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Angola's Façade Democracy

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Abstract

Following the Angolan ruling party's crushing defeat of the opposition in the first postwar elections, held in September 2008, the Movement for the Total Liberation of Angola (MPLA) has proceeded to consolidate in the last year its hegemonic rule in the country, effectively giving rise to another African hybrid regime. The regime's security and financial apparatus and national institutions have since been further molded to serve the Presidency and the military and business elites. Having acquired its democratic credentials and secure of the strength of its relevance in the international petroleum arena, Luanda has transformed a once failed state into a reformed autocracy.

ANGOLA'S FAÇADE DEMOCRACY

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On 5–6 September 2008, Angolans went to the polls to elect their parliamentarians for the first time since Angola's civil war officially ended in 2002. With 82 percent of the vote, the ruling Popular Movement for the Liberation of Angola (MPLA) won in a landslide, while its historic rival and main opposition, the National Union for the Total Independence of Angola (UNITA), took a mere 10.5 percent. These were only the second multiparty elections in Angola's history and the first since 1992. Yet, paradoxically, they secured the ruling party's hegemony, the virtual elimination of the opposition, and the consolidation of a highly securitized regime. In other words, the elections served as a vehicle for the MPLA to transform Angola into a de facto one-party state while at the same time gaining long-elusive national and international legitimacy.

With its overwhelming victory, the MPLA now has 191 of the 220 directly elected seats in the National Assembly, giving the party enough power to govern and even to change the constitution without having to engage in political debate with civil society or the opposition, whose presence in the National Assembly has dropped from 91 seats to only 29. Other opposition parties fared even worse at the polls than did UNITA. The Social Renewal Party (PRS), managed to secure only 3 percent of the vote, and the National Front for the Liberation of Angola (FNLA), one of the country's three historic liberation movements along with the MPLA and UNITA, won only 1 percent (see Table on page 138). Especially given Angola's history of unaccountable governance, corruption, social and economic exclusion, mismanagement of natural resources, and political marginalization,¹ unchecked and unchallenged one-party

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