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UNITA's Post-War Parliamentary Elite: From a Wartime Defeat to a Nationwide Party in Angola

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Abstract

Angola is governed under a presidential system characterised by a weakly institutionalised parliament ruled by the MPLA liberation movement since independence. UNITA, the largest opposition party in parliament, is also a liberation movement and former belligerent in the protracted Angolan civil war. Despite facing an uneven playing field, UNITA has seen its share of parliamentary seats increase in successive post-war elections. This makes it a relevant case study to understand patterns of elite formation and political representation more broadly. This article examines the composition of UNITA parliamentary elites in Angola in post-civil war legislatures, and how UNITA members of parliament (MPs) perceive representation tasks and engage in constituency-focused activities. We do so through a longitudinal study of post-civil war legislatures (from 2008, 2012, 2017 and 2022), drawing on novel biographical data and interviews with MPs. We argue that, following the transition from rebel movement to political party, parliament became an arena in which UNITA was able to achieve a nationwide reach by integrating MPs with diverse backgrounds and by engaging with constituents. Additionally, while institutional rules favour national over local representation, MPs seem to invest in and value links with constituents. The study highlights how nationwide recruitment and connections with constituents contribute to elite formation.

Keywords: Angola; UNITA; parliament; representation; elites

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Introduction

Piedoso Chipindo Bonga, deputy of the Angolan parliament and an historic figure in the National Union for the Total Independence of Angola (UNITA), asserted in an interview that ‘the space that UNITA has today is the product of its efforts, conquered millimetre by millimetre’.¹ The conquered space to which the member of parliament (MP) refers is that of political life in times of peace, after a protracted civil war (1975–2002) between the Popular Movement for the Liberation of Angola (MPLA) government and UNITA. The war came to an end after the death in combat of UNITA’s charismatic leader Jonas Savimbi. Peace was

¹ Interview with Piedoso Chipindo Bonga, Luanda, 30 January 2020.

achieved through the military victory of the MPLA,² which consolidated its dominant position in the state following the signing of peace agreements.³

It took six years for the first post-war legislative elections to be held in 2008. UNITA's poor results in these elections (in which it won only 16 out of 220 seats) suggested that the party would become irrelevant, but this did not happen, as it has subsequently increased its seats in parliament. Since the end of the war, UNITA has been struggling to carve out its own niche in a dominant party system in which “party-isation” of public life and all social sectors’ is a key feature.⁴ This party-isation, installed by the MPLA, works as gatekeeping system that has contributed to the formation of economic and political elites linked to the ruling party, the state, and oil revenues.⁵ In this setting, the parliament is the only state institution in which opposition parties can publicly perform their high-level political activities and have access to the state, even if this is ‘conquered millimetre by millimetre’, as Chipindo Bonga claims.

In a context dominated by the MPLA, UNITA has gradually improved its number of MPs, who increasingly represent areas beyond the party's historical constituencies in the Central Highlands, and in the process, it has distanced itself from the fate of the war loser downgraded to irrelevancy.⁶ These features make UNITA an interesting case to study to understand patterns of elite formation within opposition parties in Africa. This study's first question – who has comprised the UNITA parliamentary elites in Angola's post-civil war legislatures? – tackles the issue of descriptive representation and highlights the socio-demographic profiles of MPs. The second question – how do UNITA MPs perceive representation tasks and engage in constituency-focused activities? – taps into more substantive forms of representation. Researching these questions is crucial in several ways.

First, research on political institutions and elites in Africa has predominantly focused on incumbents and governments, resulting in more limited knowledge on opposition parties

² J. Schubert, “‘Democratisation’ and the Consolidation of Political Authority in Post-War Angola”, *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 36, 3 (2010), pp. 657–72.

³ R. Soares de Oliveira, ‘The Struggle for the State and the Politics of Belonging in Contemporary Angola, 1975–2015’, *Social Dynamics*, 42, 1 (2016), pp. 69–84.

⁴ Schubert, “‘Democratisation’ and the Consolidation of Political Authority”, p. 659.

⁵ R. Soares de Oliveira, ‘Business Success, Angola-Style: Postcolonial Politics and the Rise and Rise of Sonangol’, *Journal of Modern African Studies*, 45, 4 (2007), pp. 595–619.

⁶ A. Vines and B. Oruitemeka, ‘Bullets to Ballots: The Reintegration of UNITA in Angola’, *Conflict, Security & Development*, 8, 2 (2008), pp. 241–63.

and institutions, such as legislatures.⁷ In a regional context where historical liberation movements which have been in power since independence are increasingly losing ground to opposition parties, the case of UNITA provides an opportunity to enrich our understanding of elite formation processes in Africa, beyond the examination of incumbents, the party-isation of the state and the role of state-controlled rents in the composition of elites.

Second, this study does not prescribe to a narrow perspective that considers as elites only those who belong to a small inner circle at the highest level of the state. Examining opposition parliamentary elites allows an analysis of alternative sources for elite formation, beyond state entrenchment or oil-extraction revenues.⁸ Extant studies have focused on the history of UNITA as a liberation movement, analysing its historic elites and constituencies,⁹ the figure of Jonas Savimbi,¹⁰ and its internal transformation from a rebel movement and combatant to a civilian political party.¹¹ Nevertheless, we know little about the characteristics of UNITA's parliamentary elite following its transition from rebel movement to political party. Moreover, studies using parliamentary data in both authoritarian contexts and Portuguese-speaking countries are scarcer than studies on democracies and English-speaking contexts.¹² This study offers a contribution to bridge these gaps.

We argue that the parliament is a relevant political arena to show how opposition parties can unfold a nationwide platform and build connection with constituents. The case of UNITA supports these arguments, thus downplaying the narratives that link UNITA to destruction due to war, or to Ovimbundu ethnicity and the Central Highlands region.

To answer the two questions raised above both quantitative and qualitative data are used. First, we draw on an original biographic dataset of UNITA's MPs from 2008 until 2022

⁷ N. Cheeseman (ed.), *Institutions and Democracy in Africa: How the Rules of the Game Shape Political Developments* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2019); I. Cooper, 'It's My Party: Opposition Politics, Party Motivation and Electoral Strategy in Namibia', *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 40, 1 (2014), pp. 111–27.

⁸ R. Soares de Oliveira, *Magnificent and Beggar Land: Angola Since the Civil War* (London, Hurst, 2015).

⁹ For example, V. Martins, *Colonialism, Ethnicity and War in Angola* (London, Routledge, 2021); J. Pearce, 'L'Unita à la recherche de "son peuple"', *Politique Africaine*, 110, 2 (2008), pp. 47–64; J. Pearce, *Political Identity and Conflict in Central Angola, 1975–2022* (New York, Cambridge University Press, 2015).

¹⁰ P. Robson, 'Angola after Savimbi', *Review of African Political Economy*, 29, 91 (2002), pp. 130–2; V. Martins, '"A Nossa Lâmpada Não Se Apaga": The Mnemonic Return of Angola's Jonas Savimbi', *African Studies Review*, 64, 1 (2021), pp. 242–65.

¹¹ Vines and Oruitemeka, 'Bullets to Ballots'; J.G. Porto, C. Alden and I. Parsons, *From Soldiers to Citizens: Demilitarization of Conflict and Society* (Aldershot, Ashgate, 2007).

¹² As is the case of K.O. Opalo, *Legislative Development in Africa: Politics and Postcolonial Legacies* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2019), which advances knowledge of the features of parliaments in Kenya and Zambia, or Y.L. Morse, 'The Legislature as Political Control: Change and Continuity in Cameroon's National Assembly (1973–2019)', *Journal of Modern African Studies*, 59, 4 (2021), pp. 485–506.

to describe the socio-demographic characteristics of UNITA elites and show how some historical features remain prevalent – namely, ethnicity, region and military background. Second, we utilise semi-structured interviews with the president of UNITA, Adalberto Costa Júnior, and eight MPs in Luanda and Lisbon, in 2020, 2021 and 2023, to ascertain MPs’ perceptions of representation tasks and service to constituents. All the interviews were conducted in Portuguese and the interviewees consented to be identified in our study. We also use UNITA internal documents (namely the ‘Regulation for the selection of candidates for representatives to the National Assembly on the UNITA list for the 2022 general elections’) and Facebook posts, since the latter is frequently used by party members to disseminate events and speeches.¹³ The data reveal that despite having few institutional incentives to focus on their constituencies – as they are elected under closed-list proportional representation and are expected to represent national interests – MPs maintain close proximity to constituents, irrespective of the constituency in which they were elected.

This article proceeds as follows. The next section presents an overview of how elites in Africa have been analysed. We then discuss elite-building processes in Angola and describe the country’s National Assembly. The fourth section offers a descriptive representation of UNITA’s MPs from 2008 until the current legislature, while the fifth presents MPs’ perceptions of their representation tasks and their connections with their constituents. We then provide concluding remarks.

Political Institutions and Elite-Building Processes in Africa

African political elites remain understudied,¹⁴ and the extant studies are particularly focused on ruling elites¹⁵ and not on opposition. Analyses of the trajectories of political elites in different institutions have shown that there is limited circulation of top-ranking political leaders. During transitions to democracy there was a ‘high degree of continuity in

¹³ Access to biographical data and to UNITA’s internal documentation used in the article was possible due to the generous assistance of the Parliamentary Group of UNITA. Data are still being collected to comprehend other variables, as education and profession, to better characterise this elite.

¹⁴ J.P. Daloz, ‘Elite Distinction: Grand Theory and Comparative Perspectives’, *Comparative Sociology*, 6, 1–2 (2007), pp. 27–74; A. Osei, ‘From Conflict to Consensus? Elite Integration and Democracy in Ghana’, *Comparative Sociology*, 13, 4 (2014), pp. 503–30; A. Osei, ‘Elite Theory and Political Transitions: Networks of Power in Ghana and Togo’, *Comparative Politics*, 51, 1 (2018), pp. 21–42.

¹⁵ E. Goldring and A.S. Matthews, ‘To Purge or Not to Purge? An Individual-Level Quantitative Analysis of Elite Purges in Dictatorships’, *British Journal of Political Science*, 53, 2 (2023), pp. 575–93.

personnel' in cabinets or parliaments, with little renewal of political elites.¹⁶ In authoritarian regimes, elites are 'typically described as centralized in the presidency, state-dependent, and recruited from a small social segment', excluding opponents.¹⁷

Political centralisation and patronage based on state resources characterise these systems. Both horizontal and vertical integration of elites in Africa are often understood through neo-patrimonial lenses¹⁸ that see clientelism and personalised relationships as relevant mechanisms for elite integration, and as a source of elite conflict. Clientelism has also been considered as a mechanism by which parliamentary elites connect to their constituencies through redistribution of material goods or symbolic capital.¹⁹ From this perspective, studies on African elites have revealed the close ties between the economic and the political spheres, in which politics is seen as means for acquiring wealth, irrespective of regime type.²⁰

Authoritarian regimes often have seemingly democratic institutions in place. These are important for increasing the lifespan of the regime²¹ and have been considered to be institutions that rubber-stamp regime decisions.²² In this sense, parliaments may be used by autocrats to govern with the co-operation of opposition forces, very often through co-optation and redistribution of patronage, offsetting possible challenges these opposition elites may pose to the ruling elite.²³ However, recent studies have advanced knowledge on the development of legislatures across time and space²⁴ and on their representative functions, focusing on descriptive representation and analysing whether political elites 'mirror the social composition of the electorate'.²⁵ Despite the observation that most

¹⁶ J.P. Daloz, "'Big Men" in Sub-Saharan Africa: How Elites Accumulate Positions and Resources', *Comparative Sociology*, 2, 1 (2003), pp. 282.

¹⁷ Osei, 'Elite Theory and Political Transitions', p. 22.

¹⁸ Osei, 'From Conflict to Consensus?'

¹⁹ C. Raleigh and D. Wigmore-Shepherd, 'Elite Coalitions and Power Balance across African Regimes: Introducing the African Cabinet and Political Elite Data Project (ACPED)', *Ethnopolitics*, 21, 1 (2022), pp. 22–47; L. Demarest, 'Elite Clientelism in Nigeria: The Role of Parties in Weakening Legislator–Voter Ties', *Party Politics*, 28, 5 (2022), pp. 939–53.

²⁰ Daloz, 'Elite Distinction'.

²¹ T. Pepinsky, 'The Institutional Turn in Comparative Authoritarianism', *British Journal of Political Science*, 44, 3 (2014), pp. 631–53.

²² F. Wiebrecht, 'Between Elites and Opposition: Legislatures' Strength in Authoritarian Regimes', *Democratization*, 28, 6 (2021), pp. 1075–94.

²³ J. Gandhi and A. Przeworski, 'Authoritarian Institutions and the Survival of Autocrats', *Comparative Political Studies*, 40, 11 (2007), pp. 1279–301; B. Magaloni, 'Credible Power-Sharing and the Longevity of Authoritarian Rule', *Comparative Political Studies*, 41, 4–5 (2008), pp. 715–41.

²⁴ Opalo, *Legislative Development in Africa*.

²⁵ Osei, 'Elite Theory and Political Transitions', p. 22.

African political systems lack competition and opposition parties rarely reach power,²⁶ Yonatan Morse's studies of Cameroon's National Assembly demonstrate how the legislature, notwithstanding the authoritarian nature of the regime, has been a dynamic institution since the country's independence in regards to the orientation and social profile of its MPs.²⁷

Within elite studies in Africa, MPs are still often overlooked.²⁸ The few existing studies offer insights on their roles, their economic resources to enable them to enter politics, their links to their constituents, and renewal rates.²⁹ Moreover, there has been a focus on incumbents and, similarly to other regions, opposition parties have received less scholarly attention.³⁰ MPs can be seen as political elites, if we define these as persons within institutions such as political parties and legislatures.³¹ Elites do not have access to equal resources within institutions, but the new multiparty systems offered opposition parties a chance to access state institutions and 'provided outside options through which elites could win seats in the legislature'.³²

However, being elected does not necessarily mean access to the spoils of the state. So, what alternative venues are available for opposition parties to build their elites? Angola's government is a presidential system in which decisions are concentrated in the hands of the president. Ministers are officially named assistants of the holder of the executive power and, as in other authoritarian regimes, the parliament is weakly institutionalised, its legislative performance almost wholly limited to acts of the dominant party and the president.³³ However, the National Assembly represents an important arena for making opposition political parties visible and giving them a voice in institutional politics. This applies in particular to opposition parties that can form parliamentary groups: those

²⁶ For example, see M. Bogaards, 'Crafting Competitive Party Systems: Electoral Laws and the Opposition in Africa', *Democratization*, 7, 4 (2000), pp. 163–90.

²⁷ Morse, 'The Legislature as Political Control'; Y.L. Morse, 'Pathways to Power in Authoritarian Regimes: Civil Service, Multipartyism and Legislative Selection in Cameroon', *Government and Opposition*, 57, 3 (2022), pp. 490–507.

²⁸ Osei, 'From Conflict to Consensus?', p. 509.

²⁹ Morse, 'The Legislature as Political Control', p. 486; J.D. Barkan, *Legislative Power in Emerging African Democracies* (Boulder, Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2009).

³⁰ J. Pearce, 'From Rebellion to Opposition: UNITA's Social Engagement in Post-War Angola', *Government and Opposition*, 55, 3 (2020), pp. 474–89; L. Helms, 'Political Oppositions in Democratic and Authoritarian Regimes: A State-of-the-Field(s) Review', *Government and Opposition*, 58, 2 (2023), pp. 391–414.

³¹ Osei, 'Elite Theory and Political Transitions', p. 21.

³² Opalo, *Legislative Development in Africa*, p. 210.

³³ J. Pearce, D. Péclard and R. Soares De Oliveira, 'Angola's Elections and the Politics of Presidential Succession', *African Affairs*, 117, 466 (2018), pp. 146–60.

that have elected three or more deputies, according to the Rules of Procedure of the National Assembly (Article 26). Before presenting UNITA's parliamentary group, the following section briefly narrates the historical trajectory of UNITA and its elites, in a context where institutions and access to resources are dominated by MPLA's elites.

Elites in Angola: MPLA and UNITA

In southern Africa, several former liberation movements have assumed power after the country gained independence: South West Africa People's Organisation (SWAPO) in Namibia; Zimbabwe African National Union (Patriotic Front) (ZANU[PF]) in Zimbabwe; Liberation Front of Mozambique (Frelimo) in Mozambique; and MPLA in Angola. However, in Angola, three liberation movements still manage to coexist. MPLA has ruled over the country since its independence from Portugal in 1975, first as a single-party regime and then, after the first multiparty elections in 1992, as the dominant party. The other anti-colonial movements that have become political parties are the Union of the Populations of Angola, created in 1964 and renamed the National Liberation Front of Angola (FNLA), and UNITA, established in 1966 in Muangai in Moxico province and based on five main principles (named the Muangai Declaration, which is still invoked by the party's cadres).³⁴

UNITA was created as both an armed movement and a political organisation, which defines its identity.³⁵ In a heavily polarised society and political environment,³⁶ UNITA was the MPLA government's opponent during the civil war, with the MPLA representing the centralised state and UNITA an armed rebel group seeking to gain power.³⁷ During the war, and still today, MPLA controlled the dominant narrative of patriotism and defence of the state, while UNITA was the enemy³⁸ and 'the party of the *confusionistas*',³⁹ which had

³⁴ Pearce, 'From Rebellion to Opposition', p. 477.

³⁵ Pearce, 'From Rebellion to Opposition'.

³⁶ C. Messiant, 'MPLA et UNITA: Processus de Paix et Logique de Guerre', *Politique Africaine*, 57 (1995), pp. 40–57.

³⁷ D. Péclard, 'Les Chemins de la "Reconversion Autoritaire" en Angola', *Politique Africaine*, 110, 2 (2008), pp. 5–20.

³⁸ J. Schubert, '2002, Year Zero: History as Anti-Politics in the "New Angola"', *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 41, 4 (2015), pp. 835–52; J. Ball, "'From Cabinda to Cunene": Monuments and the Construction of Angolan Nationalism since 1975', *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 45, 5 (2019), pp. 821–40.

³⁹ Martins, "'A Nossa Lâmpada Não Se Apaga"', p. 249. *Confusionistas* is a word used in Angola to refer to those responsible for creating *confusão*, which means confusion and war.

allegedly brought misery to the population. But unlike many opposition parties in Africa,⁴⁰ UNITA is not organisationally weak, and it has been part of the executive. The Lusaka Protocol (1994) implemented a Government of Unity and National Reconciliation in 1997, the same year the majority of UNITA's MPs elected in 1992 assumed their positions. Angola's multiparty parliament thus functioned for the first time with all its elected MPs.⁴¹

Angola's ruling elite is tied to the MPLA-engineered post-war state building strategy.⁴² The MPLA elite is mostly urban and creole, with an *assimilado* social background derived from the colonial social organisation of the country.⁴³ Ricardo Soares de Oliveira notes that MPLA's agency was crucial for defining Angola's institutions and that resources, namely oil, played a crucial role in the consolidation of the regime and its elites.⁴⁴ Angola's economy has been heavily dependent on natural resources. During the war, oil was at the core of the state's 'elite rentierism'.⁴⁵ Oil rents were controlled by the MPLA, while illegal exploration of diamonds was a significant source of revenue for UNITA, primarily to support the purchase of arms.⁴⁶ After the war ended, oil continued to be the key product for the accumulation and redistribution strategies carried out by the MPLA and the state,⁴⁷ in contrast with the living conditions of the population, the overwhelming majority of whom are socially excluded.⁴⁸

Alongside this control of rents and the state, following independence MPLA dedicated itself to the construction of an Angolan national identity that transcended particularities such as ethnicity.⁴⁹ This strategy fed politicised narratives of a division between the 'peoples of UNITA' and the government. On the UNITA side, authors such as

⁴⁰ D. Paget, 'The Authoritarian Origins of Well-Organized Opposition Parties: The Rise of Chadema in Tanzania', *African Affairs*, 118, 473 (2019): pp. 692–711.

⁴¹ A. Vines, *Angola Unravels: The Rise and Fall of the Lusaka Peace Process* (New York, Human Rights Watch, 1999), p. 25.

⁴² R. Soares de Oliveira, 'Illiberal Peacebuilding in Angola', *Journal of Modern African Studies*, 49, 2 (2011), pp. 287–314; Martins, *Colonialism, Ethnicity and War in Angola*.

⁴³ Soares de Oliveira, 'The Struggle for the State and the Politics of Belonging', p. 73. *Assimilado* refers to the educated colonial subjects who lived according to European standards and were distinct from the *indígenas*, the majority of the colonized, under the framework of the Portuguese colonial law.

⁴⁴ Soares de Oliveira, *Magnificent and Beggar Land*.

⁴⁵ Soares de Oliveira, 'Business Success, Angola-Style', p. 608.

⁴⁶ A. Malaquias, 'Making War and Lots of Money: The Political Economy of Protracted Conflict in Angola', *Review of African Political Economy*, 28, 90 (2001), pp. 521–36.

⁴⁷ J.S. Ovadia, 'The Reinvention of Elite Accumulation in the Angolan Oil Sector: Emergent Capitalism in a Rentier Economy', *Cadernos de Estudos Africanos*, 25 (2013). pp. 33–63.

⁴⁸ C.P. Barros, 'The Resource Curse and Rent-Seeking in Angola', *CEsA Working Paper 102*, 2012, available at <https://cesa.rc.iseg.ulisboa.pt/RePEc/cav/cavwpp/wp102.pdf>, retrieved 4 September 2024; Ovadia, 'The Reinvention of Elite Accumulation'.

⁴⁹ Soares de Oliveira, *Magnificent and Beggar Land*, p. 37.

Justin Pearce⁵⁰ and Vasco Martins⁵¹ argued that the party mobilised a discourse on its core moral values, based on the anti-colonial struggle and its strong implementation in the Central Highlands, the land of the Ovimbundu people.⁵² UNITA's historic constituency is precisely the region where Ovimbundu's elites, prior to the existence of the movement, were socialised within Christian missions. These missions were crucial for the formation of UNITA's elites that later fought against Portuguese colonialism.⁵³ The Ovimbundu are still considered 'UNITA's people',⁵⁴ seen as the *other* inside the Angolan state, through stereotypes and epithets in historical processes of marginalising an ethnic group and the region with which the Ovimbundu are associated.

In oversimplified terms, the elites under discussion here are divided between the ruling elite associated with the MPLA and its civilian government, and the elite from UNITA associated with the Ovimbundu and linked to the military struggle during the civil war. However, to better understand UNITA and its elites, we need to explore the transformation of UNITA from a rebel movement to a political party.⁵⁵

UNITA does not fit the model observed in cases, where armed groups laid 'down the[ir] weapons and replace[d] violent conflict with political competition'.⁵⁶ In fact, UNITA's history as a liberation movement and as a member of the executive branch, albeit with limited powers, counter this model. On the one hand, 'UNITA did not rise up in rebellion against the MPLA. Rather, both movements started out in opposition to Portuguese colonial rule'.⁵⁷ On the other hand, during the second period of Angola's civil war (1992–2002), UNITA was represented in political institutions. In the first multiparty elections, held between 29–30 September 1992, UNITA elected 70 MPs. However due to the resurgence of the war, they did not assume their seats in parliament until 1997, when the Government of Reconciliation and National Unity was formed, containing ministers from all parties with

⁵⁰ Pearce, 'From Rebellion to Opposition'.

⁵¹ Martins, *Colonialism, Ethnicity and War in Angola*.

⁵² T.K. Beck, 'Staging Society: Sources of Loyalty in the Angolan UNITA', *Contemporary Security Policy*, 30, 2 (2009), pp. 343–55.

⁵³ D. Péclard, *Les Incertitudes de La Nation En Angola. Aux Racines Sociales de l'Unita* (Paris, Karthala, 2015).

⁵⁴ Martins, *Colonialism, Ethnicity and War in Angola*, p. 8.

⁵⁵ C. Manning and I. Smith, 'Political Party Formation by Former Armed Opposition Groups after Civil War', *Democratization*, 23, 6 (2016), pp. 972–89 (p. 978); Vines and Oruitemeka, 'Bullets to Ballots'.

⁵⁶ Manning and Smith, 'Political Party Formation', p. 972. K. Wittig, 'Politics in the Shadow of the Gun: Revisiting the Literature on "Rebel-to-Party Transformations" through the Case of Burundi', *Civil Wars*, 18, 2 (2016), pp. 137–59 (pp. 139–41).

⁵⁷ J. Pearce, 'Global Ideologies, Local Politics: The Cold War as Seen from Central Angola', *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 43, 1 (2017), pp. 13–27 (p. 16).

parliamentary representation.⁵⁸ UNITA's military wing was based in the Central Highlands (notably in Bailundo and Andulo), while its political wing was based in Luanda.⁵⁹ UNITA was simultaneously a belligerent against the MPLA and a member of the executive branch of government. However, UNITA lacked real power, since the executive was based on MPLA's political programme, and no relevant positions were assigned to UNITA's members.⁶⁰

UNITA had an armed branch, the Armed Forces of the Liberation of Angola (FALA). This provided a well-organised structure, experienced cadres and a collective identity⁶¹ that shaped UNITA's transition into a civilian party after the war ended in 2002. UNITA's strategy was to accept the integration of its soldiers into the Angolan national army and to follow the Luena Agreement's political prescriptions.⁶²

UNITA's ability to survive after the death of its founder raised concerns.⁶³ On the eve of the 2008 elections, Alex Vines and Bereni Oruitemeka depicted post-war UNITA as an opposition party that had been successfully demilitarised but did not profile itself as a party of potential governance, rather potentially becoming a token opposition party like other opposition parties in Africa that function at a disadvantage vis-à-vis the incumbents.⁶⁴ UNITA elites suffered threats and intimidation as well as a lack of funding and means for running a campaign.⁶⁵ MPLA's win in the 2008 elections consolidated the links between the party, the state and the president, while UNITA had failed to present itself as a possible alternative to the ruling party.⁶⁶ In short, UNITA was considered 'an emasculated presence in the MPLA-controlled political game'.⁶⁷

⁵⁸ Vines, *Angola Unravels*, pp. 25-6.

⁵⁹ Péclard, 'Les Chemins de la "Reconversion Autoritaire" en Angola', pp. 8-9.

⁶⁰ J. Adalberto, 'Angola: Governo de Reconciliação Nacional Nasceu Há 20 Anos', *Deutsche Welle*, 11 April 2017, available at <https://www.dw.com/pt-002/governo-de-reconcilia%C3%A7%C3%A3o-nacional-de-angola-nasceu-h%C3%A1-20-anos/a-38385610>, retrieved 1 March 2023; I. Amundsen, C. Abreu and L. Hoygaard, 'Accountability on the Move: The Parliament of Angola', *CMI Working Paper 11*, 2005, available at <https://www.cmi.no/publications/2021-accountability-on-the-move#pdf>, retrieved 4 September 2024.

⁶¹ These dimensions (a well-organised structure, experienced cadres and a collective identity) support the proposition that successor parties that have previously been socialised into the rules of the political game are more likely to endure.. See Manning and Smith, 'Political Party Formation', p. 974.

⁶² I. Amundsen and M. Weimer, 'Opposition Parties and the Upcoming 2008 Parliamentary Elections in Angola', *CMI Working Paper 9*, 2008, available at <https://www.cmi.no/publications/3103-opposition-parties-and-the-upcoming-2008#pdf>, retrieved 4 September 2024, p. 28; P.C.J. Faria, 'The Dawning of Angola's Citizenship Revolution: A Quest for Inclusionary Politics', *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 39, 2 (2013), pp. 293-311 (p. 300).

⁶³ Robson, 'Angola after Savimbi'.

⁶⁴ Vines and Oruitemeka, 'Bullets to Ballots'.

⁶⁵ Pearce, 'L'Unita à la recherche de "son peuple"', pp. 60-1.

⁶⁶ Schubert, "'Democratisation" and the Consolidation of Political Authority'.

⁶⁷ Soares de Oliveira, 'Illiberal Peacebuilding in Angola', p. 288.

However, in subsequent elections UNITA has shown that it remains a force to be reckoned with and that it is capable of adapting to changes in both internal party dynamics and the political context. In an authoritarian setting where the MPLA controls institutions⁶⁸ and largely sets the conditions under which opposition parties participate in political life,⁶⁹ UNITA has been able to adapt to its role as an exclusively civilian organisation. It has adopted internal electoral mechanisms to choose its leadership and deployed efforts to attain nationwide reach by fielding candidates in all but one electoral constituency in 2022.

The National Assembly in Angola

Angola's first parliament was the People's Assembly, created after independence and comprised exclusively of MPLA MPs. The People's Assembly was replaced by the National Assembly with the 1992 Constitution as part of the transition to a multiparty system.⁷⁰ However, as seen above, the parliament only received deputies from UNITA in 1997, before another interruption from 1998 until the end of the war in 2002, when UNITA's MPs were able to resume their seats.

Since 1992, the National Assembly has been a 220-member unicameral parliament, with MPs elected for a five-year period under a closed-list proportional representation system that applies the D'Hondt method (Articles 143 and 144). Thus, 130 MPs are elected in a national circle and 90 in provincial multi-member circles of five MPs each (Article 144). The constitutional revision of 2010 changed the process for electing the President of the Republic, who is elected in general elections as the head of the list of the party receiving the most votes. This amendment strengthened Angola's presidentialism. The Constitution stipulates in Article 161 that the parliament is subject to the President of the Republic, who also holds both legislative initiative (along with MPs and parliamentary groups, according to Article 167) and executive power.

Besides the former liberation movements, MPLA, FNLA and UNITA, several political parties ran in the four elections held after the end of the war. The MPLA won every electoral contest, even though it lost votes in each successive election. In contrast, after a poor result in 2008, UNITA gradually gained ground. In the 2022 elections, it ran under the United

⁶⁸ Pearce *et al.*, 'Angola's Elections and the Politics of Presidential Succession'.

⁶⁹ O.J. Reuter and R. Turovsky, 'Dominant Party Rule and Legislative Leadership in Authoritarian Regimes', *Party Politics*, 20, 5 (2014), pp. 663–74.

⁷⁰ Amundsen *et al.*, 'Accountability on the Move', p. 1.

Patriot Front (FPU) coalition, which included independents from civil society, the party Democratic Bloc (BD), and the political project of Abel Chivukuvuku, the Angolan Renaissance Party – Together for Angola Serving Angola (PRA-JA Servir Angola). The latter two are offshoots of the Broad Convergence for the Salvation of Angola – Electoral Coalition (CASA-CE), created in 2012 by Chivukuvuku, an historical figure in UNITA who left the party after being sidelined in 2011.

Figure 1 shows the number of MPs elected by all competing parties. The dominance of MPLA is evident in the first post-war elections, and so is the growth in the number of UNITA MPs in more recent elections.

<<Insert Figure 1 here>>

The dominance of MPLA over political life has led to an uneven playing field where opposition participation is highly constrained and institutions are frequently undermined.⁷¹ One example is the continued postponement of local elections, planned since the first multiparty elections in 1992. The legislative package has still not been fully approved in the first year of the fifth legislature.⁷² Yet the UNITA MPs whom we interviewed highlight the relevance of the parliament as an institution that can promote inclusion and dialogue and explain how the actions they intend to take to make the party meaningful limit the ruling party's control over the parliament. MP Adriano Sapiñala wishes for 'a serious social contract' and for his party to have a voice in legislative initiatives, such as the local authorities mentioned above.⁷³ The very fact that the party is present in parliament allows its initiatives to gain visibility among the population and for UNITA to be presented as an alternative to the status quo.⁷⁴

Descriptive Representation: A Portrait of UNITA's Parliamentary Elite

UNITA is the only Angolan party that has increased its number of MPs in every post-war election, meaning that its parliamentary elite is expanding. Drawing on an original dataset of

⁷¹ Pearce, 'From Rebellion to Opposition', p. 479.

⁷² M. Luamba, 'Autarquias em Angola: Proposta de Lei Engavetada?', *Deutsche Welle*, 26 July 2023, available at <https://www.dw.com/pt-002/autarquias-em-angola-proposta-de-lei-engavetada/a-66352867>, retrieved 29 July 2023.

⁷³ Interview with Adriano Sapiñala, Luanda, 25 January 2020.

⁷⁴ Interview with Albertina Ngolo Felisberto, Luanda, 28 January 2020; interview with Manuel Armando Ekuikui, Luanda, 24 January 2020; interview with Mihaela Webba, Lisbon, 11 October 2021.

UNITA's MPs from 2008 until 2022,⁷⁵ here we explore the nature of descriptive representation,⁷⁶ that is the socio-demographic profile of the MPs. We do this using data on age, gender, ethnicity, locality (if native to the district and to the region) and military background. This allows UNITA's parliamentary elite to be described not only in terms of key socio-demographic factors but also whether UNITA's historic Ovimbundu constituencies are prevalent in the parliamentary group and if having a military background is relevant.

As can be seen in Figures 2 and 3, the UNITA parliamentary group has had, in all legislatures, a predominance of deputies who are over 50 years old and male. Thus, similar to other parliaments, such as in Sierra Leone⁷⁷ and Cameroon,⁷⁸ there is a lack of youth representation. Across all of UNITA's parliamentary groups, only two MPs were younger than 30 years of age: Manuel Armando da Costa Ekuikui was 26 years old when he was elected in 2017, and Ariane Rebeca Lusadisu Nhany was the same age when elected in 2022. The average age in each legislature was 58, 56, 54 and 53 years old, respectively.

<< Insert Figure 2 and Figure 3 here >>

The same lack of representativeness applies to women. A study of the Angolan parliament prior to the 2008 elections found that the National Assembly was unrepresentative of women and the rural population.⁷⁹ National-level quotas adopted in 2005 helped increase women's presence in parliament,⁸⁰ but women remain underrepresented within UNITA's parliamentary group (Figure 4). In UNITA's parliamentary group (under the FPU coalition) that emerged from the 2022 elections, only 16 per cent are women, which is the lowest level of female representation since the end of war. This figure was 25 per cent in 2008 and 2017, and 28 per cent in 2012. Despite the decrease in women's representation in 2022, all the women elected were from UNITA, with none from the other FPU coalition members. Within FPU, each party selected their respective candidates based on criteria considered to be competitive. Conversely, MPLA assembled a list with more women and youth, which the party praised as a commitment towards the

⁷⁵ We consider the MPs who took office after the elections, but not their replacements in cases of death or other reasons.

⁷⁶ S. Dovi, "Political Representation", *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Fall 2018), available at <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2018/entries/political-representation>, retrieved 27 September 2023.

⁷⁷ A. Osei, 'Post-Conflict Democratisation in Sierra Leone: The Role of the Parliament', *Journal of Legislative Studies*, 27, 1 (2021), pp. 112–35.

⁷⁸ Morse, 'The Legislature as Political Control'.

⁷⁹ Amundsen *et al.*, 'Accountability on the Move', p. 16.

⁸⁰ K.S. Adams, 'The Sub-Saharan African Triumvirate: Female Representation in the National Parliaments of Angola, Ethiopia and Lesotho', *International Journal of Politics and Good Governance*, 3, 3 (2012), pp. 1–26.

party laws,⁸¹ which require parties to promote equal opportunities for men and women (Article 20 of Law 22/10 of 3 December 2010).

<<Insert Figure 4 here>>

UNITA's parliamentary groups across all legislatures feature inequality in both gender and age, inequalities also seen in other contexts.⁸² Angola's current legislature consists of 33.6 per cent women MPs, a figure comparable to that of other authoritarian countries in the region, including Uganda, Cameroon, Zimbabwe and Equatorial Guinea.⁸³ Considering the relationship between gender and age, the parliamentary elite remains an 'old boys' club', limiting women's and young people's access to political institutions.⁸⁴ In general, political parties in Africa relegate young people to secondary roles in terms of political visibility and access to institutions,⁸⁵ and UNITA aligns with this trend.

Considering ethnicity (Figure 5), UNITA has a dominant Ovimbundu presence in its parliamentary elite, but has also progressively incorporated members from other ethnic groups, gradually becoming a more diverse party. In the first legislature, UNITA drew most its seats from the Benguela, Huambo and Kuando-Kubango constituencies.⁸⁶ These are regions with a strong Ovimbundu presence and a history as UNITA strongholds. Alongside the Central Highlands, Kuando-Kubango is the region where UNITA installed Jamba, the party's support structures during the civil war, providing welfare to the populations under the party's tutelage.⁸⁷ The initial composition of UNITA's parliamentary group confirmed the claim that Jonas Savimbi mobilised Ovimbundu cultural affinities to UNITA, first as an anti-colonial movement and later as a belligerent opposing the MPLA, to gain electoral

⁸¹ M. Luamba, "'Ilustre Desconhecida" é Candidata do MPLA a Vice-Presidente', *Deutsche Welle*, 24 May 2022, available at <https://www.dw.com/pt-002/ilustre-desconhecida-%C3%A9-candidata-do-mpla-a-vice-presidente/a-61920072>, retrieved 15 August 2024.

⁸² E. Oinas, H. Onodera and L. Suurpää, 'Evasive Youth, Oblique Politics', in E. Oinas, H. Onodera and L. Suurpää (eds), *What Politics? Youth and Political Engagement in Africa* (Leiden, Brill, 2018), pp. 1–20.

⁸³ IPU Parline, 'Monthly Ranking of Women in National Parliaments, September 2023', available at <https://data.ipu.org/women-ranking?month=9&year=2023>, retrieved 27 September 2023.

⁸⁴ N. Shvedova, 'Obstacles to Women's Participation in Parliament', in J. Ballington and A. Karam (eds), *Women in Parliament: Beyond Numbers* (Stockholm, IDEA, 2005), pp. 33–50 (p. 37).

⁸⁵ J.O. Adebayo, 'Gerontocracy in African Politics: Youth and the Quest for Political Participation', *Journal of African Elections*, 17, 1 (2018), pp. 140–61; G.M. Bob-Milliar, 'Party Youth Activists and Low-Intensity Electoral Violence in Ghana: A Qualitative Study of Party Foot Soldiers' Activism', *African Studies Quarterly*, 15, 1 (2014), pp. 125–52.

⁸⁶ Amundsen *et al.*, 'Accountability on the Move', p. 16.

⁸⁷ Pearce, 'From Rebellion to Opposition', p. 478; Pearce, *'Political Identity and Conflict'*, p. 108.

success.⁸⁸ Nevertheless, the party gradually became national and the current legislature is the most ethnically diverse in the history of UNITA's parliamentary group.

<<Insert Figure 5 here>>

Ethnicity overlaps with MPs' places of origin, with UNITA maintaining a strong presence in the Central Highlands. Huambo is the province of origin of most UNITA MPs (seven in 2008, 13 in 2012, 14 in 2017, and 21 in 2022), followed by Bié (with three, seven, 10 and six, respectively). UNITA's traditional elites, the Ovimbundu elite, and those formed as result of UNITA's placement in Huambo and the creation of Jamba during the civil war, continue to be present in the Angolan parliament.

The increasing ethnic diversity of the party is matched by increasing diversity in the provinces of origin of UNITA candidates. At this level also, the composition of the parliamentary group elected in 2022 is unprecedented, with MPs originating from all 18 Angolan provinces. In addition, for the first time, UNITA has elected MPs in all provincial constituencies but one (Cunene). Breaking this down by election and provincial circles allows us to chart its evolution: UNITA elected three MPs for provincial constituencies in 2008 (Bié, Cabinda and Kuando Kubango); eight in 2012 (one MP in the provinces of Bengo, Benguela, Cabinda, Huambo, Kuando Kubango, Luanda and Zaire, and two in Bié); 16 in 2017 (one deputy in the provinces of Bengo, Benguela, Cabinda, Kuando Kubango, Lunda Norte, Moxico, Uíge and Zaire, and two deputies in Bié, Huambo, Luanda, and Lunda Sul); and finally, 33 in 2022 (one deputy in the provinces of Huambo, Huila, Kuando Kubango, Kwanza Sul, Moxico and Namibe; two deputies in Bengo, Bié, Kwanza Norte, Lunda Norte, Lunda Sul, Malanje and Uíge; three deputies in Benguela, Luanda and Zaire; and four deputies in Cabinda). Among these MPs, not all were born in the constituency where they were elected. For example, in 2008 and 2012, Regina Eduardo Txipoia, who was born in Bié, was elected from the Kuando Kubango constituency. In 2017, the same MP was elected from the national constituency. In Luanda, Nelito Ekuikui, originally from Huambo, was elected in 2017 and 2022. Adriano Abel Sapiñala, also from Huambo, who was elected in 2017 by the Kuando Kubango constituency and in 2022 by that of Benguela, is notable for his engagement with diverse constituencies and for his prominent public presence.

⁸⁸ Martins, *Colonialism, Ethnicity and War in Angola*, p. 114.

The selection of candidates for UNITA's lists does not strictly adhere to criteria based on ethnicity or locality, effectively bridging cleavages. For the 2022 elections, the selection followed its own regulations ('Regulation for the selection of candidates for representatives to the National Assembly on the UNITA list for the 2022 general elections'), which were approved in May 2022 by the Standing Committee of the Political Commission. This Regulation was followed by pacts to include members of the coalition, PRA-JA Servir Angola, BD, and civil society in the final lists. The process begins with tabulation for the national (Article 8) and provincial (Article 9) constituencies. In the case of the national constituency, there are pre-candidates listed by their inherent function, such as the party president, vice presidents, the president of the women's organisation (League of the Angolan Woman [LIMA]) and the secretary general of the party's youth organisation (Revolutionary United Youth of Angola [JURA]). These pre-candidates are presented to the president of UNITA, and to them others are added which aim to 'ensure the inclusion of technocrats, the socio-cultural balances and to attend to the shares in the scope of the political agreements' (Article 8). The final list thus results from pacts between UNITA and the other members of the FPU coalition. This is the list that presumably offers candidates the best chance of being elected.

In the case of the provincial constituencies, it is not a matter of pre-candidates giving way to candidates agreed between the groups that comprise the coalition, but of candidates who are proposed only by UNITA. The process of tabulation of the 10 candidates (five effective and five substitutes) takes place within the local party structures, with the provincial secretary being one of the candidates. The remaining nine candidates are chosen as follows: eight are elected by the provincial committee, and the provincial secretary recommends to the UNITA president the person running as the third effective candidate, who should be chosen 'among the dedicated and outstanding cadres of the Province, after consultation with the Provincial Committee' (Article 9)

Changing candidate selection rules in 2022 affected the composition of UNITA's parliamentary group, by expanding the recruitment pool and adding new politicians in the list. The party's greater national presence in 2022 was accompanied by a renewal of parliamentary elites. The new parliamentary group has a different composition from previous ones as it includes civil society actors (for example, Nuno Álvaro Dala, an activist opposed to the José Eduardo dos Santos regime and member of the group 15+2 who were

tried and sentenced to prison in 2015) and members of other political parties (such as Justino Pinto de Andrade, from BD, an anti-colonial MPLA militant who left the party after independence; in the fourth legislature, he was an MP in the CASA-CE parliamentary group). Yet UNITA's parliamentary elite remains stable, containing second-term MPs (21 in total from different generations), combining historical figures such as Alcides Sakala, Eugénio Antonino Ngolo and Piedoso Chipindo Bonga with a new generation of elites, such as Manuel Armando da Costa Ekuikui, elected general-secretary of JURA in March 2023; Rafael Massanga Sakaita Savimbi, son of the party's founder; and Adriano Abel Sapiñala, son of two prominent UNITA figures – Helena Bonguela Abel, leader of LIMA, and Samuel Chiwale. The latter two are examples of a generation of Angolans who grew up in Jamba and experienced the social support provided by the party's structures under Jonas Savimbi's leadership.

The group of MPs in their third term includes both men and women. Some are historical figures (such as the party's president Adalberto Costa Júnior, former FALA combatant Silvestre Gabriel Samy, LIMA leader Helena Bonguela Abel, and Clarisse Kaputu, journalist at Radio Vorgan, former UNITA radio station at Jamba) and others represent a generational change (such as Liberty Chiyaka, the leader of the parliamentary group, Albertina Ngolo Felisberto, daughter of Eugénio Antonino Ngolo and brought up in the ranks of UNITA, and Mihaela Webba, from a traditional MPLA family).

The selection of candidates can also shed light on how a rebel movement can transition to a solely civilian political party.⁸⁹ As war becomes a more distant reality, parliamentary elite renewal includes progressively more civilian actors with no military background (Figure 6). But having been a member of the armed branch of the party, FALA, still plays a role in the consolidation of this elite. Of those in their third term in the current legislature, Alcides Sakala Simões, Piedoso Chipindo Bonga, Silvestre Gabriel Samy and Liberty Chiyaka all boast a military background. As seen in Figure 6, the presence of MPs with a military background in the FALA is still remarkable.

<<Insert figure 6 here>>

UNITA's current president is the first with no military background. Since its foundation, UNITA has had five presidents. Jonas Savimbi was the first, from 1966 until his death in 2002. He was succeeded by António Dembo, who was president for three days, and

⁸⁹ J. Ishiyama and M. Marshall, 'Candidate Recruitment and Former Rebel Parties', *Party Politics*, 21, 4 (2015), pp. 591–602.

then Lukamba Paulo ‘Gato’, interim president until the party’s ninth Congress in June 2003, which elected Isaiás Samakuva. Samakuva was re-elected president at the tenth, eleventh and twelfth congresses, in 2007, 2011 and 2015. The current party president, Adalberto Costa Júnior, was elected at the 2019 Congress. Ovimbundu elites and military have constituted the core of UNITA’s leadership since Savimbi,⁹⁰ but the election of Costa Júnior, who has no military background and is of mixed race, broke with this tradition and symbolically led to the deconstruction of a public discourse around the tribalism of UNITA. MP Mihaela Webba considers that power at the top level of UNITA should overcome identity politics, with the election of a mixed-race president showing that UNITA is not a ‘racist party’.⁹¹

Based on the analysis presented in this section, we can conclude that UNITA’s representation became increasingly nationwide, and the party is progressively distancing itself from being confined to specific regions outside the capital city, as other opposition parties in the region are, namely RENAMO in Mozambique.⁹² UNITA’s parliamentary group has steadily incorporated previously unrepresented ethnicities and regions. However, Ovimbundu remains the majority ethnic group, and the Central Highlands continue to be the most represented region, showing that elite recruitment strategies in UNITA reinforce historic constituency links. A similar pattern emerges when we consider MPs’ military background, with MPs with a background in FALA continuing to wield significant influence in the party. As a result of the 2022 elections, there is greater diversity in terms of ethnicity and region, but not in terms of age and gender. The parliamentary group remains predominantly male and gerontocratic. To gain more understanding of the composition and trajectory of UNITA’s parliamentary elite, it would be necessary to collect additional data, namely on education, profession, party and political career. This data would also facilitate an analysis of the networks established between historic and current strongholds and the connections between MPs.

MPs’ Engagement with Constituents

⁹⁰ Martins, *Colonialism, Ethnicity and War in Angola*, p. 8.

⁹¹ Interview with Mihaela Webba, Lisbon, 11 October 2021.

⁹² J. Sumich, ‘Politics after the Time of Hunger in Mozambique: A Critique of Neo-Patrimonial Interpretation of African Elites’, *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 34, 1 (2008), pp. 111–25.

In Angola, the electoral system generates fewer incentives for MPs to nurture links with their constituencies and engage in more substantive forms of representation. Justin Pearce et al. contend that the country's proportional system, with both provincial and national circles, favours the MPLA, because it gives disproportionate weight to less populous provinces where the MPLA has had good electoral performances.⁹³ Based on the case of Rwanda, Alexander Stroh argues that a large national constituency favours the maintenance of the incumbent party in power, being one feature of institutional engineering that facilitates the centralisation of power, and making service to constituents and electoral proximity more difficult.⁹⁴ In addition to a national circle, which makes constituency service harder, the Constitution stipulates that '[m]embers shall be representatives of all the people and not only of the constituencies for which they were elected' (Article 147: Nature of the Mandate). Given this institutional setting, this section explores how UNITA's MPs perceive their role as representatives and relate to their constituents.

A first set of interview quotes highlight the role of the parliament for opposition parties. Adriano Abel Sapiñala, for example, believes that the parliament has become the 'only stage for major conflicts', following the end of the war. However, according to Manuel Armando Ekuikui the parliament is rather weak in its basic functions: '[t]he national assembly still does not represent, does not represent from a factual point of view the interests of the people', especially those on the margins of society who have no other means of representation but do have particular interests. Given the nature of parliament, the opposition has not been able to fully represent the interests of its constituents, especially if we consider the provincial constituencies.⁹⁵

Therefore, most MPs interviewed believe that the National Assembly should become a stronger institution in line with the interests of the population represented rather than with the party-isation of political life in the country. Adriano Abel Sapiñala is adamant that there are constraints on the actions of MPs due to the proportional representation rules and party-isation of Angola's politics:

⁹³ Pearce *et al.*, 'Angola's Elections and the Politics of Presidential Succession', p. 154.

⁹⁴ A. Stroh, 'Electoral Rules of the Authoritarian Game: Undemocratic Effects of Proportional Representation in Rwanda', *Journal of Eastern African Studies*, 4, 1 (2010), pp. 1–19.

⁹⁵ P.C. Roque, 'Reform or Unravel? Prospects for Angola's Transition', *Southern Africa Report* 8, May 2017, available at <https://issafrica.s3.amazonaws.com/site/uploads/sar8.pdf>, retrieved 4 September 2024.

Unfortunately, our MPs are elected based on party lists rather than individual merit. It's more about the party's order of precedence than the competence of the MP. However, given this electoral system, it's important that, when you become an MP, then there's accountability. What is your role in provincial constituency Y? What contributions do you make there? It's essential for people to recognise their elected representatives. They should not see an MP as just another citizen who earns a good salary and enjoys perks but rather as someone on a mission to represent the people. It's disheartening when the very people an MP represents don't even know them. Therefore, when you are elected from a party list, it's equally important to make an effort to become well known in the communities you represent.

<<no indent para continues>>While in proportional representation systems MPs tend to have a broader national orientation,⁹⁶ the interviews nuance this view. Adriano Abel Sapiñala is one of the MPs with a notable media presence, using social networks (specifically Facebook, where he has more than 170,000 followers) with different aims. He records and broadcasts his parliamentary interventions⁹⁷ and shows how he connects with his voters. His most common strategy is to use videos and photographs to publicise the events he organises and his field trips to the constituencies for which he has been elected (Huambo in 2017 and Kuando Kubango in 2022). Additional strategies include interactions with communities to draw attention to issues that require the urgent intervention of local authorities, as in Menongue (Kuando Kubango),⁹⁸ but also to precarious situations in various sectors, such as the informal economy in the 4 de Abril market in Lobito (Benguela)⁹⁹ or the lack of water in public health facilities, like the Caota Medical Center, also in Benguela.¹⁰⁰

⁹⁶ R. Mattes and S. Mozaffar, 'Legislatures and Democratic Development in Africa', *African Studies Review*, 59, 3 (2016), pp. 201–15 (p. 210).

⁹⁷ Such as the intervention in the debate on 22 June 2023 on Citizens' Rights and Freedom versus Acts of Public Disorder. See Adriano Abel Sapiñala, 'Sobre o ponto de agenda que o MPLA trouxe sobre, Direitos e Liberdade dos Cidadãos versus Actos de Desordem Pública, eu disse o seguinte', Facebook, 22 June 2023, available at <https://www.facebook.com/watch/?v=309854321372686>, retrieved 20 October 2023.

⁹⁸ Adriano Abel Sapiñala, 'Estivemos hoje na Universidade Cuito Cuanavale...', Facebook, 5 September 2019, available at <https://www.facebook.com/adriano.sapinala/posts/pfbid024z11vFiaJNbSjYGkEZ3HBzPQYWLucT8oRbsrbXvMUcL8faiW5SaRWKb2SjJJVeZRL>, retrieved 20 October 2023.

⁹⁹ Adriano Abel Sapiñala, 'Contacto com os vendedores ambulantes do mercado 4 de Abril', Facebook, 10 December 2022, available at https://www.facebook.com/watch/live/?ref=watch_permalink&v=541862784213637, retrieved 20 October 2023.

¹⁰⁰ Adriano Abel Sapiñala, 'Estivemos hoje 29 de Agosto no Mercado do Bairro Paz em Menongue ...', Facebook, 29 August 2020, available at

UNITA's parliamentary group uses two additional strategies for connecting with its constituencies. The first aims to mitigate the lack of proximity between an MP elected from national lists and the general population. All MPs elected in national lists are expected to develop a systematic relationship (referred to in the current legislature as a 'deputation of proximity')¹⁰¹ with the population in their places of residence or origin and in public spaces. This is a pragmatic choice, of going beyond regional ties to relevant electoral circles where the party can gain more votes in upcoming elections. In these cases, MPs who are considered to be more charismatic are selected to perform more visible service. The second strategy is to maintain a close connection with different social groups through various parliamentary committees; hence, UNITA's parliamentary group establishes relationships with associations and institutions outside parliament. For example, the Defence and Security Commission is responsible for liaising with the country's armed and police forces, veterans' associations and former combatants, promoting meetings and consultations.¹⁰²

The leader of the UNITA parliamentary group for the fourth and fifth legislatures, Liberty Chiyaka, stresses this proximity to constituents as a primary characteristic of the group, indicating that

[t]he strategic plan of the UNITA parliamentary group obliges that every week ... each deputy has to present the report of activity carried out with the citizens. How many requests have you received from the citizens? We do that. How many concerns? You have to produce the report ... How could you accept that you, as a Member of Parliament, can represent someone and for a whole month you do not say how many citizens you have talked to? How many demands did you receive from a citizen? If not, then you are not representing anyone.

<<no indent para continues>>This is also a way of overcoming people's unawareness of their representatives and the lack of recognition of the role that parliament plays in promoting democracy. In an unprecedented move in the country, in 2022 UNITA established

<https://www.facebook.com/adriano.sapinala/posts/pfbid02YHmPMLtDWzWUsaApByD9RZZ9nXNvZr9iYGhKvqeQ7VecxxXiMY1mcmBSjfC9xTPNl>, retrieved 20 October 2023.

¹⁰¹ For example, UNITA MPs went on a 'deputation of proximity' in Naimbe market on 5 April 2022. See UNITA Namibe, Trabalho de deputação de proximidade no Naimbe/mercado provincial do 5 de Abril', Facebook, 10 December 2022, available at

<https://www.facebook.com/100080999720959/videos/695531515254609>, retrieved 1 March 2023.

¹⁰² Interview with Liberty Chiyaka, Luanda, 29 January 2020.

the ‘Day of the UNITA Deputy,’ celebrated on 8 May, in tribute to Raúl Danda, a historic member of the party who passed away in 2021. He is remembered as a parliamentary role model among MPs.¹⁰³

Jean-Pascal Daloz argued that African elites navigate in different frameworks, deriving legitimacy from the ‘ability to nourish the clientele on which their power rests’.¹⁰⁴ Unable to access state resources to nurture this type of relationship, UNITA’s parliamentary elite builds legitimacy by expressing concern for its role in parliament and demonstrating closeness to constituents. The importance of service to constituents and nurturing ties with the population is promoted on MPs’ Facebook profiles. For instance, in February 2021, a group of activists and UNITA MPs travelled to Cafunfo, in Lunda-Norte, to call attention to the massacre of diamond diggers at the hands of the police. In a violation of freedom of movement,¹⁰⁵ they were prevented from reaching the area. During the 2022 electoral campaign, Adalberto Costa Júnior travelled to Cafunfo in a unique electoral campaign activity to show support to sidelined populations.¹⁰⁶

How UNITA connects with its constituents is important in overcoming the regional and ethnic-based image of the party. Ethnicity and ‘similar “club” identities’ are influential in African politics and representatives can speak for the interests of their co-ethnics.¹⁰⁷ But the case of UNITA demonstrates that co-ethnicity has little relevance for engagements with constituents, which may include agenda-setting actions and responses to one-off situations. The way in which MPs connect with constituencies and the level of elite integration have a positive effect on democratisation,¹⁰⁸ and the current legislature in Angola can create the momentum to bring about change in the way constituents regard political institutions.

Conclusion

¹⁰³ J. Cabanje, ‘Papel de Raúl Danda Considerado Exemplar’, *Jornal de Angola*, 9 May 2023, <https://www.jornaldeangola.ao/ao/noticias/papel-de-raul-danda-considerado-exemplar>, retrieved 30 July 2023.

¹⁰⁴ Daloz, ‘“Big Men” in Sub-Saharan Africa’, p. 278.

¹⁰⁵ UNITA Parlamento, ‘Mais um dia de Resistencia contra a ditadura’, Facebook, 5 February 2021, available at <https://www.facebook.com/unita.parlamento/posts/pfbid02nAJk2RoiTw7r5LuopoAWcVvHFSMzg1MV5ADhuqqMYTYCMBdNrEhtHCNSVVmNzxML>, retrieved 6 March 2023.

¹⁰⁶ Adalberto Costa Júnior, ‘De saída do Cafunfo, com as forças renovadas ...’, Facebook, 10 August 2022, available at <https://www.facebook.com/AdalbertoCosta.J/posts/pfbid0S5ajKS6ag5oeTHCF3b1jAm7aUQFM13AbVSCCes2dmLrbVwSsfLdUdz6Xq5rLVWyyI>, retrieved 6 March 2023.

¹⁰⁷ Raleigh and Wigmore-Shepherd, ‘Elite Coalitions and Power Balance’, p. 25.

¹⁰⁸ Osei, ‘Post-Conflict Democratisation in Sierra Leone’.

We have utilised the case of Angola for a two-fold contribution to fields that have been overlooked in the study of politics in Africa: the composition of elites, namely parliamentary elites, on the one hand; and opposition parties on the other. Elites usually refer to a group of people benefitting from their place in the state and their access to resources, so the concept can be extended to study parliamentary elites, particularly of opposition parties.

UNITA is an exceptional case of a historic liberation movement that assumed a belligerent role during the Angolan civil war and transitioned into a civilian political party afterwards. The party has been demonstrating in parliament that it is gradually becoming a national entity and distancing itself from the portrayals associating it with the destruction provoked by the civil war and the regional limits of the Central Highlands. UNITA witnessed a consistent growth in its parliamentary representation in each post-war election. This trend allows us to understand patterns of continuity and renewal in the processes of elite formation and political representation. Following the end of the war and in each subsequent electoral cycle, the composition of UNITA's parliamentary group demonstrates its expanding reach, ultimately achieving representation in all but one constituency during the 2022 election, while MPs elected in 2022 originate from all of Angola's provinces. While the parliamentary group has become more diverse in terms of ethnicity and regional representation, it continues to be dominated by the Ovimbundu ethnic group, a historic core constituency since its foundation by Jonas Savimbi in 1966, and is marked by a significant presence of deputies from the Central Highlands. Additionally, UNITA continues to feature a notable number of MPs with a military background in FALA, the party's armed wing. Furthermore, in a trend not uncommon among political parties in the region,¹⁰⁹ UNITA's parliamentary group exhibits a notable absence of women and young people and combines historical figures with newcomers. These findings are new and interesting; however, to gain a more comprehensive understanding of UNITA's parliamentary elites, further analysis using additional identifiers, such as education, profession, party and political career, is necessary.

This study also illustrates how opposition parties overcome institutional constraints to move towards more substantive forms of representation. It demonstrates that, despite electoral rules that privilege national rather than local forms of representation, UNITA

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*

deploys efforts to serve its constituents. This commitment transcends ethnic and regional affiliations, challenging the conventional belief that co-ethnicity is the primary determinant of MPs' relationships with their constituents. These insights have significant implications for understanding the role of parliament in an authoritarian regime, moving beyond a mere rubber-stamping institution. Moreover, strategies of a 'deputation of proximity' carry potential implications for democratisation and institution building.

Studies on political elites in contexts such as southern Africa, where opposition parties are gaining ground, should prioritise examining opposition parties and their strategies for renewal. This focus allows for the analysis of elites beyond neo-patrimonial approaches and the relationship with the state's resources, as they lack access to executive power. It also provides insights into what unifies these elites, their core values, and how they extend their national influence by embracing new members while keeping a core identity, in this case, linked to the liberation movement and its historic strongholds. Exploring these legacies further can go a long way in explaining patterns of elite continuity beyond the present case study.

This study suggests possibilities for future research on political representation and constituency service. First, there is a need for a comprehensive descriptive analysis of the Angolan parliament as a whole. This would shed light on its composition, extending our understanding beyond the complexities associated with the study of authoritarian regimes. Research on parliamentary elites offers an avenue of research that adds to the more conventional studies on presidents and executives. Second, an examination of the strategies employed by parties to overcome the constraints posed by a representation system designed to maintain the incumbents in power is crucial. This can illuminate how opposition parties circumvent the rules of the political game, creating mechanisms to overcome institutional restrictions and expand their national reach.

Acknowledgements

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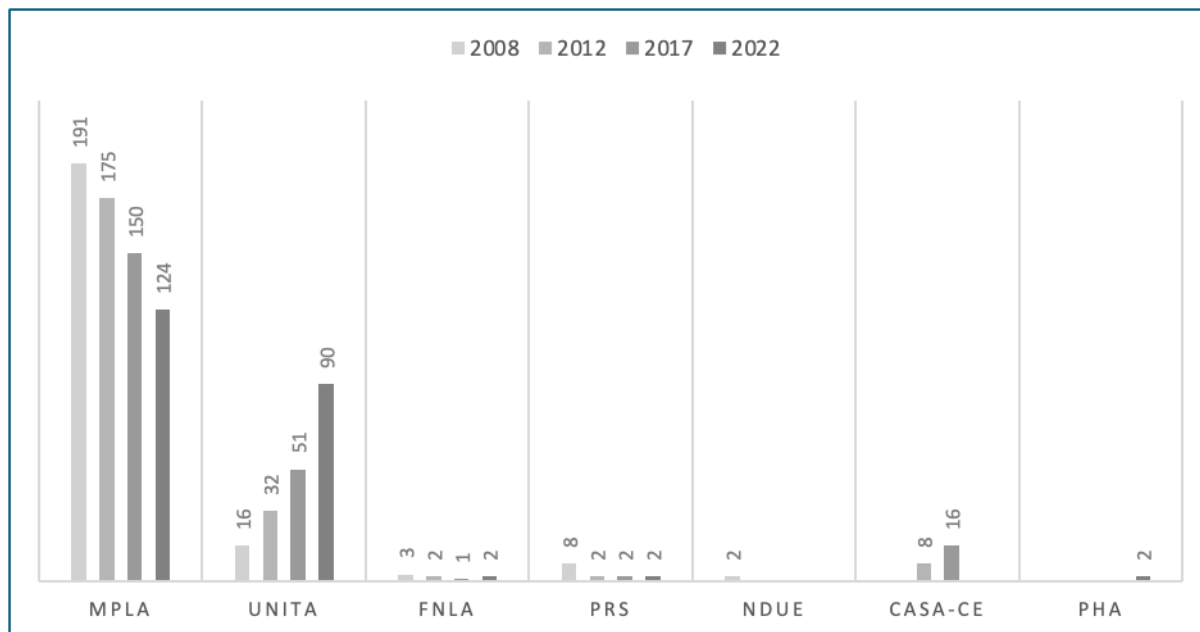


Figure 1. Number of MPs elected per party (2008–22) (Source: Authors’ elaboration based on data from Angola National Electoral Commission, available at <https://www.cne.ao>, retrieved 10 January 2023).

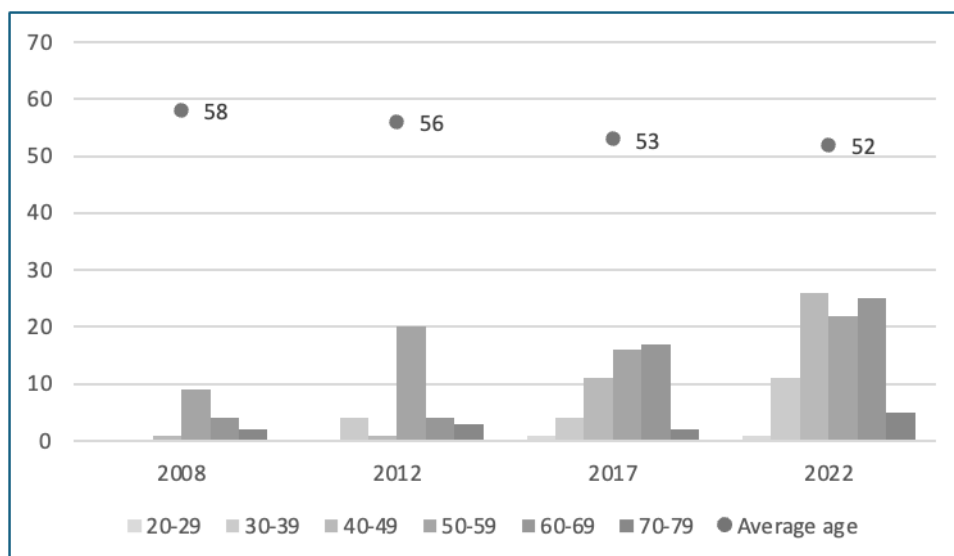


Figure 2. MPs: Total per age group and average age (2008–22). (Source: Authors. elaboration).

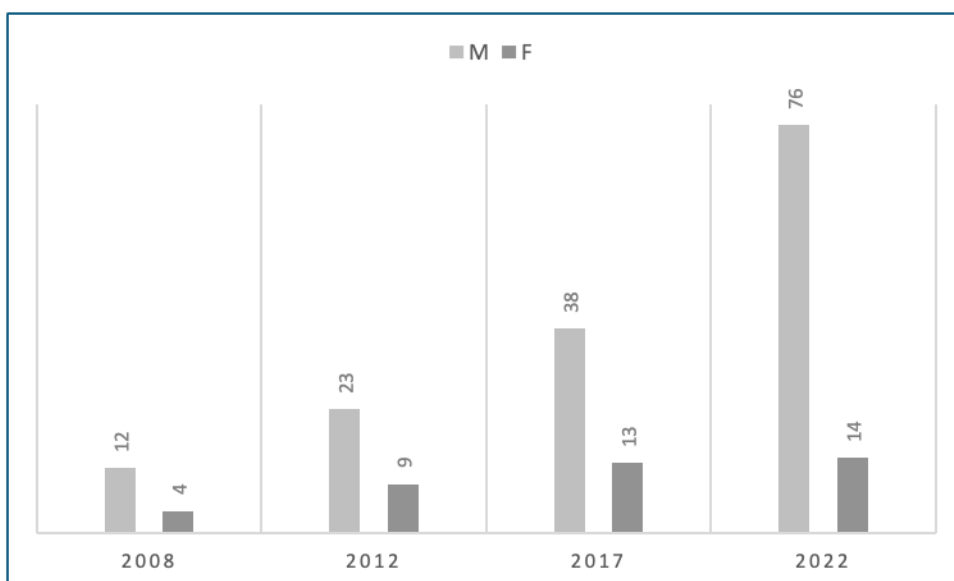


Figure 3. MPs by gender (2008–22). (Source: Authors' elaboration).

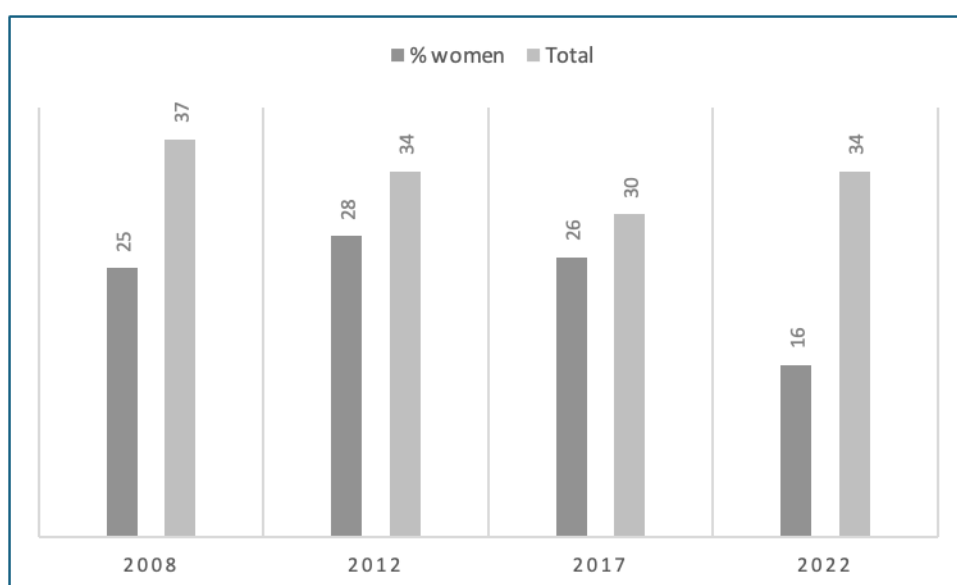


Figure 4. Percentage of women in UNITA's parliamentary group and in the parliament overall (2008–22). (Source: Authors' elaboration based on IPU Parline, 'Global Data on National Parliaments: Angola National Assembly', available at <https://data.ipu.org/parliament/AO/AO-LC01>, retrieved 17 April 2023).

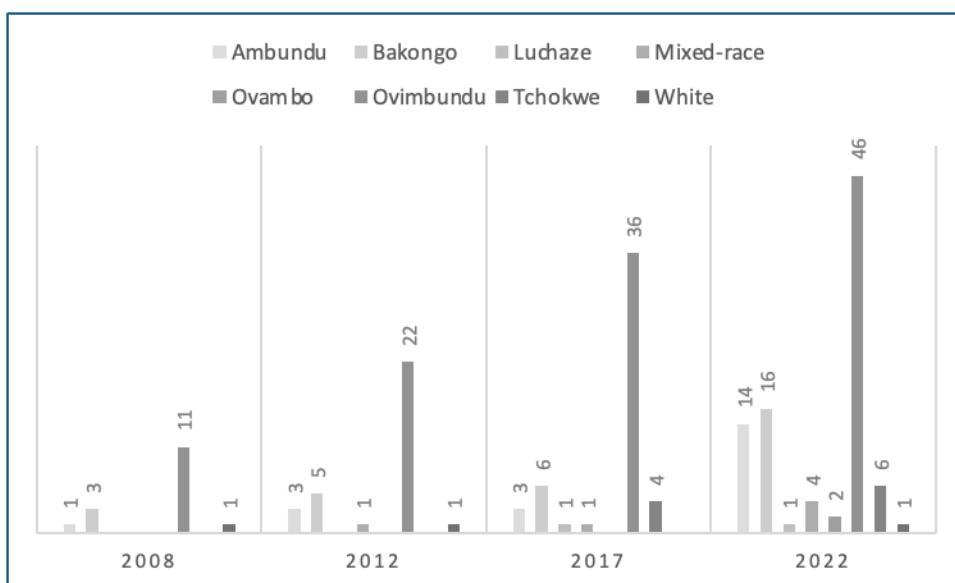


Figure 5. UNITA's MPs by ethnic group (2008–22). (Source: Authors' elaboration).

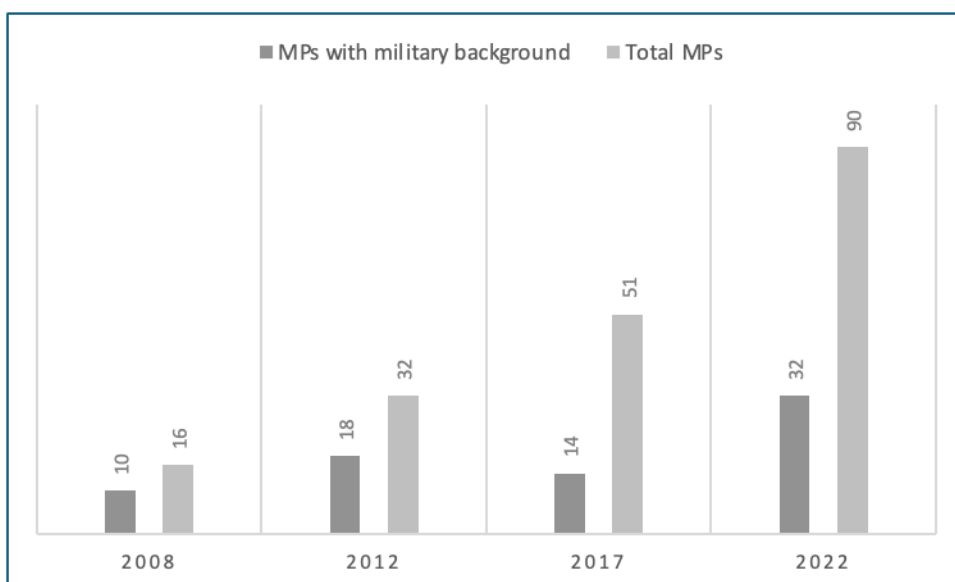


Figure 6. MPs with military background (2008–22). (Source: Authors' elaboration).