



# MPLA retains power in highly contested election

## Executive Summary

- The People's Movement for the Liberation of Angola (MPLA) won its fifth consecutive term since independence in 1975, returning João Lourenço as president with 51.17 per cent of the vote. This is compared to 43.95 per cent for the resurgent opposition fronted by National Union for the Total Independence of Angola (UNITA) leader Adalberto Costa Júnior.
- The opposition has disavowed the election result as rigged, but however compromised, the MPLA are not wholly illegitimate.
- The election repeated the trend of anti-incumbency in recent African elections, with the MPLA's appeals to its revolutionary past largely failing with a young, urbanised electorate fed up with economic stagnation, intense inequality and unemployment, and broken promises of reform.
- The result further loosens the MPLA's grip on the country, with further, potentially violent tensions likely given the opposition's momentum and the incumbents' inability to resolve structural problems. Further economic and social deterioration is likely in the medium term.
- Both Lourenço and Costa Júnior's search for geopolitical allies, especially those who offer significant volumes of direct investment, presents opportunities. However, Angola will remain a difficult place to do business, particularly in the stunted industrial and agricultural sectors.







## FLASHNOTE: Angola 2022 Election Analysis

### Political dynamics and parliamentary arithmetic

**Angolan politics remains highly contested, and it is widely thought by analysts and journalists that the election was rigged, but this does not mean the MPLA is not legitimate.**

Discrepancies between the official count and the opposition's parallel count, the institutional embeddedness of Angola's election authority within the ruling party, and MPLA control over the media and security forces has seen most analysts deduce the election was rigged. However, it should not be assumed that MPLA are wholly illegitimate. Many Angolan voters support the incumbents, especially those who remember the country's traumatic civil war; one source characterised a vote for the MPLA as a vote for 'peace'. Fears of violence and upheaval, even as the status quo becomes more oppressive, will remain central as Angola negotiates the coming period of change.

**Broken promises, economic tension and a younger, cosmopolitan, urbanised electorate mean Angola has repeated the anti-incumbent wave**

#### Angola Election Result

■ MPLA ■ UNITA

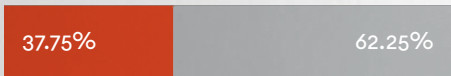
##### Official result



##### UNITA count



##### Luanda result



**“Across southern Africa more generally, legacy revolutionary parties are increasingly rejected amidst global macroeconomic headwinds, poverty and unemployment.”**

**sweeping Africa.** The recent Senegalese, Kenyan and now Angolan elections have been characterised by anti-incumbent backlash, mobilised and channelled by a charismatic opposition. Across southern Africa more generally, legacy revolutionary parties are increasingly rejected. In Angola, as in the others, this appears to be the culmination of resentment toward economic stagnation, especially crippling debt and intense inequality amidst five years of recession, which dulled the electoral appeal of the MPLA's revolutionary credentials. Hopes of political and economic revitalisation under Lourenço have been shattered, with civil society more willing than ever to criticise his failure to deliver even as instances of violent repression

multiply. It is difficult to say whether the backlash is primarily due to the young, urban poor who have suffered the most from economic stagnation, or the new middle class whose expectations of social, political and economic improvement have not been met, but the MPLA's unprecedented loss in Luanda, their former stronghold, signals a profound rupture in the country's political ecosystem.

**For the first time MPLA has lost their two-thirds majority in the national assembly, meaning they will need to compromise with the opposition on many important changes. This could force more deliberative, transparent decision-making, or significantly reduce governance quality.**

The new parliamentary configuration means MPLA can no longer unilaterally amend the constitution or appoint seats on the constitutional court, electoral commission or media regulator. These institutions have been key to maintaining power, highlighting how MPLA are losing their grip on the country. It is possible that this will open up decision-making, but MPLA and Lourenço's desire to retain control make it more likely that they will seek to subvert any pluralism, further inflaming both the opposition and civil society who are agitating for change.







## FLASHNOTE: Angola 2022 Election Analysis

### Future directions and policy implications

**Angola's macroeconomic outlook is tilted to the downside, and social problems largely intractable. The MPLA appears incapable of resolving either.** Some macroeconomic improvement has been observed under Lourenço, but this largely reflects oscillations in international oil prices. There is little appetite for diversification in either the private or public sector, with oil still accounting for 90 per cent of Angola's export earnings. \$19 billion of Chinese debt maturing in 2023, slowing oil production and a bloated import bill weigh heavily on the medium-term outlook, compounding the recession of the past five years. Meanwhile, decades of uneven economic growth, patronage and mismanagement has condemned a large chunk of Angola's population to poverty. 30 per cent are unemployed, and 44 per cent live below the poverty line. An inability to manage economic reform while preserving rewards for insiders, a stunted private sector, increased likelihood of violent repression of opposition and activists and deteriorating human capital make it unlikely that the MPLA can meaningfully respond to these challenges. Angola will remain a difficult place to do business, as

evidenced by a dearth of purchasers for the government's recent privatisation drive.

**Angola is a geopolitical flashpoint, and a weakened MPLA may be pushed further toward the west.** The MPLA retains strong ties with its cold war-era allies; China is Angola's largest trading partner and creditor, while Angola was one of the 17 African countries who refused to condemn Russia's invasion of Ukraine at the UN. These ties, however, are waning, and Angola has recently leaned toward the west by hosting regional peace talks, cooperating with the IMF and hosting substantial FDI – both resource and non-resource – from the US and western Europe. Further weakening of the regime may cause it to pivot even more decisively in return for support. Moreover, UNITA's history as a US-backed paramilitary during the cold war lends a perception of being pro-western and pro-business; if

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UNITA continues to ascend there is even greater scope for influence by western powers.

**MPLA's vote has declined at the last four elections, and the regime is weaker than ever. It is clear that Angola is headed for change, but the opposition is unlikely to hang together for another five years. Now that the constitutional court has dismissed UNITA's challenge, another push may be forthcoming, diluting the prospects for peace and stability.** Angola's opposition was united behind Costa Júnior's popularity, but this solidarity is unlikely to survive the five years until the next election. Having vowed not to “abandon” his supporters, and wary of legitimising the result by participating in parliament, Costa Júnior is now forced to consider alternate routes into power. Further, potentially extensive demonstrations are likely, with reports that many in the military are loyal to UNITA inflaming the potential for violence. This is exacerbated by an increase in unlawful detentions of young activists, with some reports of torture, in the wake of the election.

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