

# **Angola: Drivers of change**

## **Position Paper 2: Politics**



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## 2.1 INTRODUCTION

1. Democratisation is at an embryonic stage in Angola, despite nearly 15 years of multiparty politics since the aborted electoral process of the early 1990s. This paper seeks to identify the historical and structural reasons for the painfully slow process of political opening and seeks to identify whether there are drivers of change in the political system that might serve as useful points of entry for donors.
2. The paper describes the authoritarian nature of a colonial period followed by a one-party state, underpinned by a Marxist-Leninist ideology, from independence in 1975 until the chaotic multi-party opening in 1991. Since then, the political system has opened up somewhat but power remains highly centralised, and has moved in general terms away from the ruling party towards the presidency, where it rests today. Other formal structures of state, such as government ministries, are also heavily undermined and manipulated by the overwhelmingly dominant presidency. Consistent with the high level of central presidential control is a blanket government policy of *gradualismo* (gradualism). This policy results partly from the experience of the 1990s, when periods of rapid change, often encouraged by (domestic and international) forces outside the MPLA structures, produced catastrophic consequences for Angola and a reduction in the leadership's ability to control events. In practice *gradualismo* means that change is, by and large, very slow, and outside pressure to force the pace through direct pressure will most likely be ineffective, and possibly counter-productive. In this context, individuals and organizations are constrained in driving change; access to the presidency is limited and dialogue between the powerful centre and outside domestic and foreign actors is difficult, despite some minor openings since the end of the war in 2002 and the start of an electoral process which is expected to lead up to elections probably in 2006. This presents a key structural blockage and limits entry points for reformers.
3. A number of new levers for change may be emerging, however. The forthcoming elections are expected to drive some changes forward, and the analysis here helps to address one of the assumptions in the Overview – that democracy and elections open space for change. The analysis cautions against too much optimism, as the MPLA retains all the tools of repression and control at its disposal, and has shown itself willing to use them in the face of criticism. There have also been tentative

government plans for decentralisation, which offers the possibility of more openings, albeit bearing in mind the principle of *gradualismo*. But a dearth of skilled or experienced administrators in the provinces will be a major constraint on the pace of reform. The extent of these possibilities should therefore not be overestimated, but the paper hints that the eventual exit of the president, who has been in power since 1979, could yet become a pivotal driver for change in the future.

4. The analysis thus begins to offer answers to the question: How would donors engage with this nascent but highly controlled democratisation process? The short answer seems to be: with difficulty. A window does exist, however, in the coming elections, for example through offering apolitical technical, logistic and material support to the electoral processes. Without international support, the process can be more easily manipulated and controlled. DFID and other donors may therefore need to consider carefully how they could use this process as a way of supporting broader fundamental changes in Angola.

## **2.2 HISTORICAL CONTEXT**

### **Structural issues**

5. Several interlinked factors conditioned the evolution of the Angolan political system and help explain the current political set-up. Together, these factors go a very long way towards explaining the particular political directions chosen by Angola's leaders and their differences and disagreements with Western countries and Western models. Briefly, these factors are as follows. First, as in many African countries, Angola is socially fragmented, especially along regional-ethnic lines. Second, the post-colonial state and mechanisms of power were based from the beginning on extraction of natural resources. A third factor is the war, which ravaged Angola for most of the time between 1975 and 2002, sharpened an urban-rural divide, and powerfully affected the evolution of the political climate. The war had several fundamental causes, including that UNITA leader Jonas Savimbi – encouraged by Western powers who used him as a Cold War pawn and then increasingly able to use diamond wealth to support his armed forces – never lost sight of his goal of becoming president until he died in February 2002. A fourth factor is a highly

centralised and bureaucratic administrative and political system, inherited from colonial days and reinforced in the early post-independence period by an official policy of Marxism-Leninism. Many senior leaders who rose to power in the early post-independence period – including President José Eduardo dos Santos – remain in power today; their world view still heavily coloured by those early formative years. A fifth factor has been a history of often openly hostile Western political and military interference.

### **Early historical evolution**

6. Post-independence instability has its roots deep in history. Portugal's policies laid the foundation for an urban/rural divide which still persists. Portugal also failed to prepare its colonies for independence. Furthermore, ethno-regional divisions among nationalist movements that had fought the Portuguese crystallised into power blocs which then fought each other as independence approached. The Alvor Agreement of January 1975 between Portugal, the MPLA, the FNLA and UNITA set out transitional arrangements for independence. This included a power-sharing transitional government and provision for a new constitution and elections before independence. But the Alvor accords soon fell apart as the three movements jockeyed for position. Within weeks, they were embroiled in a violent struggle for supremacy.
7. As the conflict escalated, each movement turned to foreign governments for military support. In the event, it was the Marxist-leaning MPLA that achieved control of Luanda, with Soviet and Cuban military support. Thus, on 11 November 1975, the agreed date for Angolan independence, the MPLA took control of the state. UNITA and the FNLA had been driven out of the capital back into the bush. Brazil was the first country to recognise the new government, and this move has since had a huge and long-term warming influence on bilateral relations.
8. From 1975 until the early 1990s Angolan society was moulded along Marxist-Leninist lines. The tight control of the state allowed a patrimonial system to be built under the post-independence president, Agostinho Neto. The revolutionary aspects of communist-inspired ideologies had carried great appeal for those seeking to overturn the colonial order (although UNITA leader Jonas Savimbi drew close to the West and relished its portrayal of him as a capitalist-inspired freedom fighter, his movement

actually drew heavily on Maoist principles, reflecting early Chinese influence). Western support for colonial Portugal and Apartheid-era South Africa, which invaded southern Angola in support of UNITA, also cast the West in a hostile role, which Angola's leaders have not forgotten.

9. A system based on central planning borrowed from Marxist doctrine was the new state's response to the catastrophic loss of skills following a massive flight of Portuguese settlers just ahead of independence. This exodus had left the new state with a total lack of qualified cadres to run the vast business interests left behind. Everything – from land, to businesses, to residential property – was nationalised.
10. Ethnicity has also had a major impact on Angolan politics. The historical roots can be traced back to Portuguese colonialism and the emergence of Creolism in the 16th century. The largely urban Creole (or mestizo) population, while small, has traditionally played a leading role in power politics – historically and into present times – and formed the backbone of the MPLA from its creation in 1956. UNITA and the FNLA were always strongly rural movements with an exclusive Bantu face. Portugal favoured Luanda and its hinterland to the detriment of other areas.
11. At the risk of over-simplifying, UNITA has historically drawn its support from the ethnic Ovimbundu people of the central highlands, while the FNLA, which played a significant military role in the early post-independence period, drew most of its strength from the northern Bakongo ethnic group. The MPLA was largely an urban movement, drawing support from Luanda and its hinterland and other coastal cities. While UNITA has since struggled to expand its membership beyond its core ethnic group, and the poorly led FNLA has dwindled to a shadow of its former self, the MPLA has had more success in expanding its support base beyond its core Mbundu ethnic group. Other parts of Angola, such as the oil-rich Cabinda enclave and the diamond-rich northeastern provinces of Lunda Norte and Lunda Sul, have their own ethnic specificities.
12. The ethnic factor is also important within the patrimonial system (see below), but it is often denied by actors within the MPLA's Creole/M'bundu core constituencies who are the main beneficiaries from the redistribution of the state's resources. Those

outside the MPLA family, who consider themselves excluded, are far readier to raise ethnicity as an issue. Ethnicity and race have also been important in the armed forces, and mixed-race generals have long dominated the most senior military ranks.

### **Post-colonial political and administrative system**

13. After independence the MPLA set about building a one-party state. Though it embarked upon programmes of nationalisation, some multinationals were allowed to stay, notably in the diamond and oil industries. Keeping oil flowing was so crucial that although officials from Cabinda Gulf Oil Co. pulled out at independence, and the new Angolan leaders were hostile to the West, Angola quickly persuaded Cabinda Gulf to return and re-start operations with the help of pressure from Nigeria, where Gulf (later acquired by Chevron) also had important interests.
14. The constitution of 1975 subordinated the government to the ruling party, and in October 1976 the MPLA Central Committee formally embraced Marxism-Leninism as its guiding ideology. Neto became head of government in 1977 and abolished the position of prime minister and vice-prime minister the following year.<sup>1</sup> Until 1980 there was no legislature, and an ad hoc Council of the Revolution was the “supreme organ of state power”, although real power lay in the Political Bureau of the MPLA.
15. Neto sought to create a disciplined party along Soviet lines. But, in 1977, a group led by Nito Alves tried to seize power by force. The coup attempt failed but several senior MPLA leaders were killed, including Alves. This provoked a purge of the party, known as “rectification”, during which every member was vetted prior to being expelled or retained. A wave of killings then ensued, contributing to a climate of paranoia and increased repression that would have deep and long-lasting effects.
16. The MPLA’s Marxist-style structures, together with the notion that the state should provide for all, suited the nascent patrimonial logic of the post-independence political and economic system. Over time, patronage networks developed around the allocation of resources, business and trading permits, government and other public offices, although Angola was not unusual in this respect, either in Africa or in the

Soviet bloc. Although the party showed signs of elitism from an early stage, grand corruption was not initially in evidence. In large measure the redistribution of resources involved the provision of cheap goods in People's Shops with ration cards such as flour and sugar to fairly wide, mostly urban, sections of the population; party officials received extra privileges. Public sector posts tended to be allocated to those with credentials in the independence struggle, although ethnic, sub-ethnic, regional and racial criteria also had some influence. Artificially low food prices discouraged peasant agriculture, and state subsidies encouraged imports. However, it was party discipline and a strong security apparatus, rather than patrimonial distribution, that formed the main basis of state power in the early post-independence years.

17. Agostinho Neto died in 1979 and was replaced by José Eduardo dos Santos. He had studied as a petroleum engineer in the USSR and had held various posts, including that of Foreign Minister and Minister of Planning. He was a compromise candidate, a diffident man surrounded by strong personalities, many of whom accepted him because they believed they could control him. This turned out not to be the case, however. Over the course of the coming years he honed his considerable skills as a political chess player, consolidating his grip on power with Soviet-bloc support.

#### **Dos Santos comes to power: a new era**

18. When Eduardo dos Santos assumed the presidency in September 1979 the MPLA had already become highly authoritarian, but dos Santos took it to another height, reflecting instincts that remain powerful today. From 1980 he began to draw into the presidency responsibilities that had previously been under party control. In December 1982, following new South African incursions in southern Angola, he obtained sweeping 'emergency powers', overseeing Regional Military Councils that were superior to all other governing and administrative structures. The President's office, known colloquially as Futungo, took over business contacts with public or private foreign entities. His increasing control over state business gave him autonomous control over external sources of income, including oil revenues. The

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<sup>1</sup> Nuno Vidal, 'The genesis and development of the Angolan political and administrative system from 1975 to the present', in Steve Kyle (org.) *Intersections between social sciences* (Cornell, NY: Institute for African Development of Cornell University, 2004), pp. 1–16.

main effect of this was to obscure both revenues and expenditure, creating an opaque system which totally lacked transparency.

19. Dos Santos is now President of the Party, Head of State, Head of Government and Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces. It would be an exaggeration, however, to describe his rule as a personal dictatorship: he had to play complex games of consensus politics within the party – games at which he became very skilled. He created a parallel government – the presidency with a host of advisers setting policies across the board. But, with a dysfunctional state bureaucracy, compounded by a severe shortage of middle-level professionals, good governance suffered. The concentration of powers in the presidency and party created more bureaucracy and a top-heavy system, with even minor decisions needing top-level approval.
20. Two factors in the mid-1980s increased the pressure on the system, preparing the ground for tentative political and economic reforms. The first was a collapse in oil prices in the mid-1980s, with savage repercussions on the state's ability to meet its commitments. The second was the increasing intensity of the war, following a rapid rise in US covert military assistance to UNITA.
21. These developments initially provoked an increase in centralisation and repression, which were responses to the state's declining ability to redistribute and deliver services. However, war-weariness and rising concern about the balance of payments opened the way to early, timid economic reforms. This was backed by leading Luanda families who felt constrained by the state's dominance and wanted more latitude for developing their own private interests.<sup>2</sup> A third factor exerting pressure on the system was the introduction of perestroika in the Soviet Union. This challenged the ideological underpinnings of the Angolan economic and political model. These were reinforced by the Soviet Union's increasing reluctance to keep bankrolling Angola. From 1987, timid political and economic changes began to emerge, with a slow transition to a form of market economy and multiparty politics. Although officially Marxism-Leninism was to remain the official ideology for another three years, the Socialist model was in gradual decline from that time.

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<sup>2</sup> Tony Hodges, *Angola: Anatomy of an Oil State* (James Currey, 2004), Chapter 5.

22. Other political and military events spurred deeper political and economic reform. In the background, a US policy of “linkage” had been formulated, which envisaged a regional solution to include the withdrawal of South African troops from the south leading to the withdrawal of Cuban troops from Angola, independence for South West Africa (now Namibia), and an end to the Angolan conflict leading to elections. A critical event which unlocked the puzzle was the South African defeat by Cuban/Angolan forces in the battle of Cuito Cuanavale in Southern Angola in March 1988. One year later, after intensive multilateral negotiations, the New York accords were signed in December 1988. Under these accords Cuba promised to withdraw from Angola in return for South Africa’s withdrawal from southern Angola and UN-sponsored elections in Namibia. All of these were implemented, leaving the Angolan internal settlement yet to be won.

**Peace efforts, more war and eventual peace**

23. This settlement, which arguably marked the period of greatest Western leverage over post-independence Angola, paved the way for the Bicesse peace agreement of 1991 between the MPLA and UNITA. This ushered in Angola’s most far-reaching political and economic reforms since independence. However, the US continued to support UNITA heavily, hoping that its old ally would win the forthcoming elections, set for September 1992. A growing sense in MPLA that military victory over UNITA was impossible encouraged political reforms, involving reconciliation and compromise. By its very nature, political accommodation with UNITA had required a move away from the one-party model towards political pluralism.

24. In 1991, the MPLA was not confident about its electoral chances. Officials drew up contingency plans, including buying property abroad and obtaining overseas visas, and the party invested in a series of private radio stations to ensure it had a non-state media outlet. It was in this period that access to natural resource revenues began to acquire significantly greater importance for the political élite on both sides. Significant corruption entered Angolan politics for the first time.

25. In the election campaign President dos Santos and the MPLA successfully recast themselves as architects of peace, democracy and national reconciliation through an

effective public relations campaign with the help of Brazilian advisers. Savimbi's arrogant and militaristic behaviour assisted them in this task.

26. Constitutional revisions in May 1991 defined Angola as "a democratic state based on the rule of law", and introduced a multi-party system, the right of assembly and demonstration. In this new climate, several new political parties came into being to challenge the MPLA and UNITA. From early 1991, workers' strikes, including those by transport workers, magistrates and, crucially, by oil workers, increased the domestic pressure for change. Angolan NGOs and independent professional associations also emerged, as did an independent media.
27. The opening up to the West and the political reforms were fundamentally driven by desire for a final solution to the long war, and the prospect that an opening to the West could pave the way to new sources of income for the state and for individual decision-makers.
28. The Bicesse agreement was, however, policed by only a very small contingent of unarmed UN observers, and the head of UNAVEM-II, Margaret Anstee, complained at the time that she had been asked "to fly a 747 with only enough fuel for a DC 3". The United States had still failed to recognise the MPLA, and it only did so some time after the MPLA victory in the 1992 elections. Up to that moment, the United States was still giving UNITA support. These factors contributed to bitterness in the MPLA about Western intentions – another historical element that helps explain the current lingering mistrust of the West today among Angola's leaders. It is worth noting, however, that while the United States, France and China had each in its own way provided a measure of support for UNITA, the United Kingdom did not, and this has also not been forgotten by the Angolan leadership.
29. Angola's first nationwide elections in September 1992 were described by the UN and other foreign observers as "generally free and fair". With a turnout of more than 91% (4.4 million) of registered voters, President Dos Santos, the MPLA candidate, received 49.6% of the vote, against 40.7% for Savimbi. Under Angolan law there should have been an election run-off but this did not take place. UNITA rejected the results even though it had gained 70 parliamentary seats. The MPLA won 129, with

the balance of 21 seats divided between 6 other parties. Savimbi chose to return to war.

30. At this point, the international community was again perceived as having let Angola down. As one observer wrote after the events: "The greatest failing of the United Nations and the international community lay in their tepid reactions after the elections. A firm stand in defence of the Bicesse peace accord and the democratisation process, together with a commitment of the resources necessary to check UNITA's military offensive and a clear understanding of the illegality of UNITA's political claims, might have changed the course of events." Although this overstates the international community's influence on Savimbi, it does reflect the Angolan government's deep disappointment with the international community. US diplomatic recognition of the MPLA government came in May 1993, as it became clear that UNITA was unlikely to achieve military victory.
31. Perhaps 300,000 people died as a result of fighting in the new war, which lasted until November 1994. During the fighting, the political decompression of 1991–2 was reversed. President dos Santos resorted again to very centralised control. Many important decisions – including the barter of oil for arms (see Position Paper 1: Economic Change and Reform) were not routed through the ministries, but through the presidency. Although initially at a military disadvantage because it had disarmed to a greater degree than UNITA, the government progressively rearmed and eventually came close to bringing UNITA to its knees. However, US pressure prevented further military pursuit of UNITA and a return to the negotiating table. This led to the Lusaka peace agreement of November 1994. Though the US aim was to try to force a more inclusive peace than might have been obtained through a military solution, the results were to be disastrous, and provided yet another cause for resentment.
32. The Lusaka agreement marked another period of political opening, fostered above all by military realities and external pressure. It provided for integration of UNITA forces into the armed forces under UN supervision, and UNITA's participation in all levels of government. This included UNITA taking up its 70 parliamentary seats, getting some provincial governorships, some ministerial posts, and some ambassadorships. The

deal was monitored by a UN peacekeeping force and a “troika” of observers (Portugal, the US and Russia) which provided a measure of pressure on the government to remain open to pluralist politics. However, the central focus of the Lusaka accords was the demilitarisation of UNITA. But Jonas Savimbi cheated, and in spite of the dispatch of a much larger contingent of UN peacekeepers to monitor the agreements, UNITA rearmed in secret, exchanging diamonds for arms on the black market. However, Savimbi did eventually allow UNITA deputies to take their seats in parliament in 1997. In the meantime, the MPLA sponsored defection from UNITA, helping a group of UNITA officials set up a new party called UNITA Renovada. Eventually, exasperated by UNITA’s ongoing back-tracking and evasion, the MPLA decided to return once again to the military option on the eve of the MPLA’s 4<sup>th</sup> Congress in December 1998. The return to war marked a widely held Angolan loss of confidence in the United Nations (which had, in effect, provided a political shield behind which Savimbi had been able to regroup and rearm) and, more generally, the international community. The government later refused to renew the mandate for the UN Observer Mission in Angola (MONUA) so that it could pursue the military option on its own terms. This time it intended to wipe out UNITA as a military force and to kill Savimbi in the process.

33. When the war started again in early 1999, Savimbi’s soldiers advanced across the country once more, denying the government access to more than two-thirds of national territory and isolating provincial capitals, and exposing the military complacency that had arisen amid an explosion of corruption in the 1990s. Once more, the military crisis led to political re-centralisation: the president abolished the post of prime minister in January 1999 and assumed the post of head of government himself. He appointed a new economic team (among other appointments) which made stringent efforts to reassert control over spending, which had led to very high and politically damaging inflation.
34. During the subsequent fighting, there was only a very small space for the political parties – the UNITA deputies in Luanda were divided between those who had openly rejected Savimbi by signing up to UNITA Renovada and those who adopted a more ambiguous stance.

35. At the same time, Angola adopted and pursued a concerted diplomatic campaign aimed at building and maintaining support for UN sanctions against UNITA. Several packages of sanctions were imposed by the UNSC from 1993 to 1998, and these had significant effects on the military outcome. Regionally, relations with South Africa were again damaged by the official policy in Pretoria of supporting renewed negotiations with UNITA, and a stream of often erroneous reports from South African think tanks that were perceived as pro-UNITA, which even at times constrained the MPLA's ability to raise oil-backed financing to buy arms.
36. However, there was another unusual by-product of the war: the emergence of a widely supported civil society platform that opposed the government's search for a military solution against UNITA and instead sought peace through new dialogue. Foreign embassies suddenly had an entry point in the political process (see Civil Society paper for more details.)
37. In the event, the fundamental fact remained that the MPLA's oil exports were worth at least ten times UNITA's diamond revenues. The Angolan Army had superior weaponry and foreign logistical support and advice that UNITA could not match. The sanctions were beginning to bite, too, and from some time in 2000 the tide began to turn; UNITA was steadily pushed back on the battlefield. After a widely criticised scorched earth policy undertaken by the Angolan Army (see Position paper 3: Civil Society), Savimbi was tracked down and killed in an army ambush in February 2002. UNITA generals surrendered to their MPLA counterparts, and a peace deal was negotiated: the Memorandum of Luena was signed in April 2002.
38. The Luena deal promised implementation of the terms that had been agreed under the Lusaka protocol. Many had hoped this would create the conditions for a rapid opening up of the political space, as had occurred after the Bicesse agreements. However, two and a half years on, despite some openings, signs of a political peace dividend are relatively sparse. Opposition parties face great challenges and the MPLA appears determined not to offer them much political space voluntarily. Significant aspects of the Luena deal include the facts that the MPLA drove the process, set out the terms and eschewed outside involvement. The MPLA, by now highly resistant to the idea of fresh intervention by the international community in its

dealings with UNITA, chose a home-grown solution to the end of the conflict. It even prevented Western diplomats from attending crucial meetings during the process of negotiation and subsequent demobilisation and reintegration of UNITA forces.

39. One promising reform that did follow the end of the war was the reintroduction of the post of prime minister in December 2002. Another was the appointment of a reformist economic team (see The Economy section) which can claim a number of successes, including a dramatic reduction in inflation. The prime ministerial post remains weak, however: President dos Santos continues to chair the Council of Ministers, as head of government. This gives him considerable hands-on influence in government policy. In this same reshuffle, however, some of the main managers of the presidential patronage network retained their posts. Notable among these are Public Works Minister Higino Carneiro and Planning Minister Ana Dias Lourenço (she has some technocratic credentials but is also a presidential loyalist, and is the wife of then MPLA secretary general João Lourenço).

**Comment:** The Supreme Court ruled on this.

40. Despite these encouraging signs, political reforms have, overall, been very slow, in apparent contrast to greater movement on economic reform (see Position paper 1: Economic Change and Reform). However, both political and economic reform share a common thread: a desire by the president to move forwards with the times, while remaining in firm, unchallenged control of events. An interim test of the likely pace of change came at the MPLA's fifth party congress in December 2003. MPLA congresses are highly important events, outlining party strategy and direction for 5 years ahead. The Congress made clear that "gradualism" was to dictate the pace of change.

41. One report summed up the disappointment that this generated:

"The congress is seen as a disappointment by many in the MPLA and has damaged morale. Although the MPLA's spokesman, Norberto dos Santos, said that new party rules were in place to improve transparency and "good governance", many MPLA members, like most Angolans, are angry with official corruption and the conservatism of the leadership. There is also anger that prominent moderates, particularly former prime ministers Lopo do Nascimento, Marcolino Moco and França Van Dunem, were not appointed to the MPLA's central committee. Justino Pinto de Andrade, an MPLA dissident, said that the MPLA is in a state of "reverse", as it is still wedded to many Marxist ideas about power. Internal democracy in the party is felt to be eroding; there was no secret ballot for the post of party president,

with voting by a show of hands instead. Mr dos Santos said that new party statutes, which reconfirm the MPLA as a "dynamic left-wing" organisation, would forbid the creation of "tendencies" that could damage discipline; this appears to be a further effort to suppress dissent.<sup>3</sup>

42. In spite of this history and an apparently instinctive authoritarian, centralised approach by President dos Santos and the MPLA, some measured, gradual, openings are clearly now underway, in preparation for elections (see Section 2.3, below). A key explanation of the current reforms is that the war served as a reason and an excuse for the government's very poor capacity to deliver; the government has now lost this excuse and is obviously more able (especially in an environment of high oil prices) to deliver. Equally, the real shared threat of Savimbi while he was alive had a powerful unifying effect within the zones controlled by the MPLA; that has now been removed too. So the MPLA knows it needs to become more responsive to the needs of ordinary people. There is no real fear of any kind of popular uprising against the MPLA; rather, the main potential threats could come from within. Although President dos Santos is adept at maintaining discipline and removing potential threats to his authority, large sections of the party, the army and other arms of the ruling structures are privately exasperated at the desperate state of poverty in Angola (though fear of censure within the party and tight control ensure that these have not been allowed to coalesce into any kind of meaningful faction within the party structures. Electoral legitimacy, and a clear project of ongoing reform, is necessary to preserve legitimacy for those within the party. What is more, the president's statement in 2001 that he would not stand as the party's candidate in forthcoming elections (even though he has since partly gone back on that statement) has also increased competition within the party to some extent. While there is apparently no current threat to the president from within the party, possible internal divisions are seen as one of the most important, or *the* most important, of the potential long-term risks to the continuation of MPLA rule.

43. Another crucial factor that conditions the pace of change is the president's **likely** concern that if he steps down, he risks being prosecuted by his successors for corruption and other ills. Recent events in nearby countries such as Zambia confirm this suspicion. This creates pressures on him to cling to power, and to continue to amass resources for his own family and networks in advance of his possible

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<sup>3</sup> Economist Intelligence Unit quarterly country report on Angola, February 2004.

departure. He might even want to ensure the prospect of retaining some power afterwards, for example by becoming head of the party. The key to this will be how he manages the succession: he wants to ensure that a successor does not pursue him for past misdeeds. This is clearly difficult, given that people who appear loyal today may not be so friendly once they are no longer under his control.

## **2.3 ELECTIONS**

44. One assumption tested in this analysis is that democracy and elections will bring change. This is based on two main arguments: that the electoral campaign will open space for public debate, and that decentralisation will follow with local direct elections and local consultative forums, leading to development, political inclusion and participation.
  
45. There has been considerable delay on the announcement of an election date (there have been no elections in Angola since 1992) during which opposition parties tried for a long period after the war's end in 2002 to put pressure on President dos Santos to hold a poll as soon as possible. Some voices quickly emerged to call for elections in 2003, but this was seen as impractical; this was pushed back to 2004, and then 2005. However, the MPLA continued to stall. The Council of the Republic, an advisory body chaired by President dos Santos, then said in July 2004 that new elections should be held by September 2006, and this was followed by an MPLA party proposal to hold presidential and legislative elections in September 2006. To confuse matters further, the president said in November, 2004 that "it could be an option" that legislative elections alone might be held in 2006, followed by presidential elections in 2007. This option, he said, would allow for a new constitution to be approved by a new parliament after the legislative elections but before the presidential elections. However, no decision on a final date has yet been taken, although on 20 April the national assembly approved a series of laws deemed necessary for the electoral process: laws on nationality, on political parties, on the electoral register, on the observing of elections, and on an electoral code of conduct. Another law – the Electoral Law – had not been voted upon at the time of writing because of disagreements with opposition parties, primarily over the composition of a National Electoral Commission, which the MPLA wants to be filled with presidential

loyalists. It is significant that the government has not simply steamrolled these laws through using its parliamentary majority, but has instead negotiated with opposition parties in special parliamentary commissions ahead of submitting to parliament. The laws were all approved with typically 165–175 votes in favour (the MPLA holds only 129 seats in parliament) and almost no votes against; the Electoral Law was postponed when the opposition parties walked out and the MPLA decided to pursue further negotiations. “Although the MPLA holds an absolute majority and could approve the law,” state newspaper *Jornal de Angola* said on 21 April, “it is worth making these laws with the blessing of all the parties.”

46. In electoral terms, however, the MPLA has all the advantages. It has reinforced its governing experience under the new multiparty framework; it controls the state media and limits the effectiveness of private media (see Position Paper 3: Civil society), it dominates the commanding heights of the economy, it has significant international legitimacy despite some disputes with donors over its policies, and it has comprehensively defeated its main domestic rival UNITA. Its parliamentary majority gives it the ability to tilt the electoral rules in its favour, and it is in a position to bend those rules if it so chooses. As a purely political party now, UNITA is weak and, like the rest of the opposition and most of civil society, dependent on state subsidies which can be controlled by the MPLA. What is more, the MPLA has begun to modernise, with the appointment of several technocrats to senior posts, and is steadily growing more sophisticated, with the human and financial resources to remain several steps ahead of its opponents.

47. Opposition parties maintain hopes that the run-up to 2006 will provide significant new openings. The assumption of many of them is that elections will bring irreversible change in Angola and an opening of the political space. Opposition parties argue that the MPLA needs re-legitimisation through an electoral process declared free and fair (including by credible international observers), and this will open a space for political bargaining.

## **2.4 THE CONSTITUTIONAL PROCESS**

48. A case study on a process to formulate and adopt a new constitution further tests our assumption that democracy and elections will bring change. This case study, along with a further one on decentralisation (described in Section 2.5, below), illustrates the enormous challenges faced by opposition parties, and shows the MPLA's determination not to surrender space under pressure. These case studies also show that the MPLA will yield piecemeal openings only on its own terms, with the aim of ensuring enough flexibility to be able to move with the times, while avoiding allowing rapid openings that could threaten its long-term goal of maintaining control for many years to come. However, the case study also provides further evidence for the MPLA's willingness to be seen to be acting in a consensual fashion and to abide by constitutional rules, and this provides another potential opening for change.
49. The MPLA holds an outright majority, with 129 seats out of 220, in the national parliament. UNITA, which is traditionally strongest in the Central Highlands, holds 70 seats. Six other parties hold the remaining 21 seats, including the Partido Renovação Social (PRS, strong in the diamond-rich northeast) and the Frente para a Libertação Nacional de Angola (FNLA, strong in the northern Bakongo regions). While the MPLA's outright majority allows it to pass laws unhindered, it falls short of the two-thirds majority required to change the constitution. For a while in 2004, this gave some leverage in the constitutional process to the opposition parties, which by and large have agreed to work together.
50. The existing constitution was approved in 1991 and revised in 1992 to provide for a multiparty system. It was assumed that a new constitution would be negotiated after the 1992 elections, but the resumption of war in that year put this on ice. Discussions were opened after the Lusaka Protocol in 1994 but again suspended in late 1998 when the war started again.
51. During the relative peace of 1994-98, and in accordance with the Lusaka deal, UNITA deputies took up their seats in the National Assembly in 1997. For the first time in Angola's history, an effective multiparty political life had started to emerge (see above); in 1997 and 1998, the National Assembly was lively and active. Debates were broadcast live on national radio and television. The parties learned how to form and use alliances. For example, in the constitutional revision process

UNITA, the FNLA and the PRS had already agreed to cluster their votes, forming over a third of the total needed to oblige the MPLA to negotiate.

52. Two models emerged from these debates:

- The MPLA project advocated a French-style, unicameral, semi-presidential system, with a central role for the president and a weak prime minister, as well as some boost to provincial autonomy with direct elections to regional structures except provincial governors (the most important ones).
- The FNLA/UNITA/PRS proposal advocated greater provincial autonomy, decentralisation and deconcentration, with all positions directly elected including governors. This model was part-way between regionalism and federalism, with provincial management of local resources. This would have given regional parties power and control in their core zones.

53. At that time there was broad consensus favouring the second proposal among opposition parties, private newspapers, international organisations, national and foreign NGOs and even some sectors of the MPLA. The idea was that decentralization could promote non-oil development, allow grassroots political participation, and even defuse secessionism in provinces such as Cabinda and the Lundas. Savimbi was then still alive, controlled large swathes of territory and therefore had leverage; the MPLA appeared ready to make concessions. However, the return to war in late 1998 ended this process.

54. Following the military defeat of UNITA in 2002, while UNITA was temporarily led by General Gato, the MPLA tried to resolve the constitutional debate outside the National Assembly itself in a bilateral negotiation between the MPLA and UNITA, overseen by the presidency. The Alvalade agreement eventually reached in December 2002 did have new ideas, but it endorsed most of the MPLA's original proposal. Under this agreement, the president would be head of government and enjoy discretionary powers to appoint and dismiss the prime minister, while the political party with most votes in a province puts forward a list of possible provincial governors from which the president would choose. The latter point was a UNITA proposal. The president would also retain the power to dissolve the National

Assembly. This shift towards the MPLA position reflected, above all, the MPLA's military victory, as well as specific pressures applied on a weakened UNITA during the negotiations.

55. However, the new UNITA leader, Isaiás Samakuva, who took over from General Gato after a party vote at a congress in June 2003, was unhappy with the agreement and tried to postpone approval to the next legislative assembly. He sought to ally UNITA with a coalition of smaller opposition parties to achieve this. In May 2004 all opposition parties withdrew from the constitutional commission responsible for drafting the law, accusing the MPLA of manipulating the commission and holding elections hostage to constitutional approval. The opposition hopes that the MPLA will lose many parliamentary seats in the next election and that the new parliament will be more balanced; possibly without even an outright MPLA majority. The parties retained their unity, in spite of delays to payments due to them from the budget, and attacks from the state media which tried to cast them in the role of spoilers. They demanded a date from the president for legislative and presidential elections, and withdrawal of the MPLA's insistence that a new constitution was a prerequisite for elections. Shortly afterwards, President dos Santos visited the US where President Bush raised the question of elections. All this seems to have had an impact. On returning home, dos Santos called selected members of civil society to see him in July 2004 for bilateral meetings about the elections (COIEPA, ADRA and AJAPRAZ and the Bar Association were consulted). He also called a meeting of the Council of the Republic (as described above), a special consultative body of senior figures including all political parties with a seat in parliament and selected civil society members.

56. Shortly afterwards, the MPLA's Political Bureau issued a statement that elections should take place by September 2006 and a timetable, as the opposition had urged. It also dropped linkage of the election date to approval of a new constitution. So the opposition appears to have obtained a compromise. This concession emerged, above all, from the fact that the MPLA did not hold the two-thirds majority required to steamroller through its position. This suggests the possibility of the emergence of further political openings after the elections, especially if the MPLA does not retain its overall majority in parliament. If this were to happen, it might produce a healthier

Deleted: , in contrast to the normal MPLA pattern of imposing laws regardless of the opposition

situation of more 'institutionalised' political negotiation with the opposition. However, this temporary victory was more apparent than real: the MPLA, frustrated by being blocked by the opposition, used its majority in parliament on 19 November to vote for the extinction of the constitutional commission and to pass the issue of the constitution to a standing parliamentary commission. The issue has thus effectively been shelved for now, and the opposition parties (which generally oppose splitting presidential and parliamentary elections between 2006 and 2007) have shifted the focus of their activities towards the mechanics of the election process itself. At the time of writing, they are still seeking to get the president to announce a firm election date or dates.

57. This episode makes it clear that the MPLA attaches considerable value to being seen to be observing the correct procedures and behaving in a consensual, consultative fashion (while working discreetly behind the scenes to put pressure on its adversaries). This is partly aimed at an international, and specifically a Western audience, although it is also important for legitimacy within the country and within the MPLA itself. It is worth noting that when President dos Santos first floated the idea of holding presidential elections in 2007 after legislative elections in 2006, he made a point of stressing that he was considering this proposal as one suggested to him by the minority PLD party. This MPLA sensitivity about being seen to be behaving correctly, and stopping short of using the full weight of its powers, also suggests another point of entry, especially in the electoral process.

## **2.5 DECENTRALISATION**

58. At present, the decentralisation programme is little more than a plan of intent, still to be implemented widely, and progress to date has been extremely slow. The decentralisation and deconcentration process started in earnest with the approval of the Local Administration Act in 1999, soon after the return to war, though a more comprehensive vision and strategy was only brought forward with the approval of a Strategic Plan by the cabinet in 2001. Pilot schemes for the programme now exist and have already led to a somewhat more consultative atmosphere in some areas. Three ministries are involved in the process: Territorial Administration, involved with cadre formation and research in co-operation with the UNDP; Finance, dealing with

technical aspects of fiscal and financial autonomy; and Planning. The party and presidency are deeply involved in monitoring and controlling the process. They are actively researching and analysing similar cases elsewhere, especially in Mozambique, which has gone through its own decentralisation process. The presidency has oversight of the project partly to ensure the process joins up with the overall political strategy and related processes (also carefully controlled by the presidency) such as future laws on decentralization, the constitution, land, territorial organisation and urbanism. This marks an improvement in the government's ability to co-ordinate policies, mirroring improvements to, and better control of, fiscal management which has helped bring down inflation (see Position paper 1: Economic Change and Reform.)

59. Regarding government intentions, some believe the decentralisation programme is simply part of a cynical plan to extend state control to municipalities and communes through more sophisticated means. Others believe that the government thinks decentralization is useful as it will help solve local development problems and could, for example, defuse secessionist feelings in provinces such as Cabinda and Lundas. The government and the presidency increasingly see non-state actors as useful as service providers (and even potential magnets for donor funding), given that the state mechanisms for delivery of services are so poor, and a decentralisation process involving increased consultation might enable the government to employ these actors in more sophisticated ways, without necessarily losing much control. Consistent with this is a statement in October 2004 by Roberto de Almeida, the speaker of parliament, who said decentralisation would progress according to the principle of "gradualism". This will allow President dos Santos and the MPLA to manage the transition carefully, assessing the results of pilot projects on an ongoing basis.

60. In a speech to a National Meeting on Local Administration in August 2004, President dos Santos outlined a two-phase plan. The first will reform state administration, and the second will create conditions to institutionalise autonomous local representative power structures after elections. He also said it was necessary for a percentage of locally generated receipts in each province, from direct and indirect taxation and other local revenue generation activities, to be allocated directly to provinces,

municipalities and communes. His central stated objective was to improve service delivery and to overcome a dire lack of human capacity at local levels. He also said that around 50% of the administrative capacity of the state is concentrated in just three of Angola's 18 provinces – Luanda, Benguela and Huíla – and that of this total, 79% of human resources are concentrated at provincial level, with 19% at municipal level and just 1% at communal level. In addition, he pointed out, only 3% of administrators had higher education, and, of these, 97% were concentrated at provincial level. Importantly, dos Santos also stressed the importance of a role for civil society to provide services and be involved in local government activity in rural areas. It is not yet clear whether this will turn out to be more than rhetoric, although there are indications that small, experimental movements in this respect are already taking place. One example of this is an announcement on 19 October 19 2004 that the Luanda Management Commission will now call monthly press conferences “so that people can find out about the problems in the city and know what the government plans to do about them”.

61. Pitfalls of decentralisation from other countries have been noted, however, and it is not clear that it will bring development, political inclusion and participation: in several other cases across Africa, decentralisation simply led to the replication and expansion of the patrimonial logic at a provincial level, sometimes degenerating into warlordism. A gradualist process could help the MPLA to avoid some of these pitfalls.
62. Angola has 18 provinces, 163 municipalities and 532 communes, in a sparsely populated territory. According to presidential advisers and senior party officials, before the implementation of *autarquias* (locally elected bodies on a Portuguese model, a final theoretical step in the decentralisation process, which is still a long way off) it is necessary to consolidate the state at the local level. Local elections are envisaged a year after legislative elections, although no precise timetable has yet been laid out. If this happens, it will have the potential to be a major driver of change in the interior.
63. The government plans to tackle decentralisation slowly and experimentally. Pilot areas, in a UNDP-supported project, are supposed to be implemented in Luanda,

Bié, Malanje and Uige, with land components in Huíla and Benguela. Whether it is coincidental or not, the chosen pilot areas exclude the most regions for the MPLA: Cabinda, with oil, and the Lundas, with diamonds, both known for their rejection of MPLA power and the centre's usurping of "their" natural resources. But some of the pilot areas are not MPLA-friendly either – Bié is a historical stronghold of UNITA, while there is major social discontent in the shanty towns of Luanda where living conditions are harsh.

64. The introduction of *autarquias* is to be implemented in parallel with the existing system of provinces, municipalities and communes; competencies would be gradually and slowly transferred to the *autarquias*. The new administrative system is also to be hierarchically less rigid: *autarquias* will be equal within each province, with autonomy in relation to each other and in relation to the centre. They will manage some resources, deal directly with investors for local projects, retain some local taxes, and manage funds directly allocated by the national budget. The move towards establishing *autarquias* is driven partly by the notion that they will absorb part of the political struggle at the centre over the management of resources. Some believe they might, in particular, mitigate secessionist tendencies in Cabinda and the restive diamond-rich Lunda provinces. However, the funds managed by *autarquias* will not be large enough to fundamentally disrupt the main revenue-generation mechanisms at the centre. In addition, the provincial posts – a level at which the president is likely to be able to maintain a significant degree of control – will remain the main repositories of political power.
65. Foreign donors have been able to gain entry points into the process by supporting projects with a decentralisation element. One is the Programme to Support Rehabilitation (PAR), which is funded by the EU and targets four provinces (Huambo, Huíla, Benguela and Bié), with municipal implementation entrusted to national and international NGOs. The projects, which involve significant EU funding, involve provincial committees, presided over by the provincial governor and including NGOs, and municipal committees, presided over by a municipal administrator and also including NGOs. In addition, there are consultative forums – the Quadros de Concertação Municipal (QCM) and Quadro de Concertação Provincial (QCP) – presided over by provincial governors and municipal administrators which in some

cases include not only other members of the administration and NGOs but also representatives from business, political parties (MPLA, UNITA and others) and other community representatives.

66. In Huíla province, for example, these structures are already functioning. An opposition party, PDP-ANA, described to us an example where it was allowed to submit motions ahead of a QCP meeting, so it submitted a complaint about provincial healthcare. At the subsequent meeting, representatives of the health authorities and the hospital were called to account by PDP-ANA, which stated to the team that there was some subsequent improvement in healthcare delivery in this case. Several other respondents in Huíla province also attested to the positive aspects of the advisory bodies. The setting up of space for such bodies in the province pre-dates the end of the war, although they only started operating properly in 2002 or later, when the provincial government decided to allow extension of the consultation principle to all levels of government. Although independent voices initially had little influence in these advisory forums, their influence has grown in Huíla somewhat since 2002. Communal bodies in this framework now include farmers, traditional leaders and others, who help formulate local priorities and write reports.

67. Although the response of provincial authorities to these reports has been limited, and concrete actions in response to points raised in such forums are not especially common, there are instances where the reports led to requests from provincial authorities for further information. NGOs involved in the process believed that reports from forums in UNITA-supporting areas of Huíla were hardly considered by provincial authorities, while those from MPLA-friendly areas received more attention. As one respondent told us: "Since these things exist, we notice that the government is being more cautious, and that it has changed strategy. The problem with this forum is that it is like parliament: we are in minority, heavily diluted by the MPLA."

68. The record of these bodies in other provinces is mixed. Although the forums exist in Huíla and Benguela provinces, they do not in either Huambo or in Bié, both provinces with large numbers of UNITA supporters.

69. The reason for the divergence in effectiveness of these bodies between provinces relates in large measure to the personality of the governor and the make-up of the provincial administration in general. But there are other reasons. In Huíla, for example, it has been possible to set up such bodies at an early date because there has been no war in most parts of the province, and the special historical characteristics of Huíla (see Position Paper 3: Civil Society for more on this) have led to far greater openness than in other provinces.

70. One of the reasons for the partial success of PAR is that NGOs worked in partnership with the government. However, funding for a third stage is to be halted by the European Union.

## **2.6 POLITICAL POWER TODAY**

71. Despite the multiparty framework, the Angolan political system has retained many of the characteristics that emerged after independence and developed through the 1980s, with power still centralised in the presidency. Since 2002, President dos Santos has made a number of statements in favour of democratic participative approaches, although those have also coincided with efforts to weaken the opposition, through coercion or cooption, suggesting that the primary goal of such statements is international and domestic legitimacy.

72. The agents of authority run from the presidency through provincial governors to ministers. Governors have considerable discretion, but not over policy matters. Ministerial importance regularly shifts and key policy decisions are made by the president. He receives much of his advice from a group of unelected advisers at the presidency, as well as other interest groups such as the MPLA and individual ministries. He plays complex power games, playing different groups (including foreign business interests) off against each other. This autocratic style of government impedes formal institutional dialogue and partnership. Personal contacts are the most effective route to gain access to policy-makers. Access to the president remains highly restricted. A very small number of gatekeepers exist at the presidency; they are used by Western diplomats to transmit information to the president. Access even to these gatekeepers is also very difficult.

73. Power is managed not only through distribution of money from state revenues but also through distribution of political and other posts. This situation is not dissimilar to that of many other countries in Africa today. The overriding imperative is the maintenance by the MPLA of its political and economic hegemony and stability, and to satisfy urban elites.
74. The most prized positions are ministerial posts and provincial governorships, as well as less publicised posts within the presidency itself. Some ambassadorships – such as London, Lisbon, Paris or Washington (and increasingly Beijing) – are also desirable. Several past government reshuffles appeared to resemble musical chairs, with old faces not being sacked but moved to new positions of authority. Some ministerial posts, such as Public Works (which, alongside a special new reconstruction office headed by an official at the presidency, is responsible for overseeing the enormous oil-financed reconstruction tasks after the war), are especially desirable, because they place the minister closer to the centre of the patrimonial system. Others, such as Youth and Sports, are clearly of less importance. In some cases (especially where UNITA members hold the ministerial post), the vice-minister is actually more powerful than the minister, and is placed there so as to ensure loyalty to the presidency.
75. Many posts are allocated because of specific personal relationships with the president. Meritocracy and competence are often not grounds for selection. An example is the case of Flávio Fernandes, who stayed in place as governor of Malange for more than a decade despite being highly unpopular because of his autocratic style and outrageous appropriation of the main (albeit limited) economic opportunities in the province. Fernandes likened himself to a turtle, saying that if a turtle is found in the branch of a tree, it was because somebody had put it there. This was taken to mean that he was untouchable because he had the backing of the president. Such was his unpopularity that even the provincial MPLA (unlike in many other provinces, Fernandes was not also first provincial secretary of the MPLA) tried to exert pressure in Luanda for many years to have him removed. The personal bond even outweighed the fact that Fernandes was a liability to the MPLA during the war, and highlights the president's unwillingness to overturn relationships based on

friendship and loyalty. Fernandes' appointment, and several others since President dos Santos came to power, have led to a widespread perception that the president is unwilling to yield to pressure, whether from ordinary people, from foreign organisations, or even from the MPLA structures.

76. Fernandes was ousted as provincial governor in July 2002, shortly after the war's end. The manner of his departure was also highly significant. When President dos Santos visited Malange in July 2002, a large rally was organised, involving tens of thousands of people, and the crowd loudly booed Fernandes in front of the president when he tried to speak. Dos Santos promised during the rally that a new local government would be appointed. According to several interviewees in Malange this was not, however, a spontaneous demonstration, but one that had been planned in advance by the local MPLA, which had sent out word in the city that such a public display of disapproval would be tolerated. It was believed by several interlocutors in Malange that President dos Santos himself knew the outcome of the rally in advance, and used the public demonstration as a pretext for overriding the bonds of friendship and loyalty in order to sack Fernandes. The former governor was subsequently nominated by the cabinet to the board of the biggest state clinic in Luanda (but he has since been fired amid allegations of malpractice).

77. Fernandes's sacking, however, also fits a new pattern that appears to have started to emerge since the end of the war, indicating that the government – or the president at least – is paying more attention to performance and popularity in selecting his leadership. On 22 October 2004, President dos Santos also dismissed two of the most unpopular remaining provincial governors: Isalino Mendes of Bengo province and Manuel Pedro Pacavira of Kwanza Norte province. This change is coming about partly because the president wishes to improve service delivery now that the war is over. In addition, while unity in the MPLA was almost guaranteed during the war owing to the shared threat coming from UNITA, with that threat now gone, unpopularity within the party is increasingly an important factor in the president's selection decisions. The president feels more confident now than during the war about challenging vested interests. He has conducted a series of minor government reshuffles since 2004, which have generally fitted a pattern of replacing non-performing managers; the fact that the audit court fined Isalino Mendes for alleged

corruption in 1996 provided further confirmation of the president's will to root out the most egregious and well-publicised cases of improprieties, though without conducting a root-and-branch clear-out of the state structures. xxc

78. President dos Santos has systematically contained potential rivals. For example, in 2001 he said that he would not be the party's candidate at future presidential elections (although he has partially retracted this statement, saying in November 2003 that it was an "open question" whether or not he would stand). It was widely perceived that the original statement was made in part to see which challengers might emerge. MPLA secretary-general João Lourenço said in August 2003 that he did not consider himself excluded from being a future presidential candidate. Then, at a subsequent MPLA congress four months later, Lourenço was replaced as MPLA secretary-general by Julião Mateus Paulo "Dino Matross", a Soviet-educated veteran of the independence struggle and a presidential loyalist. (Lourenço remains a member of the MPLA political bureau and has since kept a very low profile.) The role of MPLA Secretary-General has also lost some importance since the re-creation of the role of Prime Minister. Another example was the appointment in January 2004 of Higinio Carneiro, a powerful presidential loyalist and Minister of Public Works, as co-ordinator of a management commission in Luanda, a new structure replacing the office of governor of Luanda. Carneiro was appointed because, although he is a very important and powerful figure in the president's patronage networks, he had proved his abilities as a capable executor of presidential positions in the past. However, the president noticed his growing power and public profile (and that the Luanda management commission had not performed well under him). Carneiro was replaced in October, although he retains his ministerial post.

## **2.7 THE MPLA'S STRATEGY FOR CHANGE**

79. Unlike the opposition parties, the MPLA is very advanced in its preparations for elections. In contrast to several government ministries its party headquarters is well resourced. It has 600 salaried staff and there is a clear vision of the road ahead. Given its visceral belief in its legitimacy to lead, it has drawn up plans as far ahead as 2025 and is trying to revive its grassroots support base. The MPLA has commissioned detailed research to assist this task.

80. In this respect, several distinct changes have been made since the end of the war.

First, the party is being restructured to increase membership. One of the key recent innovations has been a move since February 2004 to transfer party cells from workplaces to neighbourhoods; this enables the party to reach out to a significantly larger share of the population than before so as to increase its share of votes at elections. MPLA membership has grown sharply since the war – especially in the central highlands region which is traditionally regarded as a UNITA stronghold. Bié now has over 300,000 members, while Huambo and Huíla provinces are not far behind; membership in Luanda is also up sharply in recent years to over 200,000. By late 2004, MPLA membership was around 2 million – from 925,000 in 1992 and 1.2 million in 1998. The party has used numerous artificial mechanisms to boost membership in many provinces, such as making it known at educational institutions that academic progress could be affected by individuals' decisions as to whether or not to join the party. Opposition supporters say that MPLA membership is necessary, or at least strongly advised, if an individual wants a senior promotion or even just a job in the state sector. There are new efforts by the party to appeal to the voluntary efforts of party members – this is an old mechanism that is unlikely to have very great effects, given enormous cynicism among the urban populations about the MPLA.

81. Secondly, although there are signs that the party is prepared to countenance increased transparency and accountability at lower levels of the MPLA hierarchy – for example, by ensuring that more than one candidate should stand for each MPLA position – the experience of the 5th MPLA congress in December 2003, where internal democracy was stifled (see above), suggests that President dos Santos remains unwilling to cede control at the higher levels. Other measures to boost the party include bribing traditional authorities (who have significant influence in people's voting patterns) with gifts. In addition, the MPLA has been passing, or seeking to pass, a series of laws (most notably on oil, land and the constitution) in advance of elections, so as to achieve strategic objectives ahead of a period when opposition parties might have more leverage.

82. There is widespread complaint from opposition parties that the line between state and party structures is blurred and that the MPLA takes advantage of this confusion to promote itself. Numerous examples exist. State media also give wide coverage to MPLA activities. Some ministers are MPLA Central Committee members and several provincial governors are MPLA first provincial secretaries; there is a similar situation at municipal and communal levels. In many rural areas the MPLA flag is more common than the national flag (they look similar). The MPLA is also already conducting a de facto pre-electoral campaign. For example, in an event widely publicised by the state media, Kwata Kanawa, the MPLA's Political Bureau Secretary for Information, visited Lobito port to offer heavy equipment in the name of the government, even though he is not a member of the government.

83. In rural areas most people have only heard of the MPLA and UNITA, and possibly the FNLA. Penetration by smaller parties is minimal. The other main actors in these regions are the churches and the NGOs. UNITA's provincial governors, who gained their positions through the terms of the Lusaka accords of 1994, are deprived of effective power; it is held instead by vice-governors who work directly with central government directives. The same problem is replicated at municipal level. The role of the UNITA ministers is generally restricted to rubber-stamping pre-prepared projects.

84. Many in the political opposition also criticise the way in which the MPLA structures capitalise on foreign aid. The research team heard several examples of MPLA delegates going to provincial communities before or after the distribution of goods by foreign NGOs, and taking credit for the distributions.

## **2.8 CONSTRAINTS ON AN EFFECTIVE MULTIPARTY SYSTEM**

85. This section draws attention to constraints within the current political system and how they impede the development of multiparty politics in Angola.

86. The opposition political parties are weak, and competing against the MPLA, with its huge state backing, is a daunting task. This is illustrated in a saying of Agostinho Neto written on a placard in front of the MPLA provincial offices in Huambo: "The

MPLA is an impassable barrier". Although there are over 100 parties registered in Angola, fewer than a quarter are operational.

87. Parties with representation in the National Assembly are constitutionally entitled to state funding, proportional to the size of their representation in parliament. UNITA, for example, receives around \$14m per year, and the MPLA around \$24m (although the parties are now trying to negotiate an increase in funding levels). Even small political parties which are registered but without parliamentary representation receive state subsidies, although the MPLA has threatened to end this funding in a new electoral package being prepared. The MPLA has the additional advantage of generating revenue from several large companies it owns, as well as having the choice of the best buildings in many provincial capitals and many other assets. For UNITA state funding has risen in importance since the war, because it no longer controls the diamond mines that sustained it in the decade up to 2002.
88. Although the government generally delivers budget allocations on time, the MPLA has, on occasion, held it back as a lever. For example, payments to some parties were delayed in 2004 during a period of wrangling between the parties and the MPLA on a future constitution (see Section 2.4, above). The MPLA uses many other tools to squeeze the opposition. These include infiltration, intimidation, bribery, the denial of business permits or the selective use of sweeteners to compromise opposition officials. Key UNITA officials have been manipulated with material bribes bringing them into the president's redistribution networks.
89. The opposition parties have only limited access to the state-owned media (though by law they should have access), and private newspapers circulate only in Luanda. The church-run Rádio Ecclésia, potentially a vehicle for carrying opposition messages, is deliberately prevented from broadcasting outside Luanda (see Position paper 3: Civil Society). Opposition parties also experience censorship through manipulated reporting, and are severely affected by the fact that private media organisations – themselves victims of patronage politics – routinely suffer pressures and inducements from the ruling structures. Agents from domestic intelligence services are also widely deployed inside the opposition parties, to gather information and play a spoiler role.

90. Outright repression is common. Although direct intimidation of opposition officials is rare in Luanda it is common in the provinces. Numerous reports exist of the destruction of opposition offices, beatings and threats, especially of UNITA officials. A recent example of violence against the opposition occurred in Luvemba in eastern Angola in July 2004. The MPLA controls its own paramilitary militia, the Organização de Defesa Civil, which has been used for political ends. Suspicions exist over the killing in Luanda in July 2004 of Mfulumpinga Victor, the outspoken leader of the PDP-ANA. His powerful personality and the party's strong ethnic Bakongo base gave him a certain legitimacy and autonomy. It is possible that Mr. Mfulumpinga's killing was simply an ordinary crime. But it had a sobering effect on independent political activity in Luanda.

91. Political parties outside parliament face even greater constraints in all the above respects, although they are less commonly directly intimidated or targeted by the police than UNITA. A few of these parties, however, have had some impact. One example is PADEPA (Partido de Apoio Democrático e Progresso de Angola), which has been more active than many parties inside parliament. It has organised sit-ins, marches and demonstrations in Luanda and its leaders have been frequently arrested for publicly raising sensitive issues such as corruptions. Its success is largely due to the personality of its leader, but its high media profile may win it seats in the next election.

92. The judicial system is also highly dependent on the MPLA and the presidency. The president has the power to appoint and dismiss members of the judiciary, including the power to appoint Supreme Court justices without reference to the National Assembly. This casts strong doubts on their judicial independence. A separation of powers between the executive, legislative and the judiciary does not exist in Angola.

## **2.9 CONCLUSIONS**

93. The Angolan political system still bears many resemblances to what it looked like before the advent of multiparty democracy. President dos Santos and the MPLA still oversee a highly centralised system. Political power is concentrated in the

presidency. The ruling élite still includes a large number of officials who have been in positions of power since independence. The organs of state security remain pervasive and under close presidential and party guidance.

94. The system is characterised at all levels by a patrimonial logic whereby revenue from oil and diamonds are used for political patronage rather than for development. This system skews the economy and severely obstructs change. Both civil society and the opposition political parties are drawn in to the system as a way of controlling and taming them. Power is still exercised through the distribution of state resources and the rotation of key figures in higher-level positions, which are valued not so much for their salaries but for the access they provide to state resources.
95. Actors seeking change place their main hopes in the forthcoming elections, and the dynamics that the electoral process will create to open more space for political debate. They see the international community as the only real source of pressure on the MPLA, although it is also recognised that its leverage is weak and constrained by the economic interests of the international players and increasing competition with China, which has shown itself to be less willing to exert pressure on behalf of Angola's poor. There is no doubt that the MPLA will win the elections, but if it loses its parliamentary majority, political negotiation would become more institutionalised. This would mark a major change. However, the MPLA has so many levers of power that even under such a scenario it would still powerfully dominate a post-election scene.
96. In a system so strongly marked by administrative centralisation and concentration of political power, a decentralisation programme would have some impact, and this provides an entry point for donors, albeit one with marked limitations. However, it would be premature to say that major change is on its way: official statements and limited indirect approaches for decentralisation in the field do not hold the promise of revolutionary change; the decentralisation programme will, at best, only progress slowly.
97. International actors had direct influence on Angola's political policy choices during the war; for example when the United States successfully applied pressure on

Angola, just before the Lusaka agreement, to halt its war against UNITA. However, since the war, the nature and scope of leverage has become more difficult to gauge. On the one hand, the quest for international legitimacy – as portrayed in the Economics Position Paper – does give external powers some influence. There has also been a growing recognition of the value of international exchange, expertise and investment. On the other hand, however, direct pressure from external actors tends to be explicitly rejected in statements by public officials as “interference in internal affairs”. And the government has not forgotten the colonial legacy, the support of major international actors for UNITA at some stage, and the weaknesses of some international agencies displayed in peace efforts. It is not surprising that Angola pursues a policy of diversification of its international partnerships; a fast-growing relationship with China, in a context of extremely high oil prices, means that Angola is currently far less susceptible than before to Western players.

98. MPLA party documents and public statements make it clear that change – whether political or economic – will be driven by the principle of *gradualismo*. This is partly to ensure that the MPLA retains a firm measure of control over processes, and this, in turn, is aimed at ensuring that the MPLA remains in control for many years to come. The pace of decentralisation and reforms related to the election, the constitution and other elements of the post-war political environment, are therefore likely to be glacial and entry points rarely straightforward. However, experience shows that political spaces, once opened up, tend not to close down completely. Gradual change is possible.
99. Most people assume that the forthcoming elections represent an early opportunity for change. What is more, both civil society and the opposition parties emphasise that the engagement of the international community in the electoral process is critical to supporting and promoting that change. That is the current agenda and the most important current short-term opening for DFID.