

30 April 2018

GOVT-337-001, Authoritarianism in the Modern Era

Professor Glover

The purpose of this paper was to make an original argument regarding contemporary authoritarianism. Additional research and sources outside of the course reading list was expected.

Authoritarian Perpetuation in Angola Vis à Vis Namibia

Angola is an oil-rich nation along the coast of the Gulf of Guinea, bridging equatorial and Southern Africa. Along Angola's southern border is Namibia, a sparsely populated and mineral rich nation. Despite these two nations have differing colonial histories, their violent struggles for independence part of a transnational decolonization struggle, collectively called the South African Border War, connected Angola and Namibia. Besides their ideologically aligned independence struggles being intertwined through combat and solidarity, both countries share many socioeconomic similarities. Both are resource dependent states, Angola being primarily dependent on oil revenue and diamonds, while Namibia is also heavily dependent upon diamonds and other extractive industries¹. Both are ruled by dominant parties, which participated in their independence struggles. And the leaders of said parties SWAPO (South West African People's Organisation) and MPLA (Movimento Popular de Libertação de Angola), only retired after prolonged periods as the executive. Additionally, they share people, such as the heavily influential Ovambo people, whom make up the majority of SWAPO's support base, whom live in Northern Namibia and Southern Angola. Both Angola and Namibia have some of the most

¹ Munslow, Barry. "Angola: The Politics of Unsustainable Development." *Third World Quarterly* 20, no. 3, 1999: 551

distinct wealth inequality in the world and are arguably controlled by independence-era elites, whom have simply occupied the position previously held by the colonizers². However, post-independence these nations have seemingly taken on significantly differing polities. There is a 53-point difference between Angola and Namibia's Freedom House scores with the former's 2016 aggregate score being a 24. What has led to Angola's continued authoritarian character, when Namibia, a nation of similar origins and with a tied history to Angola, is considered a successful example of peaceful, democratic rule in Africa? I argue that democratization was neither an intention of the ruling MPLA or physically possible, instead President Dos Santos and the MPLA focused on power consolidation and wealth accumulation. They view opposition as a physical threat because present day Angola is the product of a revolutionary struggle and prolonged civil war of 27 years. Moreover, Namibia is an exception, in regard to Southern African decolonization struggles, because of the period and nature of its decolonization. However, I also argue that Namibia is falsely portrayed as a successful democracy and shares many political characteristics with Angola.

Angola had endured Portuguese colonization since the 16th century, although Portuguese administration only fully manifested itself in the late 19th century. Angola participated in the collective nationalist movements in Lusophone Africa against Portugal in form the early 1960s-1974 when the Carnation Revolution in Portugal³ led to a regime change (and signaled the 3rd wave of democratization) and a very rapid decolonization process, ending with Angola's independence in 1975. However, the country was then immediately thrown into a civil war perpetuated by the various liberation movements MPLA, UNITA (União Nacional para a

² Melber, Henning. "Namibia: A trust betrayed - again?" *Review of African Political Economy* 38 (127), 2011: 103.

³ De Meneses, Filipe Ribeiro and McNamara, Robert. "South Africa and the Aftermath of Portugal's 'Exemplary' Decolonization: The Security Dimension." *Portuguese Studies* 29, no. 2, 2013: 228.

Independência Total de Angola), and FNLA (Frente Nacional de Libertação de Angola). The conflict was further escalated by becoming a Cold War battle ground that pitted South African Defense Forces, and their proxies, FNLA and UNITA, against the Soviet Union supported MPLA and significant Cuban military involvement⁴. In 1992 MPLA shifted its ideological association away from Marxism and somewhat convincingly began to democratize: however, given this was during the civil war, there was little progress until the conflict ended⁵. The civil war expanded into Namibia in which the MPLA and Cuban military worked with SWAPO and their military arm PLAN to secure Namibian independence in 1990. However, the civil war in Angola lasted until 2002, with the MPLA retaining control of the state but UNITA and FNLA allowed to participate in elections⁶. The MPLA has since overseen positive economic growth under José Eduardo dos Santos. Dos Santos recently retired from the presidency in 2017, although he and his family still remain very active in the political space⁷.

Namibia, called Southwest Africa until independence, was initially a German colony notable for the colonial authorities' cruel – genocidal – treatment of Africans. Following World War I, Namibia became a League of Nations mandate, but was seized by South Africa in 1940⁸. This was illegal, as the United Nations claimed the mandate, and resulted in significant international support for Namibian independence, which SWAPO began campaigning for in the 1960s⁹. Namibia resembled Rhodesia and South Africa in that it functioned as white settler

⁴ Munslow, Barry. "Angola: The Politics of Unsustainable Development." *Third World Quarterly* 20, no. 3, 1999: 559.

⁵ Schubert, Jon. "'Democratisation' and the Consolidation of Political Authority in Post-War Angola." *Journal of Southern African Studies* 36, no. 3 (2010): 658.

⁶ Ntoni-Nzinga, Daniel. "Angola". *South African Journal of International Affairs* 12 (1), 2005: 11.

⁷ Vines, Alex, and Markus Weimer. "Angola: Thirty Years of Dos Santos." *Review of African Political Economy* 36, no. 120, 2009: 288.

⁸ Melber, Henning. "Namibia: A trust betrayed - again?" *Review of African Political Economy* 38 (127), 2011: 104.

⁹ Ibid, 104.

oligarchy that governed via exclusionary democracy and Apartheid. Although Namibia was administratively subordinate to South Africa¹⁰. Decolonization for most African states occurred in the 1960s. Many southern African States won their independence in the 1970s, whereas Namibia and South Africa only overcame white rule in the early 1990s. This is important in that the Cold War was essentially over, and the 3rd wave of democratization was firmly established. So, Namibia was largely free on the Cold War ideological struggle and its statehood was conceived during an era of worldwide democratization and liberalization, which was reflected in its constitution¹¹ and institutional character. In 1990, Namibia was granted independence from South Africa. SWAPO was elected to lead the country with independence leader Sam Nujoma as president until his retirement from politics in 2005. Namibia today is considered a stable, relatively prosperous, democracy.

The authoritarian character of Angola is intentional MPLA policy that is a consequence of prolonged armed struggle and lack of institutional strength. Angola went through several interim constitutions before settling on the current one in 1992¹². That means that the MPLA had nearly three decades of rule without any strong institutional checks. A constitution only means something if there is a strong tradition of following it, which the MPLA has exploited. Because of the excuse (to a certain extent legitimate) of not being able to practice accountability and good governance in the civil war, the state-society relationship never developed. It resembled the colonial status quo in that the state would not penetrate any part of society not necessary for revenue collection and therefore would not be accountable to any of its citizens. I found the

¹⁰ Bauer, Gretchen. "Namibia in the First Decade of Independence: How Democratic?" *Journal of Southern African Studies* 27, no. 1, 2001:34.

¹¹ Bauer, Gretchen. "Namibia in the First Decade of Independence: How Democratic?" *Journal of Southern African Studies* 27, no. 1, 2001:37.

¹² Ntoni-Nzinga, Daniel. "Angola". *South African Journal of International Affairs* 12 (1), 2005: 11-24.

state-society relationship best summed up as “a family where the father is always drunk”¹³. This is reflected in the current national assembly, in that representatives are not directly elected, instead they are allocated based on party votes, and these representatives do not even have offices in their constituencies¹⁴. There is also a continued trend of power consolidation by the MPLA. This is done through the *partidarização*¹⁵ of society, in which the MPLA dominates all aspects of public life and often acts in areas normally controlled by the state. That is because in Angola the MPLA is the state. Despite the lack of accountability and governance by the state, the MPLA seeks to penetrate all aspects of society.

The MPLA manipulates civil society in order to check political discourse through which democratization might occur. While MPLA rule post-civil war has shown a strong commitment to peace and has been characterized as benevolent authoritarianism¹⁶, there is certainly a culture of fear¹⁷ in Angola. Political opposition and civil society, given the right to exist post 1992, has often been repressed by the state and lives in a kind of limbo. The MPLA has repressed some civil society groups, while letting others act essentially freely. As a result, civil society will often be as non-political as possible in order to be tolerated by the regime. Some civil society groups will work with this regime to instill apathy among the masses, the church is one of the most potent and well-established civil society groups in Angola and has continued to espouse disengagement from the politics¹⁸. Another aspect of civil society manipulation in regard to *partidarização* is the use of state-funded aid distribution agencies, which function like NGOs. These

¹³ Schubert, Jon. "'Democratisation' and the Consolidation of Political Authority in Post-War Angola." *Journal of Southern African Studies* 36, no. 3 (2010): 658.

¹⁴ Ntoni-Nzinga, Daniel. "Angola". *South African Journal of International Affairs* 12 (1), 2005: 13.

¹⁵ Schubert, Jon. "'Democratisation' and the Consolidation of Political Authority in Post-War Angola." *Journal of Southern African Studies* 36, no. 3 (2010): 659.

¹⁶ Ibid, 669.

¹⁷ Ibid, 655.

¹⁸ Ibid, 668.

organizations such as AJAPRAZ, essentially buy the loyalty of customary authorities and societies outside state penetration to the MPLA, through providing them aid and goods which the state has failed to do. These are not government organizations, as these groups are directly associated with the MPLA¹⁹.

Namibia has remained a stable democracy, unlike many other southern African states which gained independence through armed struggle, because of uninterrupted free and fair elections since independence and a modern liberal constitution. However, the main criticism of Namibia democracy is that it is a de facto single party state. SWAPO has won every election handily, by an ever increasing margin. This is because of several aspects: access to state resources, disproportionate electoral representation, increasingly harsh treatment of opposition, and increasing political apathy. SWAPO has readily used its access to state resources to out campaign the opposition²⁰. In the 2008 Angolan elections the MPLA spent an estimated 300 million compared to 17 million for all other opposition combined²¹. Ovamboland, a SWAPO stronghold contains enough votes to win the presidency and is over represented in the national assembly²². The national assembly in Angola is also not demographically proportional, with some regions, especially those pro-UNITA, underrepresented²³. SWAPO has sought to discredit its opposition, the PDM (popular democratic movement), formally called DTA (Democratic

¹⁹ Schubert, Jon. "'Democratisation' and the Consolidation of Political Authority in Post-War Angola." *Journal of Southern African Studies* 36, no. 3 (2010): 667.

²⁰ Bauer, Gretchen. "Namibia in the First Decade of Independence: How Democratic?" *Journal of Southern African Studies* 27, no. 1, 2001:43.

²¹ Vines, Alex, and Markus Weimer. "Angola: Thirty Years of Dos Santos." *Review of African Political Economy* 36, no. 120, 2009: 288.

²² Bauer, Gretchen. "Namibia in the First Decade of Independence: How Democratic?" *Journal of Southern African Studies* 27, no. 1, 2001:48.

²³ Ntoni-Nzinga, Daniel. "Angola". *South African Journal of International Affairs* 12 (1), 2005: 13.

Turnhalle Alliance), is relatively easy to discredit, being a holdover from Apartheid²⁴, but the CoD (Congress of Democrats) has been repeatedly slandered as South African collaborators, despite being largely constituted of former SWAPO/PLAN members²⁵. This is a similar tactic in which the MPLA uses against UNITA, having created fake splinter factions of UNITA in order to delegitimize it²⁶ and organized assassination attempts on opposition leadership (framed as banditry)²⁷. Finally, participation in Namibian elections has decreased since independence, largely stemming from the lack of viable opposition to SWAPO²⁸. In Angola, the MPLA makes little effort to register voters outside of Luanda and will often manipulate registration records and ballots in order to secure the minimum number of votes necessary to win²⁹. While Angola's elections are rigged, Namibia's elections are just uncompetitive. But the end result of political disengagement and one party rule is shared by both.

The current perception of Namibia as a strong democracy is inaccurate because of the lack of competitive elections and increasing authoritarian character of SWAPO rule. Consequentially, there are many similarities in the current political situation in Namibia with those in Angola. The continuity of SWAPO rule, despite fair elections, has made Namibia under de facto one-party rule, which is very similar to the position the MPLA is in: there are elections, but they are not competitive. However, Angola is much more prone to electoral manipulation,

²⁴ Bauer, Gretchen. "Namibia in the First Decade of Independence: How Democratic?" *Journal of Southern African Studies* 27, no. 1, 2001:42.

²⁵ Bauer, Gretchen. "Namibia in the First Decade of Independence: How Democratic?" *Journal of Southern African Studies* 27, no. 1, 2001:44.

²⁶ Vines, Alex, and Markus Weimer. "Angola: Thirty Years of Dos Santos." *Review of African Political Economy* 36, no. 120, 2009: 291.

²⁷ Schubert, Jon. "'Democratisation' and the Consolidation of Political Authority in Post-War Angola." *Journal of Southern African Studies* 36, no. 3 (2010): 665.

²⁸ Bauer, Gretchen. "Namibia in the First Decade of Independence: How Democratic?" *Journal of Southern African Studies* 27, no. 1, 2001:47.

²⁹ Schubert, Jon. "'Democratisation' and the Consolidation of Political Authority in Post-War Angola." *Journal of Southern African Studies* 36, no. 3 (2010): 658.

due to MPLA members running the electoral commission³⁰. The executive in Namibia is very potent, though one could argue that this is a shared political characteristic among many African states. Nujoma was able to modify the constitution to achieve a 3rd term and nominates all of his party's legislators for the national assembly³¹. Dos Santos has arguably been more potent, essentially ruling the country with the aid of a small clique consisting of MPLA higher ups and his family³². He has frequently not observed the constitution and acts nearly autocratically. But institutionally he has facilitated the presidency becoming a very potent office, being both the head of state and head of party, which is convenient for power consolidation seeing that the MPLA is the state in Angola³³. Essentially, the executive in Angola and Namibia is not checked by institutions, albeit Angola much more so. SWAPO has expressed increasing authoritarian tendencies and adopted a more hostile tone with the press and civil society of late³⁴. Refusals to consult the national assembly when intervening in the DRC and Angolan Civil War reflects a disregard for certain constitutional checks on the executive. The reported human rights abuses during the Bush War and the 1999 Caprivi succession movement have been denied by the state and censored³⁵ and ultimately show that when politics become contentious SWAPO will not hesitate to use repression. This coincides with Levitsky and Way's theory that regimes which are forged through struggle will be much more willing to employ violence and exhibit authoritarian tendencies against political opposition. And this is exactly the same case as in Angola, where

³⁰ Schubert, Jon. "'Democratisation' and the Consolidation of Political Authority in Post-War Angola." *Journal of Southern African Studies* 36, no. 3 (2010): 660.

³¹ Bauer, Gretchen. "Namibia in the First Decade of Independence: How Democratic?" *Journal of Southern African Studies* 27, no. 1, 2001:37.

³² Vines, Alex, and Markus Weimer. "Angola: Thirty Years of Dos Santos." *Review of African Political Economy* 36, no. 120, 2009: 290.

³³ Ntoni-Nzinga, Daniel. "Angola". *South African Journal of International Affairs* 12 (1), 2005: 16.

³⁴ Bauer, Gretchen. "Namibia in the First Decade of Independence: How Democratic?" *Journal of Southern African Studies* 27, no. 1, 2001:46.

³⁵ Melber, Henning. "Namibia: A trust betrayed - again?" *Review of African Political Economy* 38 (127), 2011: 106.

coercive force is not used often, but when opposition to MPLA rule is deemed threatening, it is used liberally. However, the one main difference that reflects Namibia's democratic character is the scope and activities of the press and civil society. While SWAPO has harassed and used harsh language towards civil society and the press, they have remained independent of the state. In Angola free press does not exist, and, as mentioned earlier, civil society is heavily manipulated by the state. Many characteristics of Namibian democracy resemble Angolan anocracy, which when considering the history of SWAPO and the MLPA as militant, independence movements is not surprising, but certainly is contrary to how Namibia is portrayed.

I think when examining the differences in polity between Angola and Namibia one could argue that their different experiences under colonialism shaped their post-colonial political development. Gretchen Bauer in "Namibia in the First Decade of Independence: How Democratic?" argues that the democratic nature of Namibia's settler oligarchy established an electoral tradition in Namibia, which contributed to its current democratic character. I believe making distinctions between colonial regimes is very problematic and often subjective. There is no colonizer that has had all of its former colonies become successful democracies in Africa. Saying, for example, that French colonization was less destructive than Belgian colonization because the atrocities in Belgian Congo and chronic instability of the DRC is a poor argument because, in the end colonization, was a terrible experience for all Africans. The same goes with the difference between direct and indirect rule. So, I think it is incorrect or at least impossible to prove that Portuguese colonialism was less conducive to postcolonial democratization than British and Afrikaner settler colonization. One could say that decolonization through violent struggle is less conducive to postcolonial democratization. In regard to Bauer's argument, she

already characterizes colonial Namibia as an oligarchy, the elections were not democratic because they were non participatory. White Namibians make up less than 10% of Namibia's population³⁶, how would 90% of African Namibians, including near all of SWAPO have developed any culture of democracy from this? Moreover, Zimbabwe is a former settler oligarchy that did not experience democracy after decolonization. Cape Verde is a former Portuguese colony, which through conflict achieved independence and is democratic. I definitely agree with Bauer that Namibia is a very unique case, but colonial administration history is not an effective way to analyze differences in polities among African states. It takes accountability off African leadership and attempts to make relativist distinctions among administrative models that all served the same purpose, to repress Africans and exploit them for profit. Consequentially, to understand the differences in polity between Angola and Namibia we need to focus on the nature of decolonization and the actions of the state post-independence.

The goal of this paper was to explain why Angola is an authoritarian state and façade democracy, and how the MPLA has perpetuated this system. Regimes that are products of struggle are extremely durable due to their cohesion and hierarchy reinforced through combat³⁷. The MPLA has shown immense resilience in the face of a prolonged conflict, and this has transferred to the political arena. Unfortunately, that same resiliency and militaristic nature that molded the MPLA influenced its political behavior. Levitsky and Way explain how regimes as product of struggle foster an “us-them” mentality in the political arena. The MPLA is focused on survival rather than governance, which explains why it seeks to root out pluralism and political

³⁶ Melber, Henning. “Namibia: A trust betrayed - again?” *Review of African Political Economy* 38 (127), 2011: 103.

³⁷ Levitsky, Steven R., and Lucan A. Way. “Beyond patronage: Violent struggle, ruling party cohesion, and authoritarian durability”. *Perspectives on Politics* 10 (4), 2012: 870.

dissent while showing little interest in serving its people. The only reason Angola pretends to be a democracy is that being a strict authoritarian system has not been in vogue since the end of the Cold War, and a façade democracy is a necessary tool to garner international support and aid which supplant the MPLA's poor governance. In addition, I sought to explain why Namibia, a country that was in a very similar position to Angola, turned out so differently in terms of polity. However, I soon discovered that while Namibia is unique in regard to other Southern African cases and, as of now, is democratic, it actually shares many political characteristics with Angola. From this, I think that relatively Namibia is doing better than many other African states, but it still has many challenges to overcome before it becomes a healthy democracy, namely a peaceful exchange of power. For both these states, overcoming the legacy of violent struggle and single party systems that result from it are the greatest, although not the only, hurdles to democratization.

Bibliography

“Angola” Freedom House`, 2017 <https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-world/2016/angola>

Bauer, Gretchen. "Namibia in the First Decade of Independence: How Democratic?" *Journal of Southern African Studies* 27, no. 1, 2001: 33-55. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/823289>.

De Meneses, Filipe Ribeiro and McNamara, Robert. "South Africa and the Aftermath of Portugal's 'Exemplary' Decolonization: The Security Dimension." *Portuguese Studies* 29, no. 2, 2013: 227-50. doi:10.5699/portstudies.29.2.0227.

Levitsky, Steven R., and Lucan A. Way. "Beyond patronage: Violent struggle, ruling party cohesion, and authoritarian durability". *Perspectives on Politics* 10 (4), 2012.: 869-89.

Melber, Henning. "Namibia: A trust betrayed - again?" *Review of African Political Economy* 38 (127), 2011: 103-11.

Munslow, Barry. "Angola: The Politics of Unsustainable Development." *Third World Quarterly* 20, no. 3, 1999: 551-68. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3993321>.

Ntoni-Nzinga, Daniel. "Angola". *South African Journal of International Affairs* 12 (1), 2005: 11-24.

Schubert, Jon. "'Democratisation' and the Consolidation of Political Authority in Post-War Angola." *Journal of Southern African Studies* 36, no. 3 (2010): 657-72. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/20790050>.

Vines, Alex, and Markus Weimer. "Angola: Thirty Years of Dos Santos." *Review of African Political Economy* 36, no. 120, 2009: 287-94. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/27756272>.

