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FREEDOM OF THE PRESS

Angola

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Despite constitutional guarantees that protect freedom of expression and the press, media in Angola operate in a restrictive environment, and conditions deteriorated during 2012. State-run media continued to be the principal source of information, as the government maintained tight control over private media outlets through legal, political, and security-related means.

Laws regarding state security and insult hamper the free activities of the media. In 2010, the parliament passed a new state security law to replace a 1978 law, known as Article 26, which the government often used to imprison opposition journalists and activists. While the new law represents an improvement, it still allows for the detention of persons who "insult" the Republic of Angola or the president in "public meetings or by disseminating words, images, writings, or sound." Defamation and libel continue to be crimes punishable by imprisonment, and politicians enjoy immunity from any reporting deemed to be "offensive." In June 2011, William Tonet, editor and owner of the newspaper *Folha 8*, was sued for libel by three prominent army generals after he accused senior military officials close to President José Eduardo dos Santos of corruption. In October of that year, he was given a one-year prison sentence and fined the equivalent of \$105,000—an amount greater than the fine imposed for murder. The presiding judge threatened to punish journalists if they recorded the trial. Tonet's appeal was still pending at the end of 2012. In November 2012, nine generals sued journalist and activist Rafael Marques and his publisher, Tinta da China, for libel over his 2011 book *Diamantes de Sangue—Corrupção e Tortura em Angola*, in which he accused several military officers of engaging in torture and other human rights violations in collusion with private mining companies. Marques had also attempted to bring a criminal complaint against the generals, but the case was thrown out by the attorney general.

In March 2011, the government introduced a cybercrime bill that would have expanded the authorities' ability to seize citizens' personal data and prosecute those who make antigovernment statements online. The bill won initial approval in the parliament, but in the face international pressure and objections from civil society, the government later withdrew it.

Angola became one of the first African countries to enact a freedom of information law in 2006, granting citizens access to government-generated documents. However, accessing information remains extremely difficult in practice.

Since gaining independence in 1975, Angola has been dominated by two political parties, dos Santos's Popular Movement for the Liberation of Angola (MPLA) and the opposition National Union for the Total Independence of Angola (UNITA). The ruling MPLA continues to give preferential treatment to state-owned media and has been known to bar access to journalists covering opposition events. Interviews with top politicians and state officials, as well as access to information related to the government, are usually only granted to progovernment or state-run outlets, and state media often demand payment to cover opposition politics. The president and certain ministries also have the right to censor media content.

Self-censorship by journalists at both state-run and private outlets is commonplace in the coercive environment created by the government and security forces. Two prominent incidents of self-censorship occurred in 2012: the Portuguese public broadcaster Rádio e Televisão de Portugal (RTP) canceled a radio program in January after it discussed corruption among the Angolan elite, and in late October the government-connected owners of the weekly *Seminário Angolense* halted publication of an issue containing the full text of a speech by the leader of UNITA.

Journalists continued to be harassed, intimidated, attacked, and imprisoned in 2012. In March, journalist Coque Mukuta of the privately owned Rádio Despertar received written threats at his home, which was then attacked on multiple occasions in late April by unknown individuals. In the restive northern exclave of Cabinda—where press restrictions are more severe and a secessionist movement has been active for years—computers, hard drives, and reporting documents were stolen in June from the home of Voice of America reporter and human rights lawyer José Manuel Gimbi, one of the only independent journalists in the region. Gimbi had been targeted in the past,

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PRESS STATUS

Not Free

PRESS FREEDOM SCORE

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including in an October 2011 incident in which his children were threatened by armed men, but police have refused to comprehensively investigate the cases. No journalists were known to have been murdered in 2012, though Guinea-Bissau journalist Milocas Pereira, who was based in Luanda, disappeared in May after reporting on possible Angolan military involvement in a coup and related crises in Guinea-Bissau in April. Pereira had reportedly told a friend that she feared for her life after being attacked by a group of unknown people in early May, and that she was planning to leave the country.

Reporters also faced harassment and difficulties in covering sensitive news stories, particularly the antigovernment protests that occurred repeatedly during the year. In March, three journalists were forced to hide in nearby houses after plainclothes police attacked a demonstration they were covering in the Cazenga neighborhood of Luanda, while in Benguela, human rights activist Jesse Lufendo was arrested for taking photographs as police dispersed a peaceful protest; he was sentenced to 45 days in prison for resisting police officers. In July, while arresting participants at a youth protest against dos Santos in Luanda, police detained Mukuta, who was reporting for Voice of America at the time, and Isaac Manuel, a journalist for RTP. Human Rights Watch reported that in several instances, the government also forced protesters to issue false proclamations on state television, blaming opposition parties for the demonstrations.

The government continued to persecute Tonet and *Folha 8* in 2012, raiding the paper's offices and confiscating computers in March. Seven staff members, including editor in chief Fernando Baxe, were called in for questioning in June by police from the National Directorate of Criminal Investigations as part of a campaign of harassment following the December 2011 publication of a satirical photo montage suggesting that the president and other high government officials were criminals. In October, a judge held Tonet in contempt for practicing law after his license was revoked by the Angolan bar association, at the behest of military officials.

The government both owns and keeps tight control over the largest media outlets in the country. The state-owned newspaper, *Jornal de Angola*, and television channel, Televisão Pública de Angola (TPA), remain the most widely accessed media sources in the country, and together with state-owned Radio Nacional de Angola (RNA), they are the only outlets with a truly national reach. While more than a dozen privately owned newspapers operate, most are owned by individuals with connections to the government or ruling party, and are distributed primarily in urban areas. Nevertheless, several independent weeklies are critical of the government, with *Folha 8*, *Agora*, and *Jornal Angolense* being the most prominent. Privately owned radio stations are not allowed to use repeaters to extend their broadcast signals outside their home province; they must instead open a new station in every province in which they wish to broadcast, making private radio penetration outside Luanda extremely limited.

Denial of state and private advertising as a method of pressuring independent news outlets continues to be a problem. Some newspapers have reported sudden losses of revenue when multiple advertisers, presumably under government coercion, collectively stopped purchasing ad space. Authorities and private owners occasionally seize and destroy entire editions of newspapers that carry stories critical of the government.

Internet penetration in Angola is rather low, at 17 percent of the population in 2012. Although the medium remains less restricted than radio, television, or print outlets, it is generally only accessible to a small part of the population in Luanda.

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