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By Dr. Janette Yarwood

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Homes in a poor neighborhood of Luanda, Angola, viewed from the air, on Sunday May 4, 2014. (Source: AP Photo / Saul Loeb, Pool.)

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Togo's Incumbent President Faure Gnassingbé speaks to media after casting his ballot at a polling station in Lomé, Togo, Saturday, April 25, 2015. Togo's president, whose family has ruled this West African nation for nearly 50 years, appealed for peace as he vied for re-election Saturday against four other candidates. (Source: AP Photo/Erick Kaglan.)

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The Institute for Defense Analyses is a non-profit corporation operating in the public interest.

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IDA's Africa team focuses on issues related to political, economic, and social stability and security on the continent.

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## A Snapshot of Angola

Angola is considered by some to be Africa's [foremost emerging market](#). From 2002 to 2013, Angola's GDP grew between 5 and 15 percent annually. Since the end of its civil war in 2002, Angola has focused on reconstruction and has made great strides in the development of its economy, which is largely propelled by oil. The country is second in Africa only to Nigeria as an oil producer. The U.S. Energy Information Administration estimates that Angola [earned \\$24 billion](#) in net oil export revenue in 2014. The country is also rich in other natural resources, including gold, bauxite, uranium, phosphates, copper, timber, and natural gas, and it is the world's fourth largest producer of diamonds.

At the head of these developments is one of Africa's longest serving presidents, José Eduardo dos Santos, who came into power in 1979. In 2010, dos Santos strengthened his grip on power with a [new constitution](#) that ended the need for a direct presidential ballot. The head of the party that wins in parliamentary elections now automatically becomes president. The post of prime minister was abolished, and the president was empowered to appoint a vice president. The constitution also granted the president the authority to appoint the judges of the Constitutional Court, Supreme Court, and the Court of Audits. The new constitution also imposes a limit of two 5-year presidential terms, but this does not apply retroactively, meaning that 72 year-old dos Santos could remain in office until 2022.

## An Emboldened Population

In the lead-up to Angola's 2012 presidential election, Dos Santos faced increasing opposition as youth activists stepped up [anti-government protests](#). The small-scale youth movement, named the Angolan Revolutionary Movement (MRA), includes rappers, intellectuals, and journalists who call for social reforms and the resignation of President dos Santos. While the ruling People's Movement for the Liberation of Angola (MPLA) prevailed in the polls, the activists have not backed down, continuing to demonstrate and call for social reforms. In a recent interview, youth activist David Mendes [told DW Africa](#) that protests will not stop until there is proper access to sanitation, education, and health care and the unemployment situation is addressed. He also addressed income inequality: "wealth is not being shared equally, there is a group that dominates, food and fuel prices have increased and we object to it all."

In interviews the author conducted in late 2014, activists asserted that they were in the process of rethinking strategies and had considered building coalitions with other groups. This appears to slowly be taking shape—the MRA recently assisted with organizing demonstrations to highlight the [disappearance](#) of António Alves Kamulingue and Isaías Cassule, who were organizing protests by war veterans and members of the former presidential guard to claim unpaid pensions. In early April 2015, youth activists also planned to travel to Cabinda, in the northern part of the country, to

participate in a protest for the release of two local activists who were [detained](#) for planning a demonstration. Activists had been unable to organize the protest due to the heavy government [crackdown](#) in oil-rich Cabinda.

Since 2011, there has also been an increase in smaller, [low-level protests](#) throughout the country, including civil service workers demanding better pay and working conditions. Most recently, residents of the Cacuaco neighborhood of Luanda held a protest after a power cut. Trucks were reportedly sent to restore power immediately. One activist noted the significance: “This is a sign that things are changing.” Paula Roque, a senior analyst at the International Crisis Group on Southern Africa, echoes this view, [noting](#) that the recent conviction of police officers and state security agents for the murder of the two missing activists shows that civil society, the opposition, and youth groups can have an impact when they make enough noise.

## Conclusion

There has been an increase in the number of protests in Angola in recent years. According to ACLED (Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project), there were 89 protests between 2011 and 2014—more than the total number that occurred from the end of the civil war, in 2002, to 2010. Given Angola’s culture of fear and intimidation, these protests suggest that various sectors among the population may no longer be afraid of the regime in the way they once were. Angola’s population has become increasingly emboldened with youth and civil sector workers and war veterans regularly taking to the streets to voice their grievances. The National Union for the Total Independence of Angola (UNITA), the largest opposition party, is also more vocal, recently [asserting](#) that the one-party model does not serve Angolans and that there is a need to enhance democracy.

President dos Santos also faces economic challenges. Oil [accounts](#) for the majority of government revenue. In response to plummeting oil prices, Angola’s cabinet [cut social spending](#) and ended fuel subsidies and infrastructure projects in the 2015 budget. These cuts will affect the mostly urban and youth population that already suffers from lack of access to water and overcrowding. As a result, the drop in oil prices, if it persists, has the potential to exacerbate current grievances and lead to broader citizen activism and possibly civil unrest.

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## Past Disputed Elections

Because Togo's elections have been some of the most [violent](#) in sub-Saharan Africa, Fabre's assertions of fraud and calls for protests have [spurred](#) fears of a new cycle of post-election violence in Togo. Gnassingbé was put into office with backing from the military in 2005 but stepped down due to regional and international pressure. He subsequently won a disputed election in 2005 that left up to [500](#) people dead in post-election clashes. After the violence, Gnassingbé was forced into a [power-sharing](#) agreement with the opposition, which was mediated by the European Union and ECOWAS. The inclusive government launched several electoral, judicial, and security reforms, and in 2007 the country held peaceful legislative elections. After Gnassingbé [won](#) the 2010 presidential elections with 61 percent of the vote, the opposition disputed the results and staged demonstrations, again calling fraud.

## Fight over Term Limits and 2015 Election

As highlighted in the December 4, 2014, [edition](#) of *Africa Watch*, before the 2015 election, widespread protests over Gnassingbé's running for a third term were held across urban areas in Togo, leading to several clashes with security forces. Although a 2014 [survey](#) conducted by Afrobarometer found that 85 percent of Togolese supported term limits, according to constitutional amendments made by Gnassingbé's father in 2002, the president can legally serve in perpetuity.

In the run-up to the 2015 election, the opposition fought to change this and introduce term limits. Debate on a constitutional amendment bill tabled by the opposition began in parliament on January 5, 2015, but talks broke down soon after. The opposition “needs to be more realistic,” Christophe Tchao, UNIR's parliamentary head, [told Reuters](#). A similar effort was attempted and stymied in June 2014, when hardline elements in UNIR [refused](#) to pass a constitutional reform bill limiting the president to two 5-year terms.

With no compromise reached on the issue of term limits, the 2015 elections took place in a [tense](#) political environment. A dispute between UNIR and the opposition over the voter roll resulted in the elections, originally scheduled for April 15, being [postponed](#) by 10 days. Up to [500](#) international election observers were deployed to 4,000 polling stations on the April 25 vote. On voting day, the election was conducted peacefully, albeit with low [turnout](#) of just over 50 percent.

When provisional vote tallies were released, Fabre immediately contested the results, [claiming](#) that the tally from the election commission did not align with CAP 2015's own recorded results. Patrick Lawson-Banku, his campaign manager,

[went further](#), asserting, “This is an electoral coup planned long ago.” He also [said](#): “CAP 2015 and its candidate Jean-Pierre Fabre categorically reject the fraudulent results . . .”

## Conclusion

International and regional endorsement of the vote as free and fair, combined with a [parallel vote tabulation](#) that also closely matched the official results, suggests that Fabre’s assertions of widespread fraud are likely just a political ploy to remain relevant. Despite Fabre’s calls for [protest](#), it appears, at the moment at least, that the [divided](#) opposition will not launch a coordinated and widespread effort to fight the election results. Gnassingbé’s genuinely large vote margin and international and regional [pressure](#) on the opposition to remain peaceful and accept the results should help prevent the type of electoral violence seen in previous electoral cycles in Togo.

That said, as the recent example of [Burundi](#) illustrates, the public sentiment in favor of term limits in Togo is unlikely to go away anytime soon and may prove to be a thorn in Gnassingbé’s side down the road, especially if he remains recalcitrant. There are some [signs](#) that Gnassingbé and moderate factions of his party may be open to the idea of term limits as long as they do not apply retroactively. Now that Gnassingbé has secured another term, for the sake of democratization and to perhaps save him the same fate as Blaise Compaoré in Burkina Faso, international and regional actors would be wise to push him in this more moderate direction.

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