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Freedom House (Author)

Freedom on the Net 2022 - Angola

PARTLY FREE

61

/ 100

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LAST YEAR'S SCORE & STATUS

62 / 100 Partly Free

Scores are based on a scale of 0 (least free) to 100 (most free). See the [research methodology](#) and [report acknowledgements](#).

Overview

Internet freedom in Angola remained under threat as the country prepared for the August 2022 general election. The country's poor and failing internet infrastructure continues to hinder users' ability to access the internet consistently and without disruption. Although the government does not block or otherwise censor online content, violence against protesters and journalists has recently contributed to self-censorship, reinstating an environment of fear that had previously limited public discussion of governance issues. 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. An initial easing of some restrictions on the press and civil society, following President João Lourenço's election in 2017, has been backtracked and challenges persist.

Key Developments, June 1, 2021 - May 31, 2022

- Unitel, the country's largest telecommunications provider, suffered at least six instances of disruptions to its services due to equipment malfunctions during the coverage period (see A1).

- In December 2021, Gambia-based Africell began providing telecommunications services in Angola, offering plans that included free in-network calls and inexpensive data packages. Africell reportedly gained 2 million Angolan subscribers in its first month of service (see A4).
- Online journalists covering protests and election-related rallies were subject to harassment and detention during and after the coverage period (see C3 and C7).
- Unlike in previous years, there were no reported technical attacks against government or news sites during the coverage period (see C8).

A Obstacles to Access

A1 0-6 pts

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

Score Change: The score declined from 2 to 1 due to frequent disruptions in internet access caused by equipment malfunctions at Unitel, the country's largest telecommunications provider.

Access to the internet in Angola remains very poor but has been steadily improving. The National Institute of Telecommunications (INACOM), the country's telecommunications regulator, counted 7.2 million internet subscribers in November 2021.¹ DataReportal's Digital 2022 report indicated an internet penetration rate of 36 percent.²

The Ministry of Telecommunications, Information Technologies, and Social Communication (MTTICS) reported that there were 15 million mobile phone users in 2021, representing almost half of the population; that figure represented an increase of 1 million users since 2019.³ According to the 2021 edition of the GSM Association's Mobile Connectivity Index, 90 percent of the Angolan population was covered by 3G access, while the mobile broadband penetration figure stood at 39 percent.⁴

In December 2021, Unitel, the largest service provider in the country, expanded its 4G services.⁵ Also in December 2021, INACOM allowed the country's three mobile service providers to use 5G frequencies, while Unitel announced its first successful 5G test with telecommunications equipment maker Ericsson. Unitel and Ericsson signed a three-year 5G buildout agreement in 2021.⁶

Still, poor infrastructure significantly hinders information and communications technology (ICT) access in the country. Unitel's network issues, attributed to equipment failures, resulted in almost 3 million people losing voice and short-message service (SMS) access at least six times between February and March 2022.⁷ In April 2022, Africell, which is newly licensed to provide services in Angola, also reported "breaks in its signal" after fiber-optic cables were vandalized in Luanda.⁸ The country's fractured electricity system served 73.7 percent of the urban population as of 2020⁹ but only 7.3 percent of the rural population as of 2018¹⁰ according to the World Bank. Power outages remain frequent.

The South Atlantic Cable System (SACS), a submarine fiber-optic cable, was completed in May 2018. The SACS, which connects Brazil and Angola, is meant to reduce the bandwidth costs associated with the distance that internet traffic must travel from Europe and the United States.¹¹

The government's Telecommunications Sector White Paper 2019–22, which was released in December 2019, envisages the development of a new generation of electronic communications infrastructure in the country. The document seeks to expand internet access in municipalities, simplify licensing for the market (see A4), ensure universal access to quality internet speeds, address the digital divide (see A2), and create a fund for internet infrastructure projects.¹²

According to MTTICS minister Manuel Homem, 22,000 kilometers (13,670 miles) of fiber-optic cable have been installed around the country as of August 2021.¹³ In May 2019, Luanda awarded a contract to construct a new telecommunications satellite, AngoSat-3, to European consortium Airbus; AngoSat-2, a joint project between Russia and Angola, is expected to launch in September 2022.¹⁴

A2 0-3 pts

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

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

ICT access remains prohibitively expensive for the majority of Angolans, partially due to a lack of competition in the ICT industry (see A4).¹⁵ Reforms to the Industrial Tax Code in July 2020 levied a 35 percent tax on telecommunications companies, which added pressure for them to increase subscription prices.¹⁶

According to Cable, a UK-based telecommunications company, the average monthly cost of broadband internet service was \$92.13 in 2022.¹⁷ The average cost of 1 gigabyte (GB) of mobile data was \$2.33 as of April 2022.¹⁸ According to a 2021 joint study by the African Union and the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), only 4 percent of the population can afford 1 GB per month of data, well below the regional average of 23 percent.¹⁹

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 inferior speeds and overall service quality.²⁰

Poor infrastructure particularly affects rural residents, for whom voice and data services are of much lower 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).

Angola Online, a government-promoted project, has established a number of hotspots in an effort to expand internet availability and accessibility.²¹ In Luanda and other cities, free hotspots sponsored by private companies²² have increasingly become available in public spaces.²³ However, lockdown measures instituted during the COVID-19 pandemic limited Angolans' access to universities, workplaces, and other locations where they could access the internet. Angola Online hotspots have been overwhelmed by demand and suffered from power outages, vandalism, and budget cuts, according to the National Institute for the Promotion of the Information Society.²⁴

A3 0-6 pts

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

No restrictions on connectivity to fixed-line 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.²⁵

Angola's domestic internet 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, a planned system of submarine communications cables with connections on multiple continents. Angola Cables is a consortium of Angolan service providers; Angola Telecom and Unitel hold the largest stakes, respectively owning 51 percent and 31 percent.²⁶ Angola Cables manages ANGONIX, the country's internet exchange point (IXP); ANGONIX grew to become the third-largest IXP in Africa in 2017.²⁷ The consortium is also responsible for the SACS (see A1).

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.²⁸

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, despite 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 internet service providers (ISPs) and mobile service providers.

Sonangol owns 3 of the country's 18 ISPs (MSTelcom, Nexus, and ACS), is a major shareholder in Angola Cables, and controls 50 percent of Unitel, the country's largest ISP.²⁹ Angola Telecom owns 51 percent of Angola Cables and provides their own internet services.³⁰ The two undersea cables that connect Angola to the internet are managed by Angola Cables; critics argue this gives the company a de facto monopoly on internet provision to telecommunications companies, squeezing prices for consumers upward.³¹

In August 2019, the government introduced a plan to sell numerous state holdings, including service providers. MSTelcom, NetOne, Unitel, TV Cabo Angola, and Multitel were set to be privatized. In December 2021, Angola Telecom announced that it would transfer its mobile telecommunications networks to private companies by November 2022.³² The government previously announced that it would seek to sell a 45 percent stake of Angola Telecom's fixed-line services in November 2019.³³ In late 2020, the president authorized an initial public offering (IPO) of 49 percent of its stake in TV Cabo, the main fixed-line broadband provider in the country.³⁴ As of July 2021, the government was set to sell its stake in Multitel and NetOne and finalize the TV Cabo IPO.³⁵

Private operators Unitel and Movitel provide mobile phone services, but both are owned in part by politically connected individuals. Unitel is increasingly the dominant player, with an 87 percent share of the market as of 2021.³⁶ Sonangol owns 25 percent of Unitel and gained a further 25 percent stake in the company after purchasing PT Ventures, a Portuguese company, from Brazilian telecommunications firm Oi SA in January 2020.³⁷ In January 2022, the 25 percent stake of Unitel owned by GENI SARL, an entity reportedly owned by General Leopoldino do Nascimento, a dos Santos

loyalist, was reportedly seized by authorities.³⁸ In December 2020, a court in the Virgin Islands transferred the assets of Vidatel, a holding company incorporated in the country by Isabel dos Santos, to judicial administrators. Through Vidatel, dos Santos controlled a 25 percent stake in Unitel. The ruling followed a lawsuit initiated by PT Ventures alleging that dos Santos defrauded the provider of hundreds of millions of dollars. PT Ventures may now seek to seize Vidatel's assets, which would allow Sonangol to control 75 percent of Unitel.³⁹

The National Social Security Institute (INPS), a state agency, bought 25 percent of Movitel in 2019, becoming the second-largest shareholder after Lello International, which owns a 38 percent stake.⁴⁰ Portmil Investimentos, a holding company associated with Nascimento and other former government officials, sold its stake in January 2020.⁴¹ 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.⁴²

In March 2020, a government working group announced that Africell Holding SAL, a Gambian company, would be licensed as Angola's fourth telecommunications operator.⁴³ Africell successfully tested its network in December 2021.⁴⁴ Africell entered the Angolan market with an aggressive marketing and pricing policy, offering free in-network calls and a 1 GB data package for 750 kwanzas (\$1.30).⁴⁵ Africell claims to have gained 2 million Angolan subscribers in its first month of service.⁴⁶

The 2017 Law on Electronic Communications further enhances the government's ability to control the country's ICT sector.⁴⁷ 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.⁴⁸ However, the law 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."⁴⁹

A5 0-4 pts

Do national regulatory bodies that oversee service providers and digital technology fail to 1 / operate in a 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 MTTICS is responsible for oversight of the ICT sector. INACOM, established in 1999, serves as the sector's regulatory body. In this capacity, it determines industry policies, sets prices for telecommunications services, and issues licenses. INACOM is, on paper, an independent public institution with both financial and administrative autonomy from the ministry. In practice, its autonomy is fairly limited.⁵⁰ Its director general is appointed by the government and can be dismissed for any reason.⁵¹ In addition, the MTTICS 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, primarily in containing consumer price increases by telecommunications operators.⁵²

B Limits on Content

B1 0-6 pts

Does the state block or filter, or compel service providers to block or filter, internet content, particularly material that is protected by international human rights standards? 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 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 hosts, or digital platforms to delete content, particularly material that is protected by international human rights standards? 3 / 4

Score Change: This score declined from 4 to 3 because journalists and online users are periodically pressured via informal government demands to remove online content.

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.

In August 2021, an article by the anticorruption website Maka Angola was targeted by a fraudulent content-removal request. The article in question covered corruption in the dos Santos family and had been published by Maka Angola in 2018. The digital media foundation Qurium, which provides web-hosting services to Maka Angola, reported receiving a notice under the Digital Millennium Copyright Act (DMCA) that purported to be from the Portuguese news portal Esquerda.net, which had re-posted the Maka Angola article; the impersonator claimed that Maka Angola had copied the article from its site and was thus committing a copyright violation. Qurium did not comply with the notice.⁵³

B3 0-4 pts

Do restrictions on the internet and digital content lack transparency, proportionality to the stated aims, or an independent appeals process? 4 / 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 the new Press Law and 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 several broad provisions.⁵⁴ 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.

A crackdown on the media during the previous coverage period sharpened self-censorship, including for online journalists. In February 2021, Mariano Brás, editor of an independent newspaper, was questioned by police and threatened with charges for writing an article critical of the president's performance.⁵⁵ The Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ) qualified the case as harassment.⁵⁶ Amid mass antigovernment protests in October 2020, numerous journalists were arrested, detained, or beaten while reporting.⁵⁷

Friends of Angola, a US-based advocacy organization, has warned that the Angolan government and intelligence services' monitoring of activists and independent media is contributing to increased self-censorship.⁵⁸

B5 0-4 pts

Are online sources of information controlled or manipulated by the government or other 3 / powerful actors to advance a particular political interest? 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.⁵⁹

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. State-controlled media largely relay progovernment content. In September 2021, the main state-owned television channels announced they would no longer cover the leading opposition party, the National Union for the Total Independence of Angola (UNITA), after UNITA allegedly threatened their journalists during an antigovernment march.⁶⁰ Members of opposition parties and youth activists in the province of Cabinda, where several independence and autonomy movements are active, remain excluded from state media programs, including online.⁶¹

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 his predecessor, the late José Eduardo dos Santos, spilled over to online media, with most outlets becoming critical of the previous administration. Some analysts suspect that increasingly critical coverage of dos Santos came as a result of pressure put on outlets since his departure.

Throughout the coverage period, UNITA accused the government of spreading false information about the party and party's president on social media.⁶² Another opposition party, the Broad Convergence for the Salvation of Angola-Electoral Coalition (CASA-CE), made similar claims in March 2021.⁶³ Analysts suggest that such campaigns may be coordinated by the Angolan intelligence services and presidential advisors.⁶⁴

Russian disinformation and misinformation campaigns on social media have been identified in Angola.⁶⁵ After Russian forces launched their invasion of Ukraine, pro-Russian disinformation relating to the conflict and statements denigrating the leadership of Ukraine and of North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) member states—which emanated from the Portuguese-language service of Russian state outlet Sputnik—spread on major messaging services.⁶⁶

B6 0-3 pts

Are there economic or regulatory constraints that negatively affect users' ability to publish 2 / content online? 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.⁶⁷

B7 0-4 pts

Does the online information landscape lack diversity and reliability? 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 accessible viewpoints (see B5).

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 Radio France Internationale (RFI), and Germany's Deutsche Welle (DW) Africa, are also widely read.

Many independent newspapers are at risk, especially those that have lacked the resources to shift online during the economic crisis. In late 2019, printing companies suspended newspaper printing for over a month, officially due to financial constraints. Publishers, including those of the newspapers *Hora H* or *A Republica*, believe that the regime is boycotting their coverage due to their critical content, which is circulated widely on social media.⁶⁸ The COVID-19 pandemic and resulting economic crisis exacerbated the closure of independent print media, prompting some journalists to turn to online publishing.⁶⁹

False information, often unsourced or wrongfully credited to reliable media, is increasingly common, especially on messaging platforms. COVID-19-related misinformation spread online during the previous coverage period.⁷⁰ The government has also corrected false information about government officials and people close to the president.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, 5 / 6 particularly on political and social issues?

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 environment of fear within civil society.⁷²

Social media and messaging apps, like Facebook, Twitter, and WhatsApp, are frequently used to mobilize protests or launch campaigns. During the coverage period, activists launched a social media campaign to share suspicions regarding the hospital care Manuel Chivonde Nito Alves, a prominent Angolan activist, received after he was beaten during an antigovernment demonstration.⁷³

Activists consider livestreaming and messaging as effective tools to record evidence of police brutality, as security forces often repress demonstrations with disproportionate force. For instance, videos shared through WhatsApp during protests in late 2020 and January 2021 show police using live ammunition against protesters. Influential activist Luaty Beirão was arrested in November 2020 while livestreaming on Facebook as Beirão peacefully marched to a protest site.⁷⁴

After the January 2019 removal of a penal code provision that criminalized same-sex relations,⁷⁵ a new LGBT+ group, Iris, was legalized,⁷⁶ and is now active on social networks.⁷⁷

C Violations of User Rights

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 internet use and services.

Nevertheless, Angolan laws also include problematic language that may infringe on internet freedom (see C2).⁷⁸ In January 2017, former president dos Santos enacted a set of media laws known as the Social Communication Legislative Package, which included a 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; it has the power to suspend or ban websites that fail to abide by its standards of "good journalism."⁷⁹

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 input. The Association of Judges of Angola sharply criticized President Lourenço's 2021 proposal to revise the constitution, alleging that it would, if passed, "further weaken the courts in the exercise of their jurisdictional function."⁸⁰

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,⁸¹ 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.⁸² The Lourenço administration extended the state of emergency two times, until May 2020.⁸³

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.⁸⁴ After the amendment passed, Lourenço declared a state of calamity, which did not limit the freedom of the press.⁸⁵ The government has extended the state of calamity repeatedly, and it is still in place at the end of the current coverage period.⁸⁶

C2 0-4 pts

Are there laws that assign criminal penalties or civil liability for online activities, particularly those that are protected under international human rights standards? 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.⁸⁷

The penal code approved in January 2019 criminalizes “insults” against the president and contains articles specifically pertaining to media activity. ⁸⁸ 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, individuals who insult someone through the media can be fined and sentenced to up to six months in prison; people charged with 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.”⁸⁹

C3 0-6 pts

Are individuals penalized for online activities, particularly those that are protected under international human rights standards? 4 / 6

Journalists and activists are subject to prosecution in Angola, and cases were lodged against members of the press and civil society during the coverage period.

In January 2022, Lucas Augusto da Silva Campos (also known as Luther King) was arrested and detained at his home for allegedly engaging in vandalism during that month’s taxi drivers’ strike in Luanda.⁹⁰ In March 2022, prosecutors in the capital indicted Campos for crimes including public instigation, criminal association, and rebellion. The evidence for these charges were statements in videos obtained from Campos’s social media accounts, which were monitored by the Criminal Investigation Service.⁹¹ The government conducted the monitoring under Article 333 of the penal code, which allows the intelligence services to monitor the social media activity of anyone in the country (see C2).⁹² Campos is set to appear in court in June 2022.⁹³

Journalists also are investigated and sometimes charged with criminal defamation based on complaints regarding their online reporting. In September 2021, Carlos Alberto, editor of A Denúncia, was charged with “criminal defamation, injurious denunciation, and violating press freedom”; Luis Liz, a deputy attorney general, filed a complaint after A Denúncia covered an allegedly illegal land

transaction on Liz's part. Alberto received a two-year prison term and a fine of 110 million kwanzas (\$172,000), a sentence that would be rescinded if Alberto apologized via Facebook and A Denúncia every 5 days within a 45-day period. Alberto appealed.⁹⁴ In November 2021, Morais António, a former electoral official, filed a complaint against Fernando Caetano, a VOA correspondent and reporter for Club K. The complaint referenced a 2017 Club K article on alleged corruption within a provincial electoral commission; Caetano claimed that he was not the author of the article. Caetano's second hearing date was not set by the end of the coverage period.⁹⁵

People are occasionally penalized for online activities through the justice system, the integrity of which has drawn serious doubts. 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 media; 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.⁹⁶ He was detained for 72 hours but ultimately freed.⁹⁷

C4 0-4 pts

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

There are no reports of substantial restrictions on 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 driver's license and tax card for national citizens, or a passport with a valid visa for visitors.⁹⁸

C5 0-6 pts

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

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 recent developments suggest that the government plans to expand its surveillance capacity.

In January 2021, UNITA claimed that its communications were being monitored by state intelligence. As evidence, they cited content of WhatsApp messages sent between UNITA president Adalberto Costa Júnior and the president of Guinea-Bissau about an upcoming meeting, which surfaced in state-aligned online media.⁹⁹

In June 2020, reports emerged that Angolan intelligence services had purchased Pegasus spyware, which allows clients to compromise devices and monitor communications, from the Israeli technology company NSO Group.¹⁰⁰ Pegasus was known to have abused vulnerabilities in WhatsApp, the dominant messaging app in Angola that is widely used by journalists, activists, and opposition politicians. A 2018 *Haaretz* investigation found that an unnamed Israeli company had sold social media monitoring software to the Angolan government.¹⁰¹

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. It prohibits surveillance on political grounds or on the basis of discriminatory motivation.¹⁰² Though it is not yet clear how the

law has been applied, Angolans worry it provides legal coverage for existing surveillance practices, with little or no competent oversight of security forces' use of invasive technology.¹⁰³

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. The government has since opened centers in three major provinces and is prepared to open another two centers in 2022.¹⁰⁴ The initiative is backed by Chinese funding along with technology from Huawei.¹⁰⁵

Recent investigations have revealed increased engagement with the Chinese government on surveillance methods.¹⁰⁶ 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.¹⁰⁷

In November 2020, the head of the External Intelligence Services and Military Information Services informed parliamentarians that the government intends to construct centers to detect cybercrimes.¹⁰⁸

C6 0-6 pts

Does monitoring and collection of user data by service providers and other technology 3 / companies infringe on users' right to privacy? 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.¹⁰⁹ Such interweaving of political and business interests through family connections is compounded by the lack of rule of law in the country.

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 the security services.¹¹⁰ Article 22 mandates that service providers allow the prosecutor general or a magistrate access to data, including location data, or systems storing information considered "evidence."¹¹¹ Article 23 requires telecommunications operators store all data for at least one year.

C7 0-5 pts

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

In July 2021, Jeremias Kaboco, the editor of a privately owned news site, was briefly detained while he was covering a protest by teachers. Kaboco reported that police officers confiscated his mobile phone but did not delete its contents. He was released after two hours.¹¹²

In July 2022, after the coverage period, an MPLA supporter attempted to physically attack TV Maiombe reporter Isabel Makitoko while she was covering an event organized by the opposition National Patriotic Alliance.¹¹³

Women and LGBT+ people face online harassment in Angola. Since the February 2019 decriminalization of same-sex conduct, fewer incidents of harassment against LGBT+ people have been reported.

C8 0-3 pts

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

Score Change: This score improved from 1 to 2 because there were no reported cases of technical attacks against the government or news sites during the coverage period.

There were no reported cases of websites facing technical attacks during the coverage period, though technical attacks are generally known to occur.

According to Check Point Research, cyberattacks against targets in Angola, including ransomware attacks and phishing attempts, increased by 58 percent between 2020 and 2021.¹¹⁴ Mobile phones and banking apps are often targeted.¹¹⁵ In July 2021, for instance, the state-owned Savings and Credit Bank (BPC) confirmed that it suffered a cyberattack that temporarily limited services.¹¹⁶

The Ministry of Finance's servers were hacked in February 2021, with email accounts and shared folders penetrated by unknown individuals. The ministry reported that no services were interrupted; it declined to confirm reports of a ransomware case or release information on the extent of the data breach.¹¹⁷ In September 2020, the website of the online news outlet Correio Angolense crashed in response to an apparent distributed denial-of-service (DDoS) attack; the website remained offline for several weeks. Correio Angolense experienced the attack after publishing a report alleging that President Lourenço's chief of staff had embezzled millions of dollars in public funds. Simon Casimiro, a journalist who worked on the story, also experienced a cyberattack.¹¹⁸

Footnotes

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