



Political Parties and the Upcoming 2008 Parliamentary Elections in Angola

After the civil war ended 6 years ago, and for the first time since 1992, Angola will go to the polls. On 5th September 2008, there will be parliamentary elections, contested by 14 parties and party coalitions.

The upcoming parliamentary elections will not, however, have any direct impact on the distribution of wealth and power. The elections are only for a quite weak parliament in a country where power is concentrated in the presidency. The elections can nevertheless be a stepping-stone on the way.

Background

Angolan independence in 1974 was followed by more than 15 years of civil war and power struggles between the two liberation movements MPLA (*Movimento Popular para a Libertação de Angola*), and UNITA (*União Nacional para a Independência Total de Angola*). The third, FNLA (*Frente Nacional para a Libertação de Angola*), was defeated soon after independence.

All three transformed into political parties after the 1991 peace agreement, and participated in the 1992 elections. These first multiparty elections in Angola were, however, marred by a return to another 10 years of civil war, as the UNITA leader Savimbi did not accept defeat in the presidential elections.

Angola is the biggest oil producer in Africa, and has other natural resources that add to its wealth, but these riches are not being distributed

equally. Angola is among the most unequitable economies in the world with a general population still suffering from the results of civil war, internal displacements, landmines and a lack of basic services. The country's great wealth is concentrated in the hands of a small elite. In this context political power is closely linked to the control of the country's resources and economic power.

Political parties in Angola

This overview of the political parties includes those that were approved by the Constitutional Court in July 2008 and will participate in the 5th September parliamentary elections.



PRS, *Partido de Renovação Social* (Social Renewal Party) is the biggest and oldest of the smaller parties. It had 6 deputies in the outgoing parliament, and held the Vice Presidency. It was established in 1990, and the party leader is Eduardo Kuangana. The PRS is a moderate opposition party and a party of the current coalition government with two portfolios. The PRS deputies have voted with, and otherwise cooperated with the ruling MPLA on many issues, and supported the candidacy of dos Santos for president in 1992. The PRS was formed as a platform for people of the northeast of the country, in the Lunda provinces. The PRS is still a regional and regionalist party, although it has now more national outlook and presence. Decentralisation, in particular local elections and a federal system of government, are important to the PRS. It is a relatively well-funded party, but the party structure is clientelist and old-fashioned.



PLD, *Partido Liberal Democrático* (Democratic Liberal Party) is the fifth biggest party in the outgoing parliament. It was established by exile Angolans in Lisbon. The party president is Anália Pereira Simeão, the most visible female politician in Angola. The PLD is a member of the Liberal International and liberalism is a strong principle in the PLD. The PLD is not a radical opposition party, but a liberal reformist party. Unlike many other parties, the PLD does not rely on an ethnic or regional support base. It is an open, modern and well-organised party.



FpD, *Frente para a Democracia* (Front for Democracy) is an "intellectual", relatively radical opposition party, which stands strongest in the urban, intellectual milieu of Luanda, Cabinda and Benguela. It has a good working relationship with civil society organisations, trade unions and NGOs. The party president is Filomeno Vieira Lopes. The party was previously part of various party coalitions (and had one deputy as a member of the AC Coligação), but now it runs on its own ticket. The FpD is strongly committed to democracy, pluralism and the protection of citizens' and human rights. The internal party structure and democracy is good.



PDP-ANA, *Partido Democrático para o Progresso de Aliança Nacional de Angola* (Democratic Progress Party/Angolan National Alliance) is a moderate opposition party and a member of the current coalition government (although it supported UNITA's Savimbi for the presidency in 1992). Party president is Sediangani Mbimbi. The party has an ethnic support base with the Bakongo ethnic groups and "French-speaking" northerners along the border to the DRC, and is close to the Protestant and Baptist churches. In the election campaign, the PDP-ANA talks about national reconciliation, education and the family as an important institution. The party structure is clientelist and traditional.



PPE, *Plataforma Política Eleitoral* (Platform for Electoral Politics) is a recently established alliance (coalition) of nine micro-parties, chaired by José João Manuel. The PPE emphasises industrial development, reform of government structures and service delivery. Like other coalitions it is vulnerable to splits. Being quite new and unknown to the public, the PPE stands few chances of gaining parliamentary seats.



FNLA, *Frente Nacional de Libertação de Angola* (National Front for the Liberation of Angola) was founded as an armed liberation movement in 1956 by the nationalist hero Holden Roberto, with support from the Mobutu regime in Congo-Zaire. It is an old power rival of the MPLA. With 5 deputies it is the fourth biggest party in the outgoing parliament. Mainly due to its history FNLA is well known and represented in all provinces. Its strongest presence is, however, in the Northern provinces of Uíge and Zaire, its historic strongholds. The party is severely divided, and factionalism has reduced it to a small party that struggles to uphold its proud history. The approved MPLA party president is Ngola Kabangu.



PAJOCA, *Partido de Aliança Juventude, Operários e Camponeses de Angola* (Party of the Alliance of Youth, Workers and Farmers of Angola) was formed by a group of soldiers that split away from the MPLA when the country turned "turbo-capitalist". The party still includes many army rank and file. The party president (and outgoing deputy) is Alexandre Sebastião André. The party sets itself apart from the MPLA not in terms of programmatic content, but in the 'procedure' of how politics should be conducted.

Upcoming Parliamentary Elections

After years of promising and postponing elections, the government made a new electoral law, a law on political parties, and established a National Electoral Commission (CNE) in 2005, and voter registration took place in 2007/08.





The 2008 National Assembly (parliamentary) elections are multi-party, proportional party list elections




of 220 members of parliament. 130 members are elected nationally and 5 members will represent each of the 18 provinces, all on one national party ticket. Voting will take place in 12,400 election stations (*assembleias*) all over the country.

There are 138 political parties registered in Angola, but only 14 of these were approved by the Constitutional Court in July 2008 to take part in the upcoming elections. The parties taking part in the elections

are relatively weak, except for the two main parties and rivals MPLA and UNITA. The others have a weak funding base, a weak party organisation, and they often lack a coherent political programme. Factors like the civil war, authoritarianism and one-party rule, and a weak civil society can explain this.

Two government bodies manage the election process: the National Electoral Commission (*Comissão Nacional Eleitoral, CNE*) and an

 <p>FOFAC, <i>Fórum Fraternal Angolano Coligação</i> (Fraternal Forum of Angola Alliance) is an alliance of four small parties, established in 1997 and approved by the Constitutional Court in July 2008. The coalition president is Artur Quixona Finda. In its programme, FOFAC prioritises “the various cultural, political, social and historical problems facing Angolans today”. It will fight for greater economic equality and the restructure of public/political institutions, and can thus be seen as a radical reform party.</p>
 <p>ND, <i>Nova Democracia União Eleitoral</i> (New Democracy Electoral Union) in a recently established coalition of six parties. Their registration was approved by the Constitutional Court in July 2008. Most of these parties used to belong to the POC coalition, which they quit due to internal disagreement. The leader is Quintino de Moreira, president of the member party MPDA.</p>
 <p>MPLA, <i>Movimento Popular de Libertação de Angola</i> (Popular Movement for the Liberation of Angola) is the ruling party since independence. The president of the MPLA is José Eduardo dos Santos (who is also the President of the Republic, Chief of Army and Head of Government). The party is alongside the military and the civil service the backbone of the regime. From a Marxist party supported by the Soviet Union and Cuba, it was reformed in the early 1990s into a ‘democratic’ party. The party structure is broad and deep, from the top-heavy central organs down to party cells at the workplace and neighborhood level, and the party finances are good (hardly distinguishable from the state coffers).</p>
 <p>UNITA, <i>União Nacional de Independência Total de Angola</i> (National Union for the Total Independence of Angola) has come a long way from being the armed liberation movement struggling to control the country in open contest with the MPLA, to become a modern, democratic political party. It was established in 1966 and led by Jonas Savimbi, it was supported by the USA and apartheid South Africa in the civil war, and it was in control of large parts of the country (including the diamond producing areas). ...</p>

<p>... UNITA took part in the 1992 elections but Savimbi did not accept defeat in the presidential elections and resumed the war until he was killed and the war ended in 2002. With peace settled, the decapitated and militarily defeated UNITA entered a completely new phase by joining the coalition government and by taking up their seats in Parliament, for real. The party now appears as renewed, reconciliatory, and democratic with its new leader Isaías Samakuva.</p>
 <p>PADEPA, <i>Partido de Apoio Democrático e Progresso de Angola</i> (Party of Democratic Support for Democracy and Progress in Angola) was registered as a political party in 1995, and now approved as a contestant in the 2008 elections. PADEPA used to be a radical opposition party, but since an internal split that led to the expulsion of its founding president Carlos Leitão in 2007, the party line is unclear. Luís Silva Cardoso currently chairs the party.</p>
 <p>PRD, <i>Partido Renovador Democrático</i> (Democratic Renewal Party) was founded by a group of MPLA people who were purged and exiled after a failed coup in 1977. The party has been subject to several splits and has a leadership problem. PRD gets its main support from urban and semi-urban areas. It is a part of the current coalition government, and is lead by Luis da Silva Dos Passos.</p>
 <p>AD, <i>Angola Democrática – Coligação</i> (Democratic Alliance of Angola) had one deputy in the outgoing parliament, but the driving force of the alliance, FpD, withdrew (to join the POC alliance and later to present itself as an independent party). The coalition now has five member parties and the president is Kengele Jorge. It appears to be a coalition of relatively young, modern political activists, with democracy and ecology on the agenda.</p>

Inter-Ministerial Commission for the Electoral Process (*Comissão Interministerial para o Processo Eleitoral, CIPE*). CNE is directing the elections and ensuring that they are free and fair, whereas CIPE is an administrative body charged with voter registration and other practicalities. About 8.3 million voters have been registered.

The EU will observe these elections with about 90 long-term and short-term observers. In addition to these, other foreign government organisations and some national NGOs and the Angolan political parties will be observing the elections.

The playing field

The opposition parties are claiming that the “playing field” is not level. Among their more serious allegations is the MPLA use of state resources and administration for political purposes (for instance public transport used for their rallies, and the buying up of traditional elites, the *sobas*). They also claim that there are bans on opposition party campaigns and rallies, that legally assured state subventions for opposition parties not paid out (yet), that state media are over-exposing the MPLA, and that CIPE is in-transparent and dominated by the MPLA.

“The MPLA is using all the government means available, including military airplanes, helicopters, boats and trucks to carry out its propaganda,” says Analia Victoria Pereira, president of the PLD.

Some also claim their party officials have been subjected to politically motivated violent acts, intimidation, robberies and even assassinations. Some people are leaving the country, and many people are afraid of violence during the campaigns and on election day, especially from “militants” of the ruling party.

The outcome

The outcome of the elections is to some extent influenced by the conditions set prior to the ballot; structural conditions like uneven media access and administrative disfavours are working against the opposition.

The three nationalist parties MPLA, UNITA and FNLA are still also much better known among the general population than any of the others. The smallest parties, and in particular the four coalitions, stand to gain very little.

Ethnicity and regionalism will still play a role, as several parties are cultivating their regional strongholds. But ethnicity is not the strongest motivation for voting; the government – opposition cleavage and some

political issues like decentralisation and more power to the regions are prominent questions.

The 2008 parliamentary elections are nevertheless very good for the democratic process in Angola. The fact that a number of parties different from the MPLA are allowed to stand for elections and that they are appearing in the state media will reduce the supremacy of the ruling party. The tendencies of “nomenklatura” and “berufsverbot” (the privileged position of MPLA people and the pressure on individuals in the state administration to be MPLA members) can be broken, at least lessened.

There is, however, no reason to believe that the ruling party MPLA will be defeated in the elections. The 2008 elections takes place in a strongly presidential system, and will hardly change Angolan politics in any fundamental way.

It is important, however, whether or not the ruling party wins a 2/3 majority in the Parliament, because with 2/3 majority it may change the constitution without consultations. It is also important for the consolidation of democracy that a few opposition parties win a decent representation.

Front page picture: An MPLA “free concert” with overt political campaign messages in Luanda in May 2008, long before the official election campaign period.

Please note that this CMI Brief was completed in August 2008, during the election campaign and before the elections were held.

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