

The political economy of *partidarização* within the postcolonial state in Angola

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Abstract: The *partidarização* has been central to state formation in postcolonial Angola. Previous research has highlighted how the MPLA has used its control of the postcolonial state to subvert its institutions. This article analyses how changes in the balance and distribution of power in Angola have led to different reconfigurations of *partidarização* over time. Whereas *partidarização* emerged as a tool of co-optation, first under President Neto and later under President Dos Santos, it was subsequently also crucial to securing the MPLA's viability under the multiparty system. Finally, when the balance of power shifted towards Dos Santos in the post-war period, *partidarização* became an essential tool for the President to assert his personal control over the party and the state. Ultimately, it is argued that this new dimension of *partidarização* has contributed to the demise of President Dos Santos as calls for reform started to emerge from civil society.

Keywords: Angola, *partidarização*, political settlement, society, state.

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Introduction

On the eve of Angolan independence, on 11 November 1975,¹ two foreign armies invaded Angola. In the north, Zaire's army, under President Mobutu Sese Seko, supported the National Front for the Liberation of Angola (FNLA), and in the south, apartheid South Africa's army supported the National Union for the Total Independence of Angola (UNITA); both movements, however, were covertly financed by the United States (Gleijeses 2002; Malaquias 2007). Civil war followed the collapse of the power-sharing agreement negotiated between the three independence movements – the FNLA, UNITA and the Popular Liberation Movement of Angola (MPLA) – and Portugal as the colonial power (Malaquias 2007: 64). In the initial stage of the civil war, the MPLA relied on Katangese troops under Moise Tshombe,² and later on Cuban troops.³ The MPLA was also backed by the Soviet Union (Malaquias 2007: 56), a situation which eventually turned the internal conflict in Angola into a major proxy war between the two post-Second World War superpowers, the United States and the Soviet Union (Gleijeses 2002).

By February 1976, the MPLA and its Cuban allies had emerged victorious (Gleijeses 2002), and forced the FNLA leadership into exile. According to an informant,⁴ 'Holden Roberto [leader of the FNLA] abandoned the armed struggle, saying that the main objective of the FNLA had already been achieved', which was the independence of Angola. This is an indication that Roberto understood that the FNLA could not take power in Angola by military means. Malaquias (2007) explains that Roberto first went into exile in Kinshasa but then moved to Paris, only to return to Angola in 1991, when the multiparty democratic reform was implemented. However, UNITA's Jonas Savimbi

¹ This date was established in the Alvor Accord of 15 January 1975, in Chapter I Article 4, signed between Portugal (as the former colonial power) and the three main liberation movements in Angola, the FNLA, MPLA and UNITA.

² Malaquias (2007: 57) explains that in 1960 the province of Katanga attempted but failed to secede from the former Zaire (present-day Democratic Republic of the Congo – DRC) under then-President Mobutu Sese Seko, and those on the defeated side fled to Angola. Correia (2017: chap. 7) explains that this alliance between the Katangese troops and the MPLA under Agostinho Neto (and neither of the other two liberation parties, that is, FNLA and UNITA) was a natural one as they were both enemies of Mobutu. Correia goes on to say that, on the one hand, Mobutu provided support to the FNLA, making such an alliance between the FNLA and the Katangese impossible. On the other hand, the Katangese troops were employed by the Portuguese colonial army to fight UNITA. So, on the eve of the independence of Angola and the subsequent withdrawal of the Portuguese colonial army, such an alliance between the MPLA under Agostinho Neto and the Katangese troops was convenient and would allow them to maintain pressure on Mobutu (Correia 2017: 563).

³ Through a military operation code-named 'Carlota' (Gleijeses 2002).

⁴ An Angolan academic and former UPA (FNLA) freedom fighter (interview in Luanda, 7 August 2018).

chose to fight a guerrilla war from the countryside, claiming that it was on behalf of 'those who did not feel represented by the MPLA' (Chabal 2007: 7), backed by apartheid South Africa and the United States.⁵ As a result, the MPLA ruling coalition faced a violent armed opposition from 1975 until 2002, which had a significant impact on the trajectory of Angolan development.

The MPLA's control of the state was formalised through the first constitutional law, approved by the MPLA central committee on the eve of independence from Portugal and published in the *Diário da República* (the Government Official Gazette) on Independence Day. According to Article 48 of this document, the MPLA would appoint commissars to every leadership position within the public administration, from the provincial level down to Comissão Popular de Bairro, that is, the local administration. This ensured that only MPLA members would have access to public office, leading to what is known in the literature on Angola as the *partidarização* of state institutions,⁶ with serious implications for state formation in postcolonial Angola. This was a common experience among many pro-socialist countries, including Lusophone countries such as Mozambique, Guinea-Bissau and Cape Verde, prior to the multiparty reforms of the 1990s.

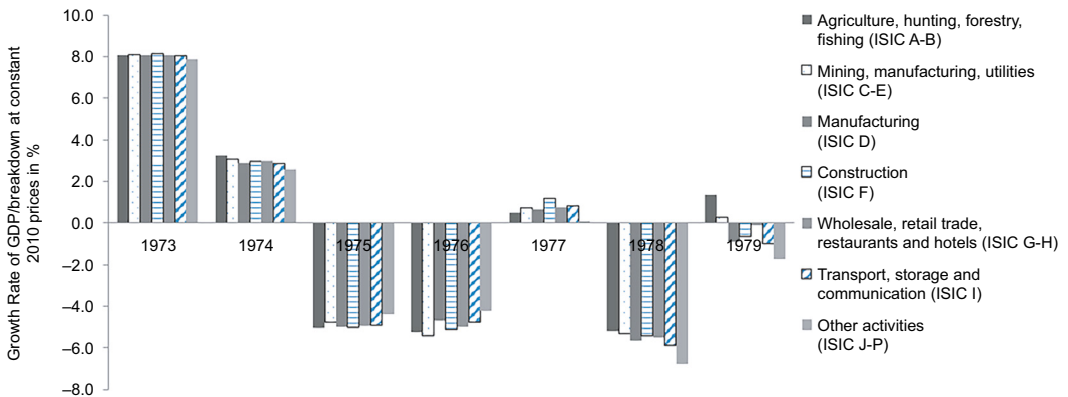
The main objective of this article is to analyse and explain how changes in the balance and distribution of power within the MPLA ruling coalition and between the MPLA and other parties, that is, political settlements,⁷ have led to different reconfigurations of *partidarização* over time. To meet this goal, this article employs historical analysis based on in-depth key informant interviews, secondary sources as well as archival research.

Following this introduction, the remaining sections of the article are structured as follows. The first section sets the stage by analysing the postcolonial political settlement and the emergence of the *partidarização*, particularly as a tool of co-optation under President Agostinho Neto. The second section examines the influence of *partidarização* in the transition to a market economy under a multiparty democracy in the 1990s. The third section analyses how the post-war political settlement has allowed *partidarização* to take on new dimensions and is followed by the conclusion.

⁵ Until 1992, the United States provided support under the pretext of fighting the spread of communism in Southern Africa.

⁶ For instance, Schubert (2013) indicates how *partidarização*, with particular reference to the post-war period, has permeated every aspect of public life.

⁷ Political settlement as used in this article is defined as 'a combination of power and institutions that is mutually compatible and also sustainable in terms of economic and political viability' (Khan 2010: 4). Critical to this analysis is the identification of changes in the distribution of power, and 'the implications for institutional performance' (Khan 2010: 7) over time.



Source: Author, from UN National Accounts Main Aggregates database, available at <https://unstats.un.org/unsd/snaama/dnList.asp>
Last accessed 10 Nov 2018

Figure 1. Rate of growth by sector (in %), 1973–9.

The emergence of the MPLA as a vanguard party: setting the stage for *partidarização*

The MPLA and its ally Cuba's military victory over the other two contending parties, that is, the FNLA and UNITA, allowed the party to assert its control of the state. By 1976, nearly 300,000 Portuguese settlers had left Angola for fear that the majority black African population, once in power, would seize the moment to repay the atrocities committed under colonial rule (Bender 1978; Bhagavan 1986).⁸ As a consequence, export revenues from coffee (as well as other agricultural produce) and diamonds declined significantly and the productive sector collapsed altogether,⁹ as illustrated in Figure 1.

Within the MPLA ruling coalition, the 1975 constitutional law ensured a balanced distribution of power among the following bodies: the presidency, the Conselho da Revolução (Revolution Council) and the Prime Minister. President Neto was the President of the MPLA, and as such he was also the President of the newly established People's Republic of Angola. Article 6 of the constitution indicated that the President was the commander-in-chief and, in this capacity, he could appoint and

⁸ One such atrocity was the massacre of Cassanje, in which workers on the cotton plantations owned by Cotonang complained about their working conditions and exploitation as they were not allowed to grow food crops. This unrest led to violence, and the subsequent Portuguese colonial army intervention killed an undisclosed number of African farmers (see Birmingham 2002: 140).

⁹ There was a slight recovery in 1977 following the state intervention in the economy through Decree Law 3/76 of 3 March, which established the basis for the nationalisation and expropriations process that followed. This recovery was followed by a significant collapse due to the 27 May political rupture.

dismiss the top military officials of the People's Armed Forces of Liberation of Angola (FAPLA).¹⁰

Although the President was the head of the Revolution Council,¹¹ the Prime Minister (hereafter PM) was the head of the Conselho de Ministros (Ministers' Council). Only this collective body, the Revolution Council, could appoint and dismiss the PM. The PM, under this constitutional law, directly oversaw the work of the ministers in the government. Clearly, this arrangement ensured some balance in the distribution of power within the MPLA ruling coalition; however, over time this political settlement proved unsustainable.

The 27 May 1977 political rupture and the silence of civil society

The post-independence constitution was very peculiar as it did not provide a clear indication that the People's Republic of Angola was leaning towards socialism. The law guaranteed a significant role for the state,¹² particularly with respect to control of the land and mineral resources. However, the constitution also indicated that the Angolan state protected private property,¹³ despite being ruled by a left-wing party that had received substantial support from socialist countries such as the Soviet Union, Cuba and Yugoslavia (Gleijeses 2002) in its fight against the two other liberation movements. This pragmatism allowed for contestation to emerge within the MPLA party-state against the MPLA leadership under Neto. Central to this contestation was the new People's Power Law, which allowed the party base to monitor the actions of the government. However, President Neto believed that this law was not progressive as it was 'against the principle of Democratic Centralism, giving the organs of local power the possibility of watching over organs of central power' (MPLA 1979: 17). This suggests that the party leadership, under Neto, wanted to rule the country with no constraints, particularly in the face of an ongoing civil war against UNITA.

According to Mabeko Tali (2001), this contestation movement was organised *around*, but not *by*, Nito Alves,¹⁴ the political commissar of the first military region during the struggle for independence and later the interior minister, on the basis that the MPLA leadership had turned 'right', betraying the Marxist-Leninist nature of

¹⁰ FAPLA was created in 1974 and was essentially the MPLA military wing, which turned into the national army after independence (MPLA 1979).

¹¹ According to the 1975 Constitutional law, Chapter III Article 35, this body temporarily replaced the People's Assembly. Article 36 indicates a balanced composition (between military and civilian officials).

¹² See Articles 9 and 11 with respect to the state control of the economy.

¹³ See Article 10.

¹⁴ See MPLA (1977) and Mabeko Tali (2001) for a detailed historical account of the events that led to this attempted *coup d'état* and its aftermath.

the party.¹⁵ The fact is that upon the failure of this ‘contestation movement’ and its attempted *coup d’état* on 27 May 1977, as the victorious MPLA leadership claims, a massive purge followed that alienated the MPLA’s base from the party’s leadership. This purge also silenced dissent and critique within the MPLA, turning the base and Angolan civil society at large into what Mabeko Tali (2001: 224) calls ‘resonance boxes’ of the party leadership’s decisions, even though Article 3 of the 1975 constitution states that ‘the people had the right to participate in the exercise of political power, through the consolidation, expansion and development of people power structures’.

In December 1977, the MPLA organised its First Congress and the party formally expressed its Marxist orientation, calling itself ‘the Party of the working class’ (MPLA 1979: 11) and uniting ‘in a solid alliance the workers, peasants, revolutionary intellectuals and other working people dedicated to the cause of the proletariat’ (MPLA 1979: 11). According to Lopo do Nascimento,¹⁶ this change was made too soon and the MPLA’s allies, the ‘Russians, said “No” to the creation of MPLA-Party of the working class, seeing it as a mistake since there were no conditions’, because the postcolonial state in Angola lacked organisational capabilities. For instance, Cramer (2006: 190) explains that ‘the MPLA had very little administrative capacity to manage a war economy’. However, as Nascimento explains, ‘members of the MPLA leadership had been accused of being bourgeois and non-socialists’ and this needed to be addressed. Therefore, to Nascimento this transformation was a ‘necessary leap forward’ to curtail the possibility of further dissent in the future, such as that which led to the events of 27 May.¹⁷

The failure of the attempted *coup d’état* was a simple victory of the ‘pragmatic’ faction within the MPLA leadership over the ‘leftist’ wing.¹⁸ It also had an immediate impact on the distribution of power within the top leadership of the party under the initial post-independence political settlement examined earlier. An amendment to the constitution’s Article 32,¹⁹ ‘duties of the president’, now granted Neto the following powers: (1) to be the head of the Conselho da Revolução; (2) the ability to appoint, preside over the oath of office ceremony and dismiss the PM and members of the cabinet; and (3) the ability to appoint, preside over the oath of office ceremony and dismiss the provincial governors.

¹⁵ Subsequently, in the First Congress of the MPLA in December 1977, the party officially and formally adopted a Marxist-Leninist orientation for the country.

¹⁶ Angolan Prime Minister from 1975 to 1977, and MPLA General Secretary from 1993 to 1998.

¹⁷ Interview in Luanda, 27 June 2018.

¹⁸ Often referred to in the literature as ‘Nitistas’ (Mabeko Tali 2001) following their main reference, Nito Alves (Interior Minister under Agostinho Neto).

¹⁹ Law No. 3/77 of 16 August gave President Neto direct control over the Council of Ministers and the government (see Vidal 2003: 7).

Once President Neto was granted these additional powers, he launched his clemency and pardon policy to allow for national reconciliation in 1978 (Vidal 2016). However, this clemency policy became a key co-optation tool. Clemency was limited to former dissidents from the MPLA,²⁰ cadres from the defeated FNLA and those from the FLEC (the Portuguese acronym for the Enclave of Cabinda Liberation Front) and excluded UNITA (Vidal 2016: 824), which at the time was waging a military operation against the ruling party. A further amendment to the constitution in 1979, through Law No. 1/79 of 16 January, eliminated the post of PM and deputy prime ministers. Nascimento, the then Prime Minister, explained that this ‘power concentration [in the presidency was] meant to create an entity that would be acknowledged by everyone as the leader’.²¹ Additionally, Lopo do Nascimento argued:

President Neto had a more prestigious position than the Prime Minister [him], and in a war situation he [Neto] could marshal support. The President came from the liberation struggle, and in a country at war it could not be an unknown young man [Nascimento himself] to open doors.²²

This suggests that the events of 27 May played an important role in aligning the post-colonial institutions with the prevailing balance of power within the MPLA ruling coalition, which at the time favoured President Neto. Neto’s clemency policy resulted in an influx of Angolans who had relocated to neighbouring countries, particularly the former Zaire (present-day Democratic Republic of the Congo – DRC), to escape the armed struggle for independence in the 1960s. Some of these Angolans left the country following the massacre of Cassanje. In a context of declining economic activity, following the collapse of the non-mineral sector due to the already mentioned exodus of white settlers, there were no job opportunities available for the returnees, and civil servants also saw their purchasing power decline. According to Messiant (1999: 78), in these circumstances the MPLA, as a party-state, became an essential provider of access to key services, such as special shops, and goods such as housing and personal vehicles, according to the position occupied by the individual within the state institutions. Party membership was also essential to access foreign exchange currency through job-related travel abroad.

Civil society responded to the increased control of public life in a number of ways. Messiant (1999: 79) argues that the informal economy, for instance, emerged in Angola through measures taken by the state to ‘compensate’ for its inability to meet the population’s basic needs. One such measure was to allow workers, particularly those in the manufacturing sector such as beverages, to be paid in goods for their own

²⁰ Mabeko Tali (2001) provides a full account of these dissident movements within the MPLA.

²¹ Interview in Luanda, 27 June 2018.

²² Interview in Luanda, 27 June 2018.

consumption. This allowed workers to sell those goods in the informal market, thus generating additional revenue for themselves. In this context, the informal economy could be regarded as a coping strategy adopted by society to survive the already mentioned collapse of the non-mineral economy following independence in 1975.

President Neto did not live long enough to consolidate his political control over the party and the state, or his grip on the key economic institutions of the country, as he died in September 1979. Nonetheless, these amendments to the constitution allowed for a more stable settlement, aligning formal institutions to better reflect the actual distribution of power within the MPLA ruling coalition in the aftermath of the 27 May failed *coup d'état*. The collapse of the settler economy and the subsequent nationalisation and confiscation process meant that the access to resources provided by control of the state was mediated through the party. This shift in the macro political settlement that led to the concentration of power under President Neto laid the foundations for his successor, José Eduardo dos Santos, to establish an Angolan private sector with linkages to the MPLA when economic reforms were introduced in the late 1980s.

***Partidarização* of the transition to a market economy under a multiparty system**

In 1984 the People's Assembly created, upon President Dos Santos's request, the Conselho da Defesa e Segurança (Defence and Security Council),²³ 'a restricted collegial body to run State affairs and direct the war, as structure to support the Head of State and Commander-in-Chief of FAPLA' (MPLA 1985: 28). In fact, this body was a *functional substitute* of President Neto's Conselho da Revolução, discussed in the previous section.²⁴ Indeed, in Article 4 of the Law No. 3/84 of 26 January, the law that created the Defence and Security Council, lines d, e, f and g clearly support this argument.²⁵ Clearly, this law placed Dos Santos in a privileged position to control the country's foreign exchange earnings and allocate resources with no supervision from the party structures. This state of affairs allowed for the emergence of a centralised

²³ Law No. 3/84 of 26 January DR I Serie – No. 22.

²⁴ Borrowing from Gerschenkron (1962), this new body, Article 4 of Law No. 3/84, allowed President Dos Santos to enjoy the same degree of control (over the MPLA party and the state) and autonomy that his predecessor, President Neto, enjoyed in the aftermath of the 1977 failed *coup d'état*.

²⁵ These lines indicate that the new Defence and Security Council was responsible for coordinating the management of the economy and the socio-economic development of the country; managing, coordinating and controlling the tasks of all governmental departments including state secretaries and local state administration; and controlling the execution of all financial transactions with foreign entities.

presidential clientelism system (Vidal 2016). After securing control of the party and the state, through the creation of the Defence and Security Council in 1984, Dos Santos vowed to address the country's ongoing economic crisis during the Second Congress of the MPLA Party of the Working Class in 1985.²⁶

The introduction of multiparty democracy in 1990s, following the Bicesse Peace Agreement,²⁷ was an attempt to allow the dispersion of political power in the context of increasing economic concentration around oil. Growth in the oil sector, a capital-intensive sector, meant that very few jobs were created. In such circumstances, the MPLA ruling coalition had to come to terms with its own base in order to compete in the country's first-ever democratic elections. The approval of a new constitutional law in 1992 opened up the country for multiparty democracy, leading to the creation of new political parties, the return of the FNLA leadership from exile and the transformation of UNITA from a rebel movement to a political party. Under the Bicesse Peace Agreement, Angolans would for the first time democratically vote for their representatives in the new National Assembly and for the country's president.

By resuming the war following the 1992 election, Savimbi (the president of UNITA) severely undercut his claim to be fighting for democracy and alienated many of those who had supported him and his party in the 1980s in the United States, particularly among the Republican party (McCombs 1986), and in apartheid South Africa during the Cold War (Gleijeses 2002, 2013).²⁸ At the early stage of the renewed civil war, UNITA gained the upper hand by seizing large chunks of territory,

²⁶ The following were identified as key objectives in the five-year plan: 'Achieving greater work and production efficiency and improving supplies for the population, as the precondition for guaranteeing the process of social and economic stabilisation; Giving priority to economic relations with foreign countries and promoting exports, as decisive factor in balancing the national economy; Reformulating methods of running the economy within the framework of planned socialist management and, in order to strengthen it, improving methods of running the economy and applying value relations more efficiently' (MPLA 1985: 51–2).

²⁷ The Bicesse Peace Agreement was signed between the Government of the People's Republic of Angola and UNITA in 1991 in Portugal. This agreement allowed for the first general elections in Angola, under UN supervision, in September 1992 to elect the Members of the National Assembly (parliament) and a new president. The MPLA won 54 per cent of 220 seats but Dos Santos had to face a run-off election with Savimbi; however, that never took place as the war resumed upon Savimbi's refusal to accept the results of the election. The document can be retrieved from <https://peacemaker.un.org/node/143> (accessed 20 April 2021).

²⁸ Official support for UNITA's war effort faded following the 1988 agreement between apartheid South Africa and the Cuban–Angolan coalition. This agreement allowed for the full implementation of UN Security Council Resolution 435/78, which granted the independence of Namibia in 1990. In 1994, multiparty democracy and general elections in South Africa brought to power the African National Congress (ANC), a former ally of the MPLA in Angola.

including major cities such as Huambo in the central region of Angola in 1993.²⁹ In the face of UNITA's renewed military threat, the MPLA ruling elite once again chose to unite behind its leader, Dos Santos, who still controlled the oil rents through SONANGOL.³⁰ However, Dos Santos had to make substantial concessions to quell internal dissent.

To meet these challenges, Dos Santos played the clientelism card by, for instance, authorising the hiring,³¹ in 1993, of South Africa-based Executive Outcomes to secure oil facilities in Soyo city and later, in Lunda North province, the diamond mining areas in Cafunfo town (Reno 1997: 177–8).³² Later, in 1995, Dos Santos rewarded some army generals by authorising the creation of Lumanhe Extração Mineira, Importação e Exportação, and providing the company with 15 per cent of the shares in two valuable alluvial mining projects, that is, the Chitotolo and Cuango (Partnership Africa Canada 2007).³³

Further concessions were made to select members of the MPLA party (and to people associated to them) when Saneamento Económico Financeiro (SEF)³⁴ was implemented (Vidal 2016: 841–2). SEF reforms involved the targeted privatisation of state-owned assets,³⁵ which was desirable following Angola's acceptance as a member of both the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) in 1989. Indeed, the privatisation programme provided an opportunity to create an indigenous capitalist class with strong links to the MPLA ruling elite,³⁶ also known in the literature as

²⁹ The second most populated city in post-independence Angola, after Luanda, was under UNITA military occupation between 1993 and 1994.

³⁰ Changes in SONANGOL Statutes in 1991, Decree Law No. 8/91 of 16 March, created a Board of Directors (Article 12) in which the president was appointed by the Council of Ministers headed by Dos Santos, thereby ensuring the president's control.

³¹ This strategy was meant to deprive UNITA of revenues from illegal diamond mining, which was estimated at USD 600 million/year from 1994 to 1997 (Hodges 2007: 178).

³² Reno (1997) explains that following the post-election war, in 1993 the Dos Santos government contracted military 'advisers', such as the South African Executive Outcomes and the American Military Professional Resources, to train Angolan personnel in the new national unity army.

³³ According to Partnership Africa Canada (2007: 7–9) this company is controlled by Angolan army generals António Emílio Faceira, Armando da Cruz Neto (former Chief of the Joint Staff General), Luís Pereira Faceira, Adriano Makevela McKenzie, João Baptista de Matos (former Chief of the Joint Staff General) and Carlos Alberto Hendrick Vaal da Silva (retired Inspector General of the Angolan armed forces), who was mistakenly identified in this publication as a civilian. Between 1997 and 2006 Lumanhe's 'cumulative net income, after taxes, reached an astounding US\$120 million' (Partnership Africa Canada 2007: 7).

³⁴ A programme designed by a task force comprised of Angolan and Hungarian experts intended to promote an 'Economic and Financial Restructuring' of the economy (Maximino 2017).

³⁵ This was a way to ensure that the MPLA party would remain viable, with access to funds, in a multiparty system.

³⁶ An Angolan academic (interview in Luanda, 6 August 2018).

‘the party entrepreneurs’ (Aguilar 2003; Vidal 2016), who were expected to lead the country’s structural transformation in the post-war transition.

In 1998, during the Fourth Congress of the MPLA, President Dos Santos managed to oust from the MPLA Central Committee and its executive body, the Political Bureau, influential figures such as Lúcio Lara and two former prime ministers, Lopo do Nascimento and Marcolino Moco.³⁷ This signalled a change in the political settlement and was intended to consolidate Dos Santos’s power, that is, curtail dissent and reassert his political control over the party and the state following the introduction of multiparty democracy. A year later, Dos Santos expanded his Office of the President of the Republic, through the Presidential Decree No 8/99 of 19 February 1999, into Casa Civil (Civil Office), Casa Militar (Military Office) and Secretaria Geral (General Administration), which allowed him to reaffirm the already evident presidential control over the civil and military structures of the state. This new institutional arrangement became essential to promote most of the changes observed in the post-war period.

Meanwhile, UNITA continued to be a major threat, waging war despite the 1994 Lusaka Protocol,³⁸ which had helped to de-escalate the post-1992 election war, particularly between 1994 and 1998. This was a peculiar period for UNITA. On the one hand, Savimbi sent his elected party members to take their seats in the National Assembly in Luanda and help build the new democratic institutions; on the other hand, Savimbi himself refused to return to Luanda and take part in this new political landscape. Therefore, Savimbi’s ambiguity made it impossible for UNITA, in the National Assembly, to check the deeds and misdeeds of the MPLA government under Dos Santos.

The 1992 constitutional law allowed for opposition political parties with seats at the National Assembly to demand accountability from the MPLA government, particularly with respect to the new strategy of accumulation that the state-led market economy provided.³⁹ Furthermore, the 1990s democratic reforms enabled the emergence of private independent newspapers such as the *Imparcial Fax* and later *Folha 8*

³⁷ Lara is recognised as an influential figure, alongside Neto, in the emergence of the MPLA during the struggle for independence (Club-K 2016). Nascimento, who was Prime Minister during the transition to independence and later in the first post-independence government under President Neto, was reduced to *militante de base* (simple party member with no key responsibility). He was regarded by factions of the MPLA ruling elite, at the time, as a potential alternative to Dos Santos for leadership of the MPLA (Club-K 2014). Moco was the General Secretary of MPLA between 1991 and 1992, and PM from 1992 to 1996.

³⁸ This refers to an agreement signed between the Angolan MPLA government and UNITA following the post-1992-election armed conflict to address the outstanding military issues from the 1991 Bicesse Peace Agreement. The document can be retrieved from <https://peacemaker.un.org/node/145> (accessed 3 March 2019).

³⁹ Article 103.

and *Angolense*,⁴⁰ which contributed to maintaining the pressure on the MPLA leadership. However, through a strategy of co-optation and threats,⁴¹ the MPLA ruling coalition under Dos Santos prevailed.

By then, Angolan civil society was already resisting the control of the party-state. For instance, when the Lusaka Protocol collapsed in 1998, a number of civil society organisations decided to act to bring the two warring parties, the MPLA-led government and UNITA under Savimbi, together to negotiate a new settlement. These groups included Grupo Angolano de Reflexão e Paz (The Angolan Reflection and Peace Group) and Mulheres Pela Democracia (Women for Democracy) (Pain & Reis 2006: 59).

Prior to the 1990s, all civil society organisations and associations had to seek authorisation from the relevant state institutions in order to operate (Pestana 2003). Due to Article 3 of the 1975 constitutional law, which allowed for the creation of the already mentioned people's power structures, in 1989 it was possible to establish the Associação Cívica Angolana (Angolan Civic Association – ACA). ACA was formally recognised by the Ministry of Justice in January 1990 (Pestana 2003: 17), but this association was disallowed later, allegedly for violating state security (Abrantes 2014: 247).

The 1992 constitutional reform made it explicit, as part of the 'Fundamental Principles', Article 3, that 'the Angolan people shall exercise political power through periodic universal suffrage to choose their representatives, by means of referendums and other forms of democratic participation in national life'. This represented a serious contradiction of the prevailing political settlement. By law, people should have had equal access to the opportunities that the transition to a market economy provided. But in reality, as will be illustrated, access was limited to those with linkages to the ruling party in Angola, which is an indication that *partidarização* was to play a key role in the viability of the MPLA under a multiparty system.

Early in the 1990s, a number of influential individuals emerged in the private sector, including Armindo César Sibingo (CEO of César & Filhos Group) and Mello Xavier (CEO of Mello Xavier Group), who were both elected to the National

⁴⁰ *Imparcial Fax* was established in 1994 by Fernando Ricardo Mello Esteves, aka Ricardo Mello; *Folha 8* was established in 1995 by William Tonet; and *Angolense* was established in 1997 by Américo Gonçalves and Graça Campos.

⁴¹ The regime would accuse anyone who criticised its accumulation and appropriation of state assets of being a paid agent of UNITA. Ricardo Mello, a journalist, director and owner of the independent newspaper *Imparcial Fax*, was murdered on 18 January 1995, and those responsible for his death were never found or tried. UNITA deputies in the National Assembly were forced to denounce Savimbi's post-election war in order to remain safe in the cities. Former UNITA members such as Jorge Valentim, George Chicoty, Nzau Puna and Paulo Tchিপilica later joined MPLA and were granted key roles (such as ministers and ambassadors) within the MPLA led government.

Assembly under the MPLA in the 1992 general elections; Bartolomeu Dias (CEO of Bartolomeu Dias Group) and Laurentino Abel Martins (CEO of L.A.M. Group) are also well-known examples. A remarkable feature of these business people, apart from their political linkages, is that they focused their investments mostly on trade (retail), hospitality, construction and road freight transport. Clearly, the state did not push the emerging indigenous capitalists towards the productive sector such as manufacturing or agriculture. Agriculture was a risky sector in this period due to the armed conflict, and the overvaluation of the local currency could render the domestic manufacturing sector less competitive (Ferreira 1999).

A second strategy employed by the MPLA ruling elite in this period to expand the private sector despite the limited organisational capabilities of an emerging capitalist class was to create business conglomerates attached to, or in some cases with strong links to, the party and/or its high-profile members. Two party-linked companies were prominent in this period, that is, UCERBA (União de Cervejas e Bebidas de Angola), the party's business wing for the beverage manufacturing sector, and GEFI (Sociedade de Gestão e Participações Financeiras).⁴² GEFI was created to manage business assets and investments linked to the MPLA and as such it is the main business wing of the party (Morais 2010). Through GEFI's business network, the MPLA was able to enter the following sectors: beverage, marketing and publicity (to support its political campaigns), hospitality and mass communications (see Figure 2). Entry to the hospitality and beverage sectors resulted from the above-mentioned privatisation programme, whereas the expansion to mass communication resulted from new investments. Expansion to the banking sector took place in the post-war period.

Another relevant company with strong links to the MPLA is Grupo GEMA,⁴³ created in 1994. Grupo GEMA's CEO, José Leitão da Costa e Silva, held successive positions in the Dos Santos cabinet from 1988 until 2003. José Leitão has been the secretary of the Ministers' Council as well as the minister head of President Dos Santos's Civil Office. This placed the company in a unique position to acquire stakes in different sectors during the 1990s privatisation programme. According to an informant⁴⁴ and Morais (2009), Grupo GEMA started with stakes in the beverage manufacturing and real estate sectors in this period and enjoyed a formidable expansion to sectors

⁴² According to Morais (2010: 7), it was created on '21 September 1992 a week before the first multiparty election in Angola'.

⁴³ Further evidence is provided by Morais (2009) in which he identifies some of key MPLA-related figures presumably attached to this company and presents an account of the process of expansion of Grupo GEMA. José Leitão da Costa e Silva is also known as José Leitão.

⁴⁴ Grupo Gema board member, interview in Luanda, 26 July 2018.

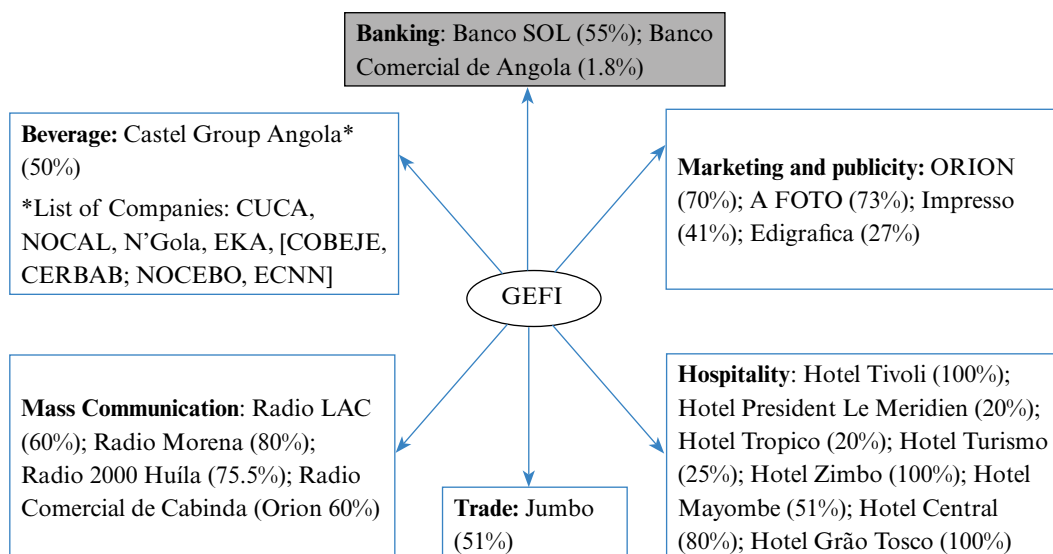


Figure 2. MPLA Party Business Network.

Source: Author, from [Morais \(2009, 2010\)](#).

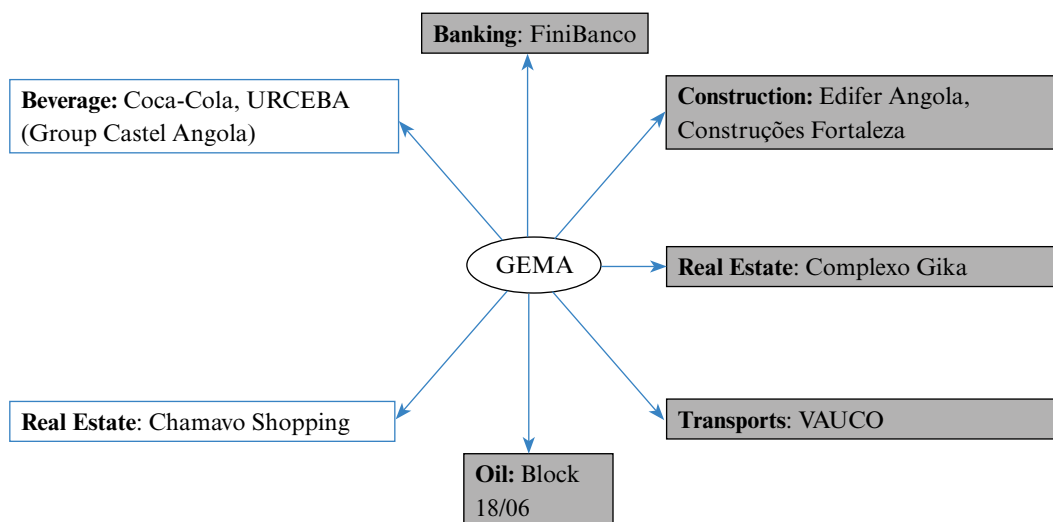


Figure 3. Grupo GEMA business network.

Source: Author, from [Expansão \(2011: 30–2\)](#).

such as banking, construction, oil and transport in the post-war period, as illustrated in [Figure 3](#).

The third group was that linked to the armed forces generals, as mentioned earlier in this section, who were very involved in the mining sector. It is noteworthy that, according to the Angolan Diamond Law, Law No. 16/94 of 7 October, Article 2, the

mining concession rights needed to be approved by the Council of Ministers presided by President Dos Santos. This meant that access was also at the president's discretion. Indeed, another informant,⁴⁵ the CEO of a well-established company in the oil and gas, mining exploration and services sector, explained: 'When the company [his company] moved to the diamond mining sector members of the MPLA political bureau and generals were the only ones who owned mining concessions.' Those generals approached our informant (PV25) because they knew she was a mining engineer. She then scouted the market to find a foreign business partner to start the project. Later, PV25 also managed to secure her own concession. MPLA-linked generals' activities were not limited to the mining sector. The generals took advantage of the 1992 Bicesse Peace Agreement, which allowed for a reduction in army and police personnel, to diversify towards the private security services. As a result, some of the surplus labour that once belonged to the defence and security forces found employment in the private security sector with companies such as ANGO-SEGU, ALFA 5, TELESERVICE and COPEBE, all of which were linked to key MPLA generals.⁴⁶

It is possible to see that the new context created by the transition to a market economy and a multiparty system was also essential for the MPLA to ensure, through *partidarização*, that key factions of the ruling coalition as well as the party, through its business conglomerate, would seize control of key sectors of the economy, which in turn would ensure the party's financial survival in a more competitive environment. The emergence of the party's business conglomerates and key factions as leading business entities was a way to ensure support for the party's leadership under President Dos Santos. Following the death of Savimbi, the balance of power within the ruling coalition shifted in favour of Dos Santos, and with it *partidarização* reached new dimensions.

⁴⁵ Interview in Luanda, 20 August 2018.

⁴⁶ This was first reported in the news article 'Investir em Angola é agora a divisa dos nossos ricos' [Investing in Angola is the new motto of our [Angolan] rich people] in *Semanario Angolense*. Later, this article was republished by different news outlets such as the website <https://forum.motorguia.net/off-topic/85913-os-50-angolanos-mais-ricos-de-angola.html> (accessed 9 September 2020). According to the news report, ANGO-SEGU is linked to Gen. Fernando Miala (former head of SIE – External Secret Services, and, under President João Lourenço, head of the Intelligence Services and State Security), Jose Maria (former head of the Army Secret Services) and Santana Andre Pitra (Petroff), former Interior Minister and Commander of the Angolan Police. ALFA-5, a leading company in security services to mining projects, was created in February 1993 and is linked to Gen. Joao de Matos. TELESERVICE (linked to generals João de Matos, França Ndalú, Armando da Cruz Neto, Luís Faceira, António Faceira and Hendrick Vaal Neto) operates mainly in the oil sector, providing security to oil companies. COPEBE is linked to Pedro Hendrick Vaal Neto (former Minister for Mass Communication), Gen. Roberto Leal Monteiro 'Ngongo' (former Minister of Interior) and Nelson Cosme (former Ambassador).

The post-war political settlement and new dimensions of *partidarização*

The end of the Angolan civil war in 2002,⁴⁷ following Savimbi's death in combat on 22 February, marked the military victory of the MPLA ruling coalition over its main threat, UNITA. This particular event in the history of Angola coincided with the rise in oil prices to historic levels on the international market. Consequently, when the international donor community failed to convene a meeting in order to mobilise resources for the post-war reconstruction plan ([Government of Angola Ministry of Plan 2005](#)),⁴⁸ Dos Santos turned to China and secured, through an oil for infrastructure reconstruction programme ([Corkin 2013](#)), the initial funds for the post-war (re)construction.⁴⁹ This was a critical juncture and perhaps a turning point, given that a commitment by the donor community such as Mozambique received, for example, may have changed the course of history.

Some observers interpreted the loans from China as a way of propping up the elite in neo-patrimonial fashion ([Alves 2010](#); [Morais 2011, 2012](#); [Soares de Oliveira 2015](#)). However, the way the *Angola model* worked meant that no money flowed from China to Angola ([Corkin 2013](#)). Rather, the oil rents were turned into public investment and reconstruction via Chinese engineering, procurement and construction contractors completing projects costed as part of the oil for infrastructure deal, with projects chosen by the Angolan elite ([Corkin 2013](#)). Through this mechanism the MPLA ruling elite turned oil into the 'engine' of growth, turning Angola into a giant construction site ([Soares de Oliveira 2015](#)).

Without external mediation or the participation of Angolan civil society, the peace process in Angola was conducted through direct bilateral negotiations, leading to the signing of the Luena Memorandum on 4 April 2002. The MPLA ruling coalition wanted to demonstrate the involvement of 'civil society' in the peace and reconciliation process through Decree Law No. 10/94, which allowed the creation of organisations of public utility. However, this decree also allowed the emergence of

⁴⁷ Angola achieved peace in 2002 upon the death in combat of Savimbi, the leader of UNITA. However, the conflict in the northern oil-rich enclave of Cabinda is not fully resolved. According to the Uppsala Conflict Data Program, from 1989 to 2019 there were 529 deaths (<https://ucdp.uu.se/conflict/387>, accessed 5 August 2020).

⁴⁸ The argument was that Angola, being an oil- and diamond-rich country, required more transparency in the management of the revenues accrued from these natural resources rather than overseas development assistance ([Malaquias 2012](#)). However, [Anstee \(2010: para. 6\)](#) explains that the absence of the international community deprived the MPLA government of 'technical assistance in developing institutions and extending state administration and social services to the whole country'.

⁴⁹ It is estimated that by 2017 Angola had received a total of USD 42.8 billion, making it the largest single recipient in Africa ([Atkins et al. 2017](#)).

organisations such as President Dos Santos's foundation Fundação Eduardo Dos Santos (FESA, established through Resolution No. 14/96 of 20 December), as well as AJAPRAZ and Movimento Nacional Espontâneo, two organisations linked to the ruling party. The case of AJAPRAZ, an association of young Angolan refugees in Zambia, and Movimento Nacional Espontâneo is curious as they emerged within the MPLA but were used as a tool to boost President Dos Santos's image (Hodges 2004), particularly when he was reasserting his control over the party and the state in the late 1990s, as mentioned above. This can be interpreted as an indication of a fissure within the ruling coalition. Indeed, Messiant's (2001) remarkable account of Dos Santos's FESA supports this view. According to Messiant, the creation of FESA was part of Dos Santos's strategy to reassert his control over the ruling party (and the state at large), which he had lost in the transition to a multiparty system. As such, FESA must be seen as way to 'marginalize the party' (Messiant 2001: 287).

In this context, the creation of a national economic system with the 'Angolan private sector as a strategic ally' (MPLA 1998: 39–40) was regarded by the ruling elites under the leadership of President Dos Santos as necessary to ensure the country's independence. Although this strategy was first implemented in the 1990s (as illustrated in the previous section), the post-war reconstruction process provided an opportunity to reinforce and accelerate the process, although, through *partidarização*, access was still limited to those in the upper echelons of the MPLA or those with strong links to key figures in the party.

In order to legitimise the MPLA's control of the state, elections for the National Assembly were organised in 2008, six years after the end of the war, at a time when Angola's economy was growing at a significant rate,⁵⁰ and as the post-war reconstruction project was already in full swing. The MPLA won 191 seats out of the 220 seats in the National Assembly, followed by UNITA with 16 seats. These results reflected the popular resentment of UNITA and prompted the end of the National Unity Government set up in the aftermath of the first multiparty election in 1992. The 2008 electoral victory opened the way for the MPLA ruling coalition to strengthen its control over the state and the economy. A presidential election was planned for 2009 but never took place. Instead, in 2010, using the MPLA majority in the National Assembly, Dos Santos changed the constitution to better reflect the country's post-war distribution of power as an outcome of UNITA's military defeat.⁵¹

⁵⁰ UN Stat indicates an average annual GDP growth of 15 per cent between 2002 and 2008.

⁵¹ This move also upset those within the upper echelon of the MPLA ruling elite, as they could no longer monitor the activities of those in the government, thus shrinking their policy space. A clear distinction emerged between those chosen to work with Dos Santos at the cabinet, and those left out and sent to the National Assembly, with fewer opportunities to accumulate assets. To ensure the party remained under control, that is, that those at the National Assembly would not turn their back on

This constitutional reform provided the president with too much discretionary power, enabling Dos Santos to sustain his patronage network. Under the new constitution, the balance of power among the National Assembly, the judiciary and the presidency that the 1992 constitution provided was removed. Now, Dos Santos was responsible for appointing and dismissing officials in the top positions in the state structure, from ministers, state secretaries and provincial governors in the executive, to judges (in the Supreme Court, the Constitutional Courts) in the judiciary, and the top officials in the army and police, making the system presidential in extreme (Pestana 2011). This reform also changed the dynamics within the MPLA ruling coalition, as now, under the 2010 constitution, as an informant explained,⁵² ‘the party was essential for the president’s election but once elected, the president would rule unconstrained from the party structures’. From now on, it was more about the presidency and its closest collaborators than the MPLA as a party. This is important as it helps explain the MPLA’s inability to discipline the subsequent wealth accumulation process of its key members. In this light, as Lopo do Nascimento explained,⁵³ ‘who ruled the party, weakened the party’.

Outside the realm of political parties, journalists such as Rafael Marques de Morais (editor of *Maka Angola*)⁵⁴ and William Tonet (from *Folha 8*)⁵⁵ continued to report cases of corruption and the misdeeds of the MPLA ruling elite despite repeated attempts to silence them.⁵⁶ Another strategy employed by the Dos Santos-linked MPLA elite to suppress this emerging ‘intermediate class’ was to use their newly acquired economic hegemony to purchase and then close, on economic grounds, those private newspapers that were too critical towards the presidency. One such example is *Semanário Angolense*,⁵⁷ a newspaper that published a controversial article that shocked Angolan society at the time. The article, titled ‘Riqueza muda de côr. Os nossos milionários’ [Wealth changes colour. Our [Angolan] millionaires], presents a vague account of how wealth has changed ‘colour’ in post-independence Angola, providing a list of 59 postcolonial Angolan millionaires with strong links with the MPLA ruling elite.

their leader, Dos Santos tied their hands in the way that the new constitution eliminated the need for presidential elections. Now, there was only one election, that for the National Assembly. The president would be the one at the top of the party list.

⁵² An Angolan political scientist and law expert, interview in Luanda, 6 August 2018.

⁵³ Interview in Luanda, 27 June 2018.

⁵⁴ *Maka Angola* presents itself as a platform dedicated to ‘supporting democracy, fighting against corruption’ in Angola; see <https://www.makaangola.org/en/> (accessed 29 September 2022).

⁵⁵ Established in 1995; see <https://jornalf8.net/> (accessed 29 September 2022).

⁵⁶ A noteworthy account of this pressure is presented by Morais (2019).

⁵⁷ Initially published under the title *Angolense*, created in 1997, it was rebranded as *Semanário Angolense* in 2003, two months after the publication, on 11 January 2003, of the above-mentioned controversial article.

The editor was bold enough to include a picture of Dos Santos and to put the article on the front page. Later, in October 2005, the same newspaper published an article titled ‘INVESTIR em Angola é agora a divisa dos nossos ricos’ [Investing in Angola is now the motto of our [Angolan] rich people]. This article reported that the Angolan ruling elite’s interests and ideas had shifted and that they were now investing in the country as the new indigenous capitalist class, listing the companies linked to them and their preferred sectors. The article also presented a list of those with accumulated wealth of over USD 100 million, led by Dos Santos, and those below USD 50 million. This publication was closed in 2015 on economic grounds after being acquired in 2010 by Media Invest, a company linked to the MPLA (Ndomba 2016).

The mobilisation of civil society, which had started in the 1990s, increased when Dos Santos’s hegemony seemed uncontested. Understanding how this was managed is also relevant to our understanding of the dominant political settlement in Angola during this period. The 2011 Arab Spring protests in North Africa inspired a new kind of social protest in Angola.⁵⁸ Young activists made use of social media tools, thanks to the public and private investments in the telecommunication sector, to call on segments of civil society, mainly those from urban and suburban settings, to protest against what they perceived as the misdeeds of the state.⁵⁹ However, this time they had a specific target within the administration, that is, Dos Santos himself. Protesting against Dos Santos was made possible by the 2010 constitution and reiterated by a 2013 Constitutional Court ruling, which named the president as the sole holder of executive power in Angola. This strategy caused so much concern to the state that it reverted to an authoritarian strategy, to the point that in 2015, 17 young activists were arrested and accused of plotting to overturn the government (Club-K 2015; Sul d’Angola 2015).

The resulting national and international outcry took the MPLA ruling elite by surprise, and calls to respect basic human rights in Angola came from different segments of civil society and from international institutions (United Nations 2015). To avoid losing face, the MPLA-dominated National Assembly approved an Amnesty Law, Law No. 11/16 of 12 August. This law allowed for those young activists who had been sentenced to jail time of two to eight years in March 2016 to be released. At the same time, this amnesty also exonerated from prosecution those within the regime who had committed common crimes (for instance corruption) that had been likely to receive a maximum sentence of 12 years in prison prior to 11 November 2015.

⁵⁸ For a chronological account of the protests in Angola, see Luamba (2017). AC7 (interview in Luanda, 6 August 2018) identifies the yellow fever and malaria crises as factors that propelled protests.

⁵⁹ Vidal (2015: 86–8) presents a stimulating account of this new phase of civil protests with particular reference to the emergence of the movement nicknamed ‘revolutionary movement’, and ‘Revus’ by the Angolan press (Luamba 2017).

In the end, the 2016 amnesty law played to the advantage of Dos Santos and his close associates.

Towards the end of the period, particularly after 2013, when the country's GDP growth reached 6.8 per cent, the highest since 2009, economic growth slowed down due to a significant drop in oil prices, from USD 109/bbl in 2013 to USD 44/bbl in 2016. The state was unable to deliver on its electoral promises of 'Growing More to Distribute Better' as there was no growth to redistribute, leading to questions of legitimacy and contestation even within the party. To make matters worse, the banking system in Angola lost most of its correspondent banking in US dollars (Sampaio 2016).⁶⁰ This was due to the presence of politically exposed persons (PEPs) in the sector, a significant lack of compliance with new international regulations aimed at preventing financing for terrorism and money laundering, and tougher regulations in foreign countries, particularly in the United States (Levin & Coburn 2010).⁶¹

Clearly, in the post-war context, *partidarização* has achieved new dimensions. The members of the new leading business class are all from the MPLA ruling elite. In contrast to the late 1980s and 1990s, when it was possible to see the party's ascendancy (through its business conglomerates) and the emergence of three different factions within the MPLA, in the post-war period, members of Dos Santos's inner circle, such as his daughter, Isabel Dos Santos, and his head of the military office, General Kopelipa, have taken advantage of the shift in the balance of power in his favour. However, it became evident, upon the collapse of oil prices on global markets, that those handpicked by Dos Santos to be the 'strong and efficient national entrepreneurs and private investors to drive the creation of more wealth and employment' (Dos Santos 2013) were not yet ready for the task. Ultimately, by employing *partidarização* to limit access to the opportunities that the transition to a market economy provided, the MPLA ruling coalition under President Dos Santos, as mentioned earlier, was unable to deliver on its electoral promises. Through internal and external pressure, and faced with a possible loss in the 2017 elections, Dos Santos surprised his peers at the MPLA Central Committee by announcing that he would retire from political life in 2018 (Dos Santos 2016), thus putting an end to one of the longest-serving terms in office in Africa, second only to Teodoro Obiang Nguema Mbasogo in Equatorial Guinea.

⁶⁰ In 2015 the Bank of America suspended the sale of US dollar bills to Angolan banks due to lack of compliance and tighter control and fines by the American regulator, and in 2016 the German Deutsche Bank stopped doing dollar clearing for Angolan banks. It is noteworthy that this situation was not unique to Angola, as a 2015 World Bank report indicates a trend particularly for major currencies such as the US dollar and the euro (World Bank 2015).

⁶¹ This report was particularly damaging for Dos Santos's government and indicated the need to address the issue of PEPs within the banking system.

Conclusion

Even though the phenomenon of *partidarização* is common in countries that have experienced both one-party systems under a central planning economy such as Angola and the other Lusophone African countries, the case of Angola, as this article has highlighted, indicates that *partidarização* has been a key element in the postcolonial state formation and helps explain the MPLA's grip on power in Angola since independence. However, *partidarização* has taken different forms and shapes depending on the prevailing macro political context. There is no doubt that a strong emphasis on *partidarização* helps explain President Dos Santos's long tenure in office, but it also led to his resignation.

President João Lourenço emphasised in a press interview in December 2018, after securing his control over the party, that the MPLA had won the 2017 elections and that only MPLA members were to be included in the government. In the current context of crisis in Angola, in which there are few resources to redistribute and the emerging private sector is still dependent on the state, the ruling party is set to continue to mediate access to valuable resources. The MPLA has won every election in Angola to date, and we do not foresee a change at least in the near future. Therefore, *partidarização* is likely to continue to be an important tool to limit access to resources that are controlled by the state.

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