural areas. According to 2016 UN Children's Fund (UNICEF) statistics, the most recent available, 8 percent of girls are married by the age of 15, and 30 percent are married by 18.

**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.

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**ecoi.net summary:**

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