

FOREWORD

In several countries discussed in this book, invoking state security has become synonymous with hostility towards freedom of expression and the press. This leads to fear, oppression, abuse of power and, ultimately, the capture of state institutions.

Why does this happen? Experts featured in this volume provide insightful answers. At its core, it is arguably about disempowering citizens by restricting access to information – an essential tool for providing oversight of state institutions. Such oversight ensures these institutions serve the common good, strengthens their capacity and upholds accountability.

I share a glimpse of my personal journey as someone targeted by state security and private contractors serving the powerful, with the help of foreign interests seeking business advantages. My experience highlights the grim reality faced by individuals who stand up for justice and the steep price they often pay. As an investigative journalist and self-described troublemaker, I dared to expose and challenge those who plundered Angola, further impoverishing its majority and robbing citizens of their future. For years, many Angolans and foreign nationals asked me the same question: How are you still alive? The sheer necessity of that question is a chilling reminder of the dangers that accompany resistance to misrule.

One incident vividly illustrates the reach of the state security apparatus. For several years, a relative persistently asked to visit me and introduce me to his daughter, whom he had named after me. I had resisted to protect him from any potential consequences due to his background in state security. Eventually, I agreed. When he entered my living room, he was visibly shocked, shaking and sweating

profusely. Upon arriving at the square where I lived, he had crossed paths with a colleague who informed him that he had been assigned to surveil 'the journalist', and that a command post had been established in the square for that purpose. I was the journalist in question.

Next door to my residence, in a house rented by an investment firm, an Israeli-led company had installed a stationary surveillance van equipped with advanced digital monitoring equipment. Its wheels had been removed to keep it in place, enabling 24/7 surveillance of my home. In 2013, security researcher Jacob Appelbaum discovered custom-designed malware on my laptop, covertly collecting all my information and sending it to India. He traced the malware to a Western multinational company based in Portugal that was providing IT security solutions and auditing services to the Angolan government. As reported in *Newsweek*, this company played a direct role in facilitating my surveillance.

Surveillance was only part of the campaign against me. Concurrent measures sought to isolate me completely and even included an attempt on my life abroad. A superior order reportedly cancelled the execution just five minutes before it was to occur.

For years I remained in denial, unable to fathom that my investigative work, published mainly on a modest website called Maka Angola, could make me an enemy of the state – or more accurately, of those who had captured the state. Gradually, I came to understand the extent of the threat my work posed to those in power, especially as I gained access to intelligence reports detailing the monitoring of civil society, including myself.

Interestingly, I also received indirect help from anonymous individuals within the state security apparatus. Some believed, as I did, that each person had a role to play in building a better Angola. Their quiet resistance to misrule enabled me to survive. This goodwill only underscored how dangerous my work was perceived to be by those in power.

In 2017, Angolans celebrated the end of 38 years of rule by José Eduardo dos Santos, with hopes that President João Lourenço would usher in a new era of reform. However, Lourenço continued the same system of governance without enacting fundamental reforms in the judiciary or state administration. He maintained the ruling Popular

Movement for the Liberation of Angola's (MPLA) modus operandi, which had entrenched state capture. By 2018, as MPLA leader, he further consolidated power, overseeing a government plagued by dysfunction, corruption, incompetence and plunder.

To shield this misrule, Lourenço expanded his repressive apparatus. By 2024 he effectively merged the Ministry of Interior with the Directorate of Intelligence and State Security Service (SINSE), circumventing legal frameworks meant to separate their functions. Senior intelligence officers were appointed to lead the Ministry and its critical departments like the Criminal Investigation Service. With SINSE accountable only to the President, Angola's state-security apparatus was transformed into a tool for maintaining power rather than protecting the public.

This misuse of state security reflects broader patterns in authoritarian regimes, where such systems are weaponised to suppress dissent and protect corruption. These actions undermine governance, erode public trust and disempower citizens. When these institutions serve oppressive regimes, they betray their fundamental purpose, enabling misrule and depriving citizens of the freedoms necessary to secure their future.

State-security agencies in the eight countries under study in this book must be reminded of their true mission: to protect the citizens.

Legal frameworks and formal protocols for oversight often fail because they depend on the very institutions they are meant to regulate. The most effective oversight stems from public scrutiny, enabled by a free press, academia, activists and civil society. By amplifying public awareness and pressuring for transparency, these entities are vital to holding state security accountable and ensuring governance serves the common good.

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