



Angolan Flag <http://flagpedia.net/angola>

Angola: Beyond the Façade of Democracy and Development

Sosina Tilahun - POLS 4575



Angolan Flag <http://flagpedia.net/angola>

Acronyms

MPLA – The Popular Movement for the Liberation of Angola
UNITA - The National Union for the Total Independence of Angola
CSO – Civil Society Organizations
FESA – The Eduardo Dos Santos Foundation

Thesis

As Angola’s only ruling party for over three decades, MPLA has organized mechanisms that appear to be working to consolidate democracy and towards inclusive development, when in fact these policies are implemented to sustain a political environment that legitimizes the party’s authoritarian rule and provides economic benefit to politically connected elites while marginalizing the rest of the population.

Abstract

How does Angola’s ruling party remain in power with national and international support despite a history of disconnect from a majority of the country’s population? To answer this question, I present the argument that MPLA, the only party in power since Angola’s independence in 1974, has molded the political, economic and social spheres of the country to advance its own interests. This is exemplified in the multiple re-elections of president Jose Eduardo Dos Santos by increasing margins despite evidence of the unconstitutional underfunding of opposition parties, media restrictions and patronage systems. Instead of consolidating democracy, the institutionalization of elections allows MPLA to legitimize its leadership. In addition, the president’s control over the country’s oil resources has allowed him to sustain a web of loyal and dependent elites. This monopoly also allows the party to gain financial leverage over opposition parties, enabling MPLA to campaign longer and reach more people in rural areas. The concern then becomes how the party is able to get away with such misconducts. To reduce accountability, MPLA has eliminated civil society organizations which could challenge its legitimacy. Angola’s booming oil sector and the implementation of regular elections look promising, however, a closer look indicates that development only benefits a few politically connected elites while democracy continues to be hindered.

Methodology

To support my thesis, I have used research findings and literature from economists and political science experts on Southern Africa. I used the Scott Library online catalogue to access journals such as, Review of African Political Economy, Journal of Democracy, and Journal of Contemporary African Studies and more. These journals provide a wide array of perspectives on the political economy of different regions on the continent of Africa. The diversity of approaches are important as they reveal the complex political atmosphere of various African countries.

Democracy

Historical Context

- During the fight for independence, as nationalist parties work to counter the *divide and rule* methods of colonizers they tend to suppress ‘struggles within the struggle’ (Roger Southall, 157-159)
- After independence from Portugal MPLA abandons the interest of the working class and peasantry (Assis Malaquias, 582)
- There is a lack of reciprocity between MPLA and Angolan citizens (Paula Cristina Roque, 149)

Development

Historical Context

- After independence, the configuration of MPLA was not representative of the majority as it was made up of urban elites, mixed race Angolans and intellectuals. (Roque, 138)
- MPLA’s monopoly over oil allows them to rely on overseas trade for profit instead of their citizens (Roque, 149)
- Politically connected elites benefit from economic development, while a majority of the population is marginalized (Jesse Salah Ovadia, 398)

Elections

- The institutionalization of elections are used to legitimize the authoritarian regime instead of consolidating democracy. (Lesley Blaauw 133)
- National Electoral Commission has MPLA members even though it is to be independent. (Roque, 149)
- Methods of swaying votes such as intimidation are used by ruling party. (Roque, 141)



Map of Angola www.lahistoriaiconmapas.com/atlas/africa+map/htm

Elections

- Because MPLA controls Angolan natural resources, it has financial leverage over oppositional parties
- Disproportionate campaign funding
 - in 2008 MPLA spent US\$300 million while the 13 opposition parties spent US\$17 million collectively on their campaigns (Vines and Wiermer, 289)

Civil Society

- Disorder is used as a mode of elite accumulation in the political system by discouraging methods of transparency and accountability such as the formation of a robust legal framework to allow Angolans to claim their rights. (Kibble 530-531)
- Weakening of CSOs - by putting limitations on the media and the closure of the United Nations Human Rights office (Nuno Vidal, 85)

Conclusion

Despite MPLA’s continued effort to suppress the development of a robust civil society, these groups continue to be vocal and in many ways, they are important agents dictating political change in Angola. With the aid of the internet, social movements are able to accomplish more as they use the platform to engage through web-based activism where they can use code names to stay anonymous and safe. One of the outcomes of the pressure activists have put on the government is a 2013 “Programme of Hearing the Youth,” event led by the president. (Vidal, 87) Hence, the nature of web-based activism and inclusive mobilization points to a promising political future for Angola.

Civil Society

- MPLA’s access to wealth allows the party to provide government sponsored alternatives, this debilitates CSOs as they continue to be underfunded
- FESA – the president’s organization, dominates civil society by offering services, building schools and healthcare centres which gives the president social control and legitimacy. (Christine Messiant, 301)