World Watch Research

Angola:

Background Information

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Copyright and sources

World Watch Research has divided up the previously named Full Country Dossier into two separate documents:

- Background country information (published annually in summer)
- Persecution dynamics (published annually in January).

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Map of country



Angola: Population (UN estimate for 2024)	Christians	Chr%
37,805,000	34,739,000	91.9

Zurlo G A and Johnson T M, eds., World Christian Database, Leiden/Boston: Brill, accessed May 2024

Recent history

Angola is in southern Africa bordered by Namibia in the south, the Democratic Republic of Congo to the north, Zambia to the east and by the Atlantic Ocean in the west. It declared independence from Portugal on 11 November 1975 after a struggle of more than thirty years. Angola is well-known for the



27 year long civil war (1975-2002) which followed independence. At the height of the Cold War, the battle for Angola became a proxy war between the West and the Communist bloc.

The civil war had begun even before independence was gained in 1975 and was caused mainly by ideological differences among the factions who were fighting for independence. The factions were:

- The National Front for the Liberation of Angola (FNLA right wing);
- The Popular Movement for the Liberation of Angola (MPLA socialist);
- The National Union for the Total Independence of Angola (UNITA anti-socialist).

With Cuban and Eastern bloc assistance, the MPLA was able to defeat the FNLA, but the members of UNITA (later supported by the USA) continued to wage a war against the socialist government. However, control by the government of areas outside the cities was slight. The devastating effect of the war left the country on the brink of complete disintegration. In 1990, UNITA recognized the legitimacy of the MPLA government as a transitional one, the MPLA formally renounced Marxist-Leninism in favor of Social Democracy, and in 1991 the two parties were able to arrive at a settlement and signed the Bicesse Accords in Portugal. A new constitution was agreed upon and multi-party elections were scheduled to take place under the supervision of the United Nations. Elections were held in 1992 and the MPLA won. UNITA rejected the result and went back to war. In 2002, the leader of UNITA, Jonas Savimbi, was killed in an ambush, and the civil war ended with a victory for MPLA. (Source: South African History Online, last accessed 13 February 2023)

President Dos Santos came to power in 1979 and ruled with an iron fist. In August 2017, after 40 years in power, Santos finally stepped down and his right-hand man won the presidential elections amid accusations of irregularities. João Lourenço assumed office in September 2017 but there was little hope of any major policy changes, although he did make some progress in reducing corruption. For instance: In August 2019, the government <u>arrested and sentenced</u> a former minister to 14 years imprisonment on corruption charges (Bloomberg, 15 August 2019). In 2019 and 2020, there was little progress in terms of human rights even though the current president is clearly more <u>open to reforms</u> than his predecessor (ISS, April 2020). Just like any other country, the COVID-19 crisis also shaped Angola's politics, economy and social life in 2020 and 2021.

In August 2022, "incumbent President Lourenço was elected for a second term in highly disputed elections. The MPLA extended its five-decade long rule but lost its two-thirds majority in parliament. For the first time, the coalition led by UNITA received more votes in the capital, Luanda, than the ruling party" (HRW 2023 Angola country chapter). The re-election of President Lourenço led to increased scrutiny as the government struggled to implement promised reforms, and opposition parties raised concerns about the fairness of the electoral process and the broader political climate in Angola.

In 2023 and 2024, the country continued to grapple with economic challenges, particularly due to its reliance on oil, which led to economic volatility amid fluctuating global oil prices. The government pursued further economic reforms aimed at diversification, with a focus on boosting the agricultural sector and reducing the national debt, although progress was slow. Politically, the government faced criticism for its handling of human rights issues, particularly regarding restrictions on religious freedom and civil society activities.



Political and legal landscape

The country went through some devastating phases after gaining independence. It is a presidential republic, with the president acting both as head of state and head of government. Theoretically, the country moved to a multi-party system following the 1992 elections. However, as in many other Sub-Saharan countries, elections in Angola only bear a façade of institutional democracy. Angola is one of the prime examples where a national liberation movement has taken over as the dominant ruling party. While the first ever local elections scheduled for 2020 were postponed indefinitely due mainly to the COVID-19 crisis, national and presidential elections took place in August 2022, as stated above, with the MPLA ruling party and incumbent President Joao Lourenco winning (Al-Jazeera, 29 August 2022).

Angola is a secular state with a Christian majority. Constitutionally speaking, freedom of religion is respected. Article 10 (section 2) of the 2010 Constitution states: "The state shall recognize and respect the different religious faiths, which shall be free to organize and exercise their activities, provided that they abide by the constitution and the laws of The Republic of Angola" (Constitute Project, accessed 30 September 2020). Article 41 also provides for freedom of conscience, religion, and worship, and recognizes the right to conscientious objection. Article 41, section 4 states that "no authority shall question anyone with regard to their convictions or religious practices, except to gather statistical data that cannot be individually identified". However, these well-articulated constitutional guarantees are restricted by the actions of the government.

According to Freedom House's Freedom in the World 2024 Angola report:

- Angola is rated 'Not Free' in civil liberties and political rights: Angola scores 28 out of 100, with
 particularly low scores in political rights (10/40) and civil liberties (18/60). The country remains
 under the control of the Popular Movement for the Liberation of Angola (MPLA) since its
 independence, with authorities systematically repressing political dissent. Despite some initial
 easing of restrictions after President Lourenço took office in 2017, these have since been
 reversed, and corruption, due process violations, and abuses by security forces remain rampant.
- The electoral process is not free and fair: Angola's electoral process is heavily skewed in favor of the ruling MPLA. The head of government is not elected through free and fair elections, as the MPLA has entrenched its power through systemic manipulation of the electoral framework. The National Election Commission (CNE) is dominated by the MPLA, and irregularities during the 2022 elections, such as biased media coverage and flawed voter registration processes, have further undermined the integrity of the electoral process.
- Corruption is rampant: Corruption remains deeply embedded in Angola's public and private sectors. Despite some high-profile convictions, including that of José Filomeno dos Santos, the son of former President José Eduardo dos Santos, corruption continues to pervade the government. The 2023 Afrobarometer survey revealed that many Angolans believe corruption is becoming more widespread, and there is a pervasive fear of retaliation for reporting corrupt activities.
- Media and press freedom is restricted: Media freedom in Angola is severely constrained, with
 most media outlets either state-owned or heavily influenced by the government. The few
 ostensibly private outlets also serve as mouthpieces for the regime, and journalists face
 significant risks, including criminal charges for defamation and physical violence. In 2023, the on-



line news outlet Camunda News was forced to close following a government-led campaign of harassment.

• Insult and defamation are considered criminal offenses: The Angolan government continues to use legal provisions to suppress press freedom. Journalists face criminal complaints and civil lawsuits for their reporting, particularly if it involves criticism of the government. This environment of intimidation has led to widespread self-censorship among the press, further stifling free expression in the country.

The same report shows how freedom of assembly and association, academic freedom, individual freedom of expression and religious freedom are still restricted in Angola:

- "The constitution guarantees religious freedom, but the government imposes onerous criteria on religious groups for official recognition, which is required for the legal construction of houses of worship. Many Pentecostal churches remain unregistered. There are no registered Muslim groups, though Muslim communities have been vocal in their demands for recognition and the right to worship freely."
- "Academics must maintain a façade of agreement with the MPLA's preferred narratives and refrain from open criticism of the party, or risk losing their positions. Those who voice dissent are often monitored by security services."
- "Fear of retribution for expressing criticism of the government or controversial opinions in private
 conversations persists in Angola, and self-censorship is common. Known surveillance of civil
 society groups, journalists, and academics can leave ordinary citizens reluctant to speak out. The
 government actively monitors online activity. Opposition parties' youth organizations claim that
 repression of political dissent has increased in recent years, citing several instances of arbitrary
 arrests and intimidation of government critics by state security forces."
- "While the Lourenço administration initially showed more tolerance for public demonstrations
 than its predecessor, peaceful marches are still frequently met with arrests and violence by the
 security forces, at times resulting in the deaths of protesters."



Religious landscape

Angola: Religious context	Number of adherents	%
Christians	34,739,000	91.9
Muslim	421,000	1.1
Hindu	800	0.0
Buddhist	3,400	0.0
Ethnic religionist	2,175,000	5.8
Jewish	0	0.0
Bahai	5,000	0.0
Atheist	68,300	0.2
Agnostic	392,000	1.0
Other	340	0.0
OTHER includes Chinese folk, New religionist, Sikh, Spiritist, Taoist, Confucianist, Jain, Shintoist, Zoroastrian.		

Zurlo G A and Johnson T M, eds., World Christian Database, Leiden/Boston: Brill, accessed May 2024

In May 2019 a new law was introduced which reduced the 100,000 member registration requirement to 60,000, but added several other requirements, including a mandate that 1,000 members reside in each of the country's 18 provinces. This change has actually made it more difficult for churches to submit an application. In 2022, four churches were registered. Many church leaders have applied for registration for their churches and have been waiting for over ten years. Without registration, it is illegal to operate schools, clinics and other social services. Christians have thus found it difficult to congregate and many churches face demolition. In November 2018, thousands of churches were facing forced closure (World Watch Monitor, 14 November 2018). Some of the churches that were closed have been demolished, and additional closures continued in subsequent years. In the WWL 2023 and WWL 2024 reporting periods, over a hundred smaller churches were forced by the authorities to close down.

According to the US State Department IRFR 2023 Angola:

- "The government estimates there are 88 registered religious groups and more than 1,200 unregistered religious groups in the country. The Baha'i Faith and the World Messianic Church remained the only two non-Christian registered religious organizations.
- The other recognized religious groups include 58 Protestant denominations such as the Anglican, Baptist, Evangelical, Lutheran, Mennonite, Methodist, and Seventh-day Adventist Churches; the Church of Jesus Christ; 28 African Messianic denominations; and the Catholic Church."



Religious minorities in Angola make up 9% of the population, encompassing groups such as animists, Muslims, Jews, Baha'is, and others. The Muslim community, primarily composed of foreign migrants from North and West Africa, is estimated to be around one million, despite 2018 government data reporting only 122,000 Muslims. The Jewish community is particularly small, with approximately 350 individuals, mainly resident foreign nationals. Additionally, 12% of the population identifies as not being affiliated with any religious group.

Christians, who have been asking for better legal protection and recognition, will most likely continue to be ignored by the authorities.

Economic landscape

In its summary updated on 9 October 2024, the <u>World Bank's Angola Overview</u> highlights Angola's continued economic challenges, emphasizing the country's heavy reliance on oil, which has resulted in volatile growth and persistent poverty and inequality:

- "After a modest 1% growth in 2023, primarily due to lower oil production, exchange rate depreciation, and fuel price hikes, real GDP grew by 4.1% year-on-year in the first quarter of 2024. This marks the most significant annual expansion in the past nine years. The rebound was driven by a recovery in oil production and a robust performance in the services sector, particularly in domestic trade and transport and storage. Higher oil prices and production boosted Angola's current account surplus in the first half of 2024."
- However: "Rising inflation and declining per capita income have strained household purchasing power, especially for the less well-off." In 2024, "more than a third of the population is projected to live on less than \$2.15 per day."

According to the 2024 Angola Economic Outlook:

- Oil dependency and economic vulnerability: Angola's heavy reliance on oil, which accounts for a
 significant portion of GDP and exports, has made its economy highly susceptible to fluctuations
 in oil production and prices, leading to volatile growth and economic challenges.
- *Inflation and monetary policy:* The economy has faced inflationary pressures, with inflation expected to peak in 2024 due to currency devaluation. The National Bank of Angola has responded by raising interest rates to stabilize the economy.
- **Debt management and fiscal consolidation**: Angola has made progress in managing its public debt, with a significant reduction in the debt-to-GDP ratio projected for 2024. The government has also implemented fiscal consolidation measures to create more fiscal space.
- **Economic diversification and structural transformation**: Despite some progress in agriculture and agribusiness, economic diversification remains a challenge. The government aims to accelerate structural transformation and attract foreign direct investment to reduce the economy's dependency on oil.
- Climate finance and decarbonization: Angola is prioritizing its decarbonization agenda, with significant investments in the energy sector and climate finance, primarily supported by public and development finance institutions. This reflects the country's commitment to addressing climate change while fostering sustainable development.



According to the <u>October 2023</u> update in the Index of Economic Freedom, Angola's overall economic freedom remains below the world average:

- Angola's economy is ranked 118th out of 184 countries, with an economic freedom score of 54.3, marking it as "mostly unfree."
- Despite a slight improvement of 1.3 points from the previous year, Angola remains heavily dependent on oil and diamond revenues, which has led to inefficiencies and a lack of economic diversification.
- The country faces significant challenges, including pervasive corruption, lack of judicial independence, and a constrained regulatory environment.
- Monopolies dominate key sectors, and non-tariff barriers alongside burdensome investment regulations hinder private sector development.
 - The country's public debt stands at 66.7% of GDP, and although the government maintains a moderate tax burden and fiscal health.

Social and cultural landscape

According to the <u>World Factbook Angola</u> (accessed 9 October 2024) and <u>UNDP Human Development</u> Report Angola (data updates as of 13 March 2024):

- *Main ethnic groups:* Ovimbundu (37 %), Kimbundu (25%), Bakongo (13 %), Mestico i.e mixed European and native African (2%), European (1%), other (22%)
- *Main languages:* Portuguese 71.2% (official), Umbundu 23%, Kikongo 8.2% Kimbundu 7.8%, Chokwe 6.5 %, Nihaneca 3.4 %, Nganguela 3.1 %, Fiote 2.4 %, Kwanhama 2.3 %, Muhumbi 2.1%, Luvale 1%, other 3.6%
- Population growth: 3.38% (2021 est.)
- *Urban population:* 67.5% of the total population (2021)
- Rate of urbanization: 4.04% annual rate of change (2020-2025 est.)
- Literacy rate, adult (ages 15 and older): 66.0%
- Expected years of schooling: 11.8 years
- Employment to population ratio (ages 15 and older): 72.2%
- Unemployment, total: 6.9% of labor force
- *Unemployment. youth (ages 15-24):* 16.09%
- Human Development Index score and rank: Angola ranked 148th out of 189 countries with a score of 0.581
- Life expectancy at birth: 61.1 years
- Gender Development Index (GDI): 0.903
- Gender Inequality Index (GII): 0.536

According to UNHCR Operational Data Portal Angola (updated 30 September 2024):

 Refugees: "there are more than 56,000 refugees and asylum seekers in Angola spread over provinces such as Luanda and Lunda Norte. These refugees represent a multitude of countries such as the DRC, Rwanda, Mauritania and others. They are located in several provinces across Angola, including Luanda and Lunda Norte. "



According to FFP's Fragile State Index (FSI 2023 Angola):

• Angola ranked #39 out of 179 countries with a score of 86.9 points and was categorized as 'high warning'). It is a country where cronyism, clientelism and nepotism are rampant. As a result, the magnitude of corruption in the country is high and the lack of rule of law and lack of good governance are prevalent. The positive thing about Angola is that the FFP shows that it has been improving in this regard since it reached the climax in 2017 (91.1).

As calculated by Transparency International (<u>CPI 2023 Angola</u>): Due to the high levels of corruption, Angola ranked #121 out of 180 countries, scoring 33 points.

Technological landscape

Angola is advanced in mining industry technology and is one of the richest countries in minerals, especially diamonds. However, the country is not as well-advanced as it could be in other areas, considering the available funds for investment. High costs remain a big hindrance for many Angolans in the field of communication technology. Access to the Internet is low but has been growing steadily.

According to DataReportal Digital 2024: Angola (23 February 2024) / survey date - January 2024:

- *Internet usage*: Total internet users: 14.63 million people (39.3% of Angola's total population). This indicates that a significant portion of the population is connected to the internet, but more than half of the population still lacks internet access.
- **Social media usage**: Total social media users: 5.00 million people (13.4% of the total population). Social media usage is relatively low compared to internet usage, suggesting that while many Angolans have internet access, a smaller percentage engage with social media platforms.
- Active cellular mobile connections: 29.20 million (78.4% of the total population). Mobile
 connectivity is widespread, with a high percentage of the population having access to mobile
 devices. This suggests that mobile phones are the primary means of digital access for most
 Angolans.

According to <u>BuddeComm Research</u> (Last updated 8 July 2024):

"The government has continued to develop telecom infrastructure to help diversify the country's economy and lessen its dependence on offshore crude oil production, which accounts for almost all exports and up to 80% of tax revenue. By extending and upgrading telecom networks the government expects businesses to become more efficient and for e-commerce to become a more prominent feature of economic growth. In addition, networks will facilitate rural access to education and health care. However, there is much progress to be made if the country is to improve the business climate and attract investors."

According to Freedom House's Freedom on the Net 2023 Angola:

- Angola's internet freedom is rated as "Partly Free," with a score of 59 out of 100.
- The country's poor infrastructure continues to hinder consistent internet access, and while there is no direct government censorship of content, the environment is constrained by intimidation and legal actions against online critics.
- The ruling party has manipulated online content and social media interactions, particularly



- around the 2022 elections, to suppress dissent and bolster its presence.
- Concerns over government surveillance and the prosecution of individuals for their online activities contribute to a climate of fear that limits freedom of expression and public discourse online.

Security situation

The country was embroiled in a 26 year civil war from 1975 to 2002. Human security remains a major problem due to the lack of rule of law in the country.

In the Province of Cabinda, a region in Angola with a history of pro-independence struggles, conflict has been ongoing between government security forces and the Front for the Liberation of the Enclave of Cabinda (FLEC). The Catholic Church has been working to bring the separatists and the government together for dialogue. However, the government has arrested activists involved in the region, exacerbating tensions.

Adding to the situation, on 25 March 2023, <u>seven activists</u> were detained during a meeting organized by Conacce Chaplains, a Christian non-governmental organization (Crux, 2 May 2023). The meeting was part of an educational program on human rights. Angolan police interrupted the event and arrested 45 attendees. While five of the activists were released on 28 April, two were retained in custody. This series of arrests has sparked outrage among human rights advocates in the region.

In a <u>statement</u> released on 17 May 2023, Amnesty International expressed concern over the lack of security for individuals who speak out on issues such as corruption and poverty: "Authorities in Angola must immediately and unconditionally release Tanaice Neutro for protesting against high levels of poverty, corruption and repression, and guarantee the right to peaceful protest across the country, Amnesty International said today as it marked seven months since the activist was arbitrarily detained." The statement adds: "Over the last few years, Angolan authorities have demonstrated a ruthless determination to crush dissent and unduly limit the people's rights to freedom of expression, association and peaceful assembly,"

In the context of human security, Angola's human security is marked by significant challenges, including economic instability, political repression, and environmental vulnerabilities. Political dissent is often met with repression, leading to human rights abuses and a lack of judicial independence. Additionally, environmental threats such as droughts and water scarcity further endanger food security and livelihoods, particularly in rural areas. These issues collectively undermine the overall well-being and security of the Angolan population.

Christian origins

Christianity was introduced into Angola before colonization. In 1491, Roman Catholic priests from Portugal paved the way to establish mission stations in the country. In the 16th century, Henrique, the son of Manikongo Nzinga Alfonsa, became the first Sub-Saharan African to be consecrated as bishop. (King Alfonsa had ruled over the Kongo Empire from 1509-1543.) However, the fact that the Portuguese turned their main focus to the slave trade hindered the expansion of the Christian faith for a considerable time. In 1865, the Vatican decided to send the White Fathers to the country with a new assignment so that Christianity could regain the momentum that it had lost earlier.



(Source: Encyclopedia of African History, 3-Volume set, pp.83-84.)

Protestants arrived in 1878, when British Baptists started working among the Bakongo people near São Salvador. In 1880, missionaries with the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions arrived to work among the Ovimbundu and were joined by Canadian Presbyterians (now an integral part of the United Church of Canada) in 1886. In 1885 forty-five missionaries from the Methodist Episcopal Church arrived in Angola as one of the first efforts organized by the newly elected bishop, William Taylor. The Christian Brethren established their mission station in 1889. Anglicans established work in Angola early in the 20th century. The Pentecostal movement entered Angola in 1938, with initial efforts being made by the Church of God International.

(Source: Melton J.G. and Baumann M., eds.: Religions of the World - A Comprehensive Encyclopedia of Beliefs and Practices - 2nd edition, p.133.)

Church spectrum today

Angola: Church networks	Christians	%
Orthodox	0	0.0
Catholic	20,444,000	58.9
Protestant	9,973,000	28.7
Independent	2,432,000	7.0
Unaffiliated	2,735,000	7.9
Doubly-affiliated Christians	-846,000	-2.4
Total	34,738,000	100.0
(Any deviation from the total number of Christians stated above is due to the rounding of decimals)		
Evangelical movement	6,372,000	18.3
Pentecostal-Charismatic	9,330,000	26.9

Zurlo G A and Johnson T M, eds., World Christian Database, Leiden/Boston: Brill, accessed May 2024

Orthodox: Eastern (Chalcedonian), Oriental (Pre-Chalcedonian, Non-Chalcedonian, Monophysite), Nestorian (Assyrian), and non-historical Orthodox. Roman Catholics: All Christians in communion with the Church of Rome. Protestants: Christians in churches originating in or in communion with the Western world's 16th-century Protestant Reformation. Includes Anglicans, Lutherans and Baptists (any of whom may be Charismatic) and denominational Pentecostals, but not Independent traditions such as Independent Baptists nor independent Charismatics. Independents: Christians who do not identify with the major Christian traditions (Orthodox, Roman Catholic, Protestant). Unaffiliated Christians: Persons professing publicly to be Christians but who are not affiliated to churches. Doubly-affiliated Christians: Persons affiliated to or claimed by 2 denominations at once. Evangelical movement: Churches, denominations, and individuals who identify themselves as evangelicals by membership in denominations linked to evangelical alliances (e.g., World Evangelical Alliance) or by self-identification in polls. Pentecostal-Charismatic: Church members involved in renewal in the Holy Spirit, sometimes known collectively as "Renewalists".

Christians are a majority in the country. There are major issues regarding the hostility shown by the main church denominations towards the smaller ones.



Further useful reports

A selection of in-depth reports and smaller articles are available on the Research & Reports pages of the Open Doors website:

https://www.opendoors.org/en-US/research-reports/.

These are also available on the Open Doors Analytical website (password: freedom):

- https://opendoorsanalytical.org/?s=Angola
- https://opendoorsanalytical.org/reports/.

External Links

- Recent history: South African History Online https://www.sahistory.org.za/article/angolan-civil-war-1975-2002-brief-history
- Recent history: arrested and sentenced https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2019-08-15/angola-jails-most-senior-official-yet-after-corruption-trial
- Recent history: open to reforms https://issafrica.s3.amazonaws.com/site/uploads/sar38.pdf
- Recent history: HRW 2023 Angola country chapter https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2023/country-chapters/angola
- Political and legal landscape: national and presidential elections https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2022/8/29/angola-ruling-party-wins-vote-and-president-a-second-term
- Political and legal landscape: 2010 Constitution https://www.constituteproject.org/constitution/Angola_2010.pdf
- Political and legal landscape: Freedom in the World 2024 Angola https://freedomhouse.org/country/angola/freedom-world/2024
- Religious landscape description: facing forced closure https://www.worldwatchmonitor.org/coe/angola-2000unregistered-churches-forced-to-close/
- Religious landscape description: IRFR 2022 https://www.state.gov/reports/2022-report-on-international-religious-freedom/angola/
- Religious landscape description: IRFR 2023 Angola https://www.state.gov/reports/2023-report-on-international-religious-freedom/angola/
- Economic landscape: World Bank's Angola Overview https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/angola/overview
- Economic landscape: Angola Economic Outlook: https://www.afdb.org/en/countries/southern-africa/angola/angola-economic-outlook
- Economic landscape: October 2023 https://www.heritage.org/index/pages/country-pages/angola
- Social and cultural landscape: World Factbook Angola https://www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/countries/angola/
- Social and cultural landscape: UNDP Human Development Report Angola https://hdr.undp.org/data-center/specific-country-data#/countries/AGO
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- Security situation: seven activists https://cruxnow.com/church-in-africa/2023/05/catholics-call-for-dialogue-in-angolas-separatist-cabinda-region
- Security situation: statement https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2023/05/angola-authorities-must-releaseactivist-languishing-in-detention/