

The Internet and Democracy Building in Lusophone African Countries



SUSANA SALGADO

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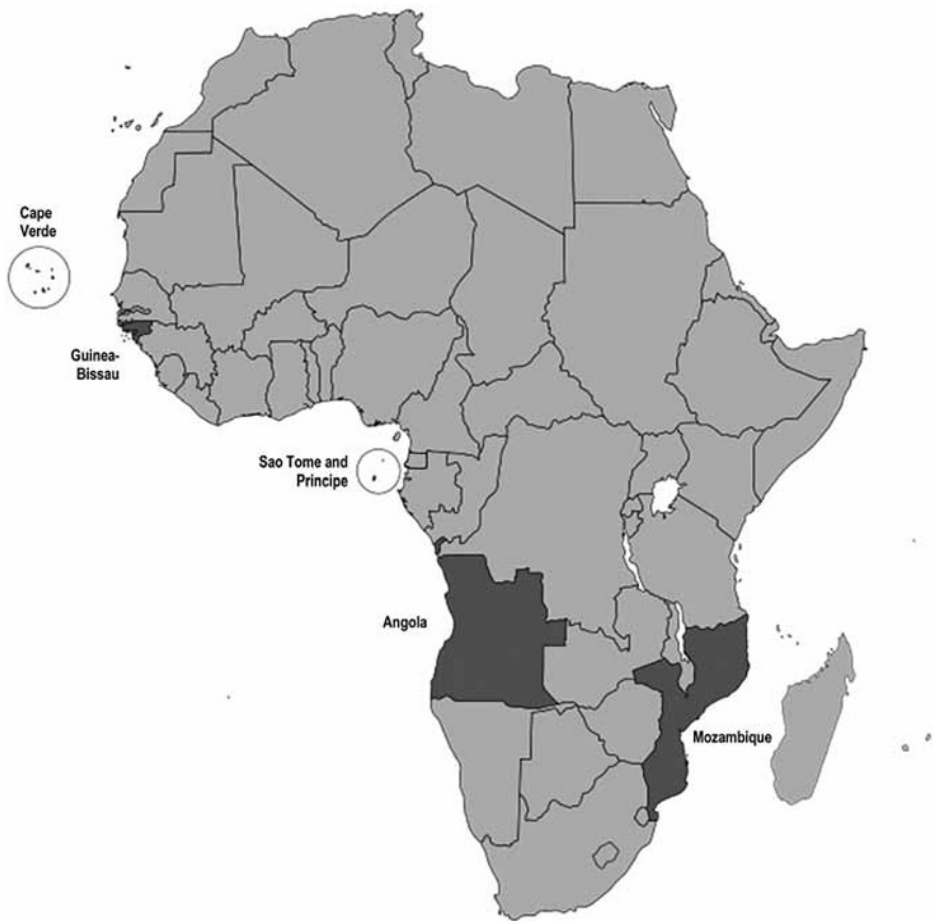
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List of Abbreviations

ADI	Independent Democratic Action (Sao Tome and Principe)
CASA-CE	Broad Convergence for the Salvation of Angola – Electoral Coalition
FDC	Christian Democratic Front (Sao Tome and Principe)
FLEC	Front for the Liberation of the Enclave of Cabinda (Angola)
FNLA	National Liberation Front of Angola
FRELIMO	Mozambique Liberation Front
IMF	International Monetary Fund
MDFM-PCD	Force for Change Democratic Movement – Democratic Convergence Party (coalition Sao Tome and Principe)
MDFM-PL	Force for Change Democratic Movement – Liberal Party
MDM	Democratic Movement of Mozambique
MLSTP	Movement for the Liberation of Sao Tome and Principe
MLSTP/PSD	Movement for the Liberation of Sao Tome and Principe/Social Democratic Party (Sao Tome and Principe)
MpD	Movement for Democracy (Cape Verde)
MPLA	Popular Movement for the Liberation of Angola
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
PAHUMO	Mozambican Humanitarian Party
PAICV	African Party for the Independence of Cape Verde
PAIGC	African Party for the Independence of Guinea and Cape Verde
PCD-GR	Democratic Convergence Party – Reflection Group (Sao Tome and Principe)
PCD	Democratic Convergence Party (Cape Verde)
PRS	Social Renewal Party (Angola)
PTS	Labour and Solidarity Party (Cape Verde)
RENAMO	Mozambican National Resistance
UCID	Cape Verdean Independent Democratic Union
UN	United Nations
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UNITA	National Union for the Total Independence of Angola



Map of Africa Indicating the Lusophone African Countries

Source and copyright information: This map is based on an image by Lokal_Profil. Lokal_Profil is the author of the image 'Blank map of Africa'. The image is under CC-BY-SA-2.5 license. User: Waldir highlighted the countries in red. The image was downloaded from Wikimedia Commons. The map was edited to include a title and the names of the countries by the author of this book.

Preface and Acknowledgements

This book had its origin in research aimed at studying the media and the processes of democratization of the Lusophone African countries, Angola, Cape Verde, Mozambique and Sao Tome and Principe. The unstable political and social situation in Guinea-Bissau, while the research and the fieldwork were being undertaken, did not allow the inclusion of this country in the study. This six-year (2008–2013) research project was awarded funding by the Portuguese Foundation for Science and Technology (FCT), which also included support for the realization of fieldtrips to these countries. The fieldwork has served to carry out observation and to conduct interviews with social and political actors, representative of different political orientations and viewpoints.

In societies such as these experiencing recent democratization processes and where many democratic deficiencies linger, especially regarding freedom, justice and tolerance, and where an atmosphere of suspicion tends to be the rule when the topic is politics, the actual presence of the researcher and a direct contact with the interviewees has revealed to be of utmost importance in many situations, not only for gathering data, but also for making sense of all collected information. Trust is key in this type of environment. However, even so, it was not always simple to make the initial contacts and persuade journalists and politicians to give their testimony. Some of them were suspicious of my research motivations (I was asked on a few occasions if I was doing a report for the government), and given the sensitive nature of some of the issues addressed (freedom of expression, rule of law, and democratic development) some respondents did not feel comfortable expressing their views or having their name publicly associated with their views. For this reason, some interviewees remained anonymous and are not quoted directly in this book. Nevertheless, a thorough analysis was conducted to evaluate the truthfulness and accuracy of these testimonies, and whenever it made sense these contributions were taken into account and are therefore also reflected in the overall research results.

The help of some local experts was precious in many different ways (mediating contacts, clarifying doubts, with logistics during fieldwork, etc.) and has to be acknowledged in these first pages; namely, the diligent and constant assistance of Ivete Ferreira (former parliamentary deputy and university professor) in Cape Verde and Paula Simons (former parliamentary deputy and journalist) in Angola, but also the help of journalists Orlando Castro (Luso-Angolan), Carlos Alberto Cardoso de Menezes (Sao Tomean) and Ouri Pota (Mozambican). I also want to express my thank you to all those who agreed to give their testimony to this research. They all have contributed immensely to shaping my knowledge of these four countries.

All these interviews (the complete list of interviewees is available in the end of the book) and informal conversations were essential for two reasons. First, they integrate in the research direct testimonies, different personal experiences and the perceptions of the actual actors involved in these democratization processes, who were asked to comment on their countries' adjustment to democratic features and the performance of their countries' media outlets. Second, after being analysed and cross-checked with other data, these first-hand experiences were transformed into updated knowledge on these countries' recent paths. The first challenge this research had to face was the shortage of up-to-date, credible and accurate information on the Lusophone African countries, in particular about their recent democratic developments, which in some cases was compounded by a considerable discrepancy between official versions and actual reality. Fieldwork was, therefore, not only a matter of methodological preference, but it was crucial to the completion of this research.

This book is also the result of an attempt to integrate fragmented visions of the influence of the Internet on democracy building and of African democratic development and media, without ever losing sight of the specificities of the Lusophone African countries. Furthermore, a comparative approach is implicit throughout the research as countries are analysed through the same parameters. The objective was to prevent generating knowledge derived from different case studies without any interconnection among them, which is another reason for the existing fragmentation in these fields of study. It is also worth explaining that the decision to separate mainstream media and the Internet in different parts and chapters within the book is purely a result of trying to identify the existence of possible media effects on democracy prior to the development and penetration of the Internet in these countries; it was therefore an attempt to isolate the impact of the Internet on democracy building.

The book reflects all these concerns. It traces some of the most relevant arguments regarding the Internet, democratic building and development processes, it aims to advance updated information and knowledge on the under-studied Lusophone African countries, and it makes an effort to overcome fragmentation by proposing an integrated analysis of the different countries. Hopefully, it will also contribute to a reflection on what democracy means and actually is in different parts of the world, and push forward an insightful discussion on the successes and failures of African democratization.

This makes all the more sense in a time when democracy is relapsing in many parts of the world. For the eighth consecutive year, the Freedom House annual report (entitled *Freedom in the World 2014*), which measures the state of political rights and civil liberties in all countries, recorded more declines in democracy and freedom worldwide than gains. The prospects for Internet freedom, according to the same organization, are not much brighter. Internet freedom is also in decline due to broad surveillance, new laws controlling web content and the growing number of arrests of digital activists. However, apparently there is some kind of hope because, at the same time as repressive

governments are intensifying control and monitoring, some resourceful activists are learning new ways to forestall online repression.

Last but not least, I want to use this Preface to thank the reviewers for their helpful comments and Ashgate for the interest in my research (I was invited to prepare a book proposal after a conference presentation), patience, support, and making this book possible.

Susana Salgado
Lisbon, December 2013

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Introduction

This book is the result of research on the role of the media in the democratization processes of the Lusophone African countries. It was a study based on a combination of research methods, including fieldwork in the Lusophone African countries; media analysis; and interviews with politicians, journalists, researchers, bloggers, social movement activists, and other important actors in these four countries. Its main objective was to understand how these countries are adjusting to the construction of a democratic project and to the higher levels of freedom any democratization process entails. Wiseman has noted a few years ago that “the African experience suggests that it is possible to create democracy even in unfavourable conditions” (1997: 273). Focusing on the Lusophone African countries, this research has thus tried to identify and discuss not only those conditions but also the type of democracy that is actually being created.

Democracy also means that unrestricted flows of information are conveyed through the media to allow critical debate and informed decision-making, which implies that press freedom is a crucial element in any democratization process. The main idea behind this study was therefore to understand how and why the media system takes different shapes and serves different purposes in different countries. In its structure, policy and behaviour, does the media system merely reflect the society in which it operates, is it used as an instrument by powerful elites to achieve their specific objectives, or in a third possible hypothesis, have actual freedom and a greater degree of openness rendered possible a more proactive role in pushing democratic changes further?

Previous research has pointed to the important role of the media in democratic processes in Africa. The media, if free and independent, can contribute to framing and including new perspectives and new actors in debates, shaping democratic building processes. And the Internet, by emphasizing plurality and the negotiation of meaning not only in content but also through new forms of communicating and disseminating content, has, in many cases, accelerated inclusion in political life, created new possibilities for civil society activism and promoted debates in general. Additionally, the Internet is of particular interest in these countries because its development coincided with the development of their democratization processes. The Internet is integral part of the rapidly evolving media environments, which shape and are shaped by politics and society. This is why the Internet and its influence both in media systems and in democratic transition processes deserve special attention in this work.

The African context presents important specificities that make such research work particularly challenging. In the late eighties and early nineties, the third

wave of democratization (Huntington 1991), which had started in 1974 with the Carnation Revolution in Portugal, spread to Africa. Many Sub-Saharan African countries initiated democratic reforms in this period, mainly by adopting new constitutions, multi-party regimes and elections as the means to select rulers. In the memorable phrase of President Omar Bongo of Gabon “the winds from the East are shaking the coconut trees”.¹ However, in most of these “new regimes” democratic politics remains very fragile.

Some democratic features have been adopted, but others critical to the development of democratic processes tend to be continuously ignored. Actual political competition, freedom of assembly, freedom of expression and particularly free and independent media outlets are still missing in some of these countries after all these years. These are also underdeveloped countries with strong inequalities, and where most of the population experiences many difficulties in surviving. Additionally, it has to be taken into account the fact that democracy and citizenship may have different meanings in some of these contexts.

Several debates that are strongly related to these issues are also addressed in this book: the different interpretations and adaptations of democracy, the concepts of democratization and development, the debate on democracy and economic development, the promises that digital media brings to democratization processes and to development, and the implications of the African digital divide. At the same time, by approaching these issues in different countries this book also intends to promote reflection and discussion about the peculiarities of these countries’ interpretations of democracy, as well as the models of democracy implemented. One would expect to find different cultural expectations of democracy and of political leadership in Africa when compared with the Western world, for instance, not only because their history is completely different, but also because these are very different societies.

However, despite the many similarities of the Sub-Saharan African democratization processes, it is important to avoid false generalizations and to take into account the differences among these countries. Their paths are not exactly the same and their pasts tell different stories of adjustment to democratic features. In fact, these are complex political and social phenomena that need to be thoroughly and further investigated through observation and in-depth study. The focus of this research, on four different case studies which look at each reality in relation to the others, is a response to this demand. This type of approach allows the identification of similarities and differences between countries and deepens the overall knowledge not only of all the different cases, but also of each one of them, because the nature of the approach is also comparative.

1 According to Huntington, this third wave of democratization began in Southern Europe, spread to South America, then Asia, and finally at the end of the eighties arrived in Central America, causing the transitions from Communist rule in Eastern Europe and some democratization processes in Sub-Saharan Africa.

What is more, Angola, Cape Verde, Mozambique and Sao Tome and Principe illustrate very well such differences. Despite having important similarities in terms of historical background, official language, foreign influences, and the same period of independence, these countries seem to be, in reality, constructing different types of media and political systems and adapting very differently to democratic features.

Aside from an interest in deepening knowledge of Sub-Saharan African political and media environments, another reason for the interest in this book is the lack of studies approaching these issues in the Lusophone Africa. There are already some studies about the media in Africa, and some even address the Internet, but the rapid development of new information and communication technologies and the increasing flows of information available support continued attention to these issues. Plus, due to language barriers and the difficulty of getting access to information in general, the recent developments in the African Portuguese-speaking countries remain significantly understudied in this regard. The almost complete absence of these African countries from academic studies concerned with these topics clearly limits knowledge on the intricacies of their political and media systems and impairs a more varied and complete perspective of African democratization processes.

The topics explored here are in their infancy. In the countries under consideration, democracy as a political system and independent news media informing the population are new alternatives (in some countries more than others) and are starting to be seen as a reality, making this an excellent time to observe and study the media and the civil society dynamics, how people deal with higher levels of freedom and with the possibility of choosing their rulers. This is also a very good opportunity to see if certain mistakes already made by other countries can be prevented or circumvented. In short, these countries' recent and ongoing democratization experiences can provide us with important insights into the roles and functions that the media in general and the Internet in particular can perform in the creation of a more democratic society, as well as in empowering and educating citizens in democratic values.

This research was full of challenges. The lack of information on these countries regarding these issues was an important motivation but also the first big challenge. Information such as levels of print readership and television and radio audiences or public opinion surveys, electoral polls, political parties' government programmes, etc., which is usually accessible in other countries, was not available in most of these cases and if there was some information, the issue was its reliability. Soon it was clear that the only way of overcoming part of this challenge was through direct observation and data gathering in the field. Interviews were the most promising resource since they allow a more exploratory approach combined with the gathering of more specific information. However, finding interviewees willing to give their testimonies and talk about issues that remain sensitive in most of these places, such as freedom, opinions about the government, etc. proved to be extremely difficult in some situations, especially where there is less freedom.

Some contributions were actually given off the record for this reason. In addition to these difficulties, some of the gathered information was clearly biased and partisan, so a filter and critical judgement were needed at all times to interpret these inputs and separate facts from opinions.

In addition to specific bibliography on Africa and on media and democratization, a framework proposal in particular was used as inspiration both in the data gathering phase and in the analysis. Although designed to develop comparative research on the relation between media systems and political systems in the Western world, Hallin and Mancini's (2004) four dimensions (structure of media markets, political parallelism, professionalization in journalistic work, and the role of the state in the media system) are very useful as a starting point to organize thoughts and information when we are analysing several different case studies. However, even though their proposed dimensions allow drawing an accurate picture of most Western countries, they are not complete enough to be applied to African countries, democratic transitions and "hybrid regimes", and so other more specific guidelines were also included.

To understand the dynamics of the media and political systems, the links between them, and the role that the media have in the democratization processes of the Lusophone African countries, this study looked at these countries through a number of aspects: levels of press freedom, which includes both the legal framework and the actual conditions of freedom and independence; the main role of the news media outlets according to journalists and politicians (simply report facts, "watchdog", some degree of interventionism, partners of the government to help achieve its objectives); journalistic professionalization and working conditions; the relationship between journalists and politicians; the structure of the media system (overall number and type of news outlets, audiences and circulation, market size and weight of the advertising market, functions of each type of media and the most important media used by the population in general to get information, role of the state, levels of financial dependence of the sector, degree and type of private initiative in the media sector, existence of independent and/or alternative media – it is vital to look not only to the number of media outlets, but especially to their ownership, partisan bias and political parallelism, because private ownership is not always equal to independence from political and economic elites); and levels of overall pluralism (diverse and independent media outlets are essential to ensure high levels of pluralism and a balanced representation in media coverage of society, including different social, ethnic and political groups).

All these questions on the media reveal much about how the political class is adjusting to democratization and to higher levels of freedom and citizen participation, but in some cases, more specific questions on the political system were also investigated, namely: its organization; actual political and party competition; the relationships between political parties; political consensus on the main issues the country faces; political representation in the parliament; relationships between the different democratic institutions; relationships between the political and the business elites; motivation of citizens to participate in political

processes; identification of other possible important actors, such as churches, community leaders, NGOs; degree of freedom of assembly; levels of freedom in election campaigns; fairness of elections and possible reports of intimidation; and levels of political alternation in power.

Because the central objective of this research was to evaluate the changing media environment and the influence of the Internet in the media and political systems, and more precisely in the democracy building processes, different questions addressing the online media were also included: possible effects of the Internet in media diversity, more specifically through new types of news media and new content producers; levels of development of online publications; the most common formats of online media; users and objectives; levels of freedom of the online media and comparison with the levels of freedom in mainstream media; the reach of online information; possible different effects on audiences, namely, promoting interest in politics and more participation; level of influence on mainstream media's agenda and content; and level of influence on political communication and political actors.

Contextual constraints on appropriation of technology and information in general were also acknowledged through the gathering and analysis of different types of information, for instance: Internet penetration levels, digital divide and knowledge divide, the different levels of literacy, and levels of human development and economic growth.

It was not always possible to obtain all these data for all the four countries and sometimes the information gathered through interviews presented contradictions. Whenever possible and to overcome some of these limitations, data of other nature were used to sustain the analyses; however, the available information was very limited in most cases. These limitations and the fact that each case emphasizes different aspects explain why the country chapters (Chapters 5 to 8) present somehow different structures.

The main goal of these introductory pages was to present the research, its objectives and implications, as well as its methodologies and constraints. Finally, a brief overview of the rest of the book's contents still fits here.

Part I explains the theoretical framework and provides some important references and generic contextual data. Chapter 1 discusses the concepts of development and democratization; Chapter 2 addresses specifically the influence of the media in democratization processes and gives special attention to the Sub-Saharan African context; and Chapter 3 introduces the debate on the promises of further democratization brought by the Internet and contextualizes the meaning of these hopes in the Lusophone African reality.

Part II describes and analyses the political and media systems of the Lusophone African countries. It explores the links between media and politics in Angola, Cape Verde, Mozambique and Sao Tome and Principe, and examines the consequences in democratization of different types of relations between politicians and journalists. Chapter 4 discusses these countries' similarities and differences and Chapters 5, 6, 7 and 8 aim at providing more detail and assessing the cases of Angola,

Mozambique, Sao Tome and Principe and Cape Verde respectively. One of the objectives of Part II is to provide up-to-date information on the development of these countries' democratization processes and to provide a context to the analysis in Part III on the effects of the Internet in these four countries.

Part III deals exclusively with the Internet and examines different online expressions linked with democracy in these four countries. The overall objective is to assess if the Internet has introduced any substantial changes in both the behaviour and the means of communication of political and social actors, thus pushing forward democratization. Chapter 9 resumes some of the issues and arguments addressed in Chapter 3 and gives more in-depth information on the Lusophone African countries' online development, explaining the contextual constraints to the democratic potential of the Internet. Chapter 10 analyses the effects of the Internet in the media system, more precisely the development of online papers and other information websites and their influence in information flows and pluralism. Chapter 11 discusses the influence of blogs and social network websites in civil society, journalism and politics. Finally, Chapter 12 takes a look at the political parties' websites to assess if different forms of communication and information are being developed or if a new means of expression is simply a different vehicle for the same type of information already found in other political communication instruments.

Based on such findings, the Conclusions aim at linking and further explaining all these different but related elements. The book ends with an attempt to find patterns and explanations for the Internet's influence in different democratization processes.

Part I

Media, Democracy and Development

Part I of this book provides some theoretical background on the connections between Media, Democracy and Development. It explores how these concepts have been addressed and related in the existing literature and explains the most important questions deriving from the links between them. It also provides some contextual data and analysis on the Lusophone African countries with regard to their levels of human development and discusses the applicability of the Western notions of democracy to some of these contexts.

This part of the book provides a first insight not only to the problematic use of Western concepts in African countries and to the particularities of the democratization processes in this part of the world, but it also draws attention to some important differences within the Lusophone Africa. Although usually pointed out as new democracies, the four countries studied here present very different paths towards democracy building and very different levels of democratic consolidation. This acknowledgement of their differences raises some doubts on the international patterns of democracy, especially in regard to the assessment of democratic features in different settings.

These first pages are also dedicated to discussing the importance of information and the media to development and democratization and explaining how these issues have been approached in the African case. There is no consensus on the positive role of the media in democratization and development, because it can be used both to promote equality among citizens and to accentuate their differences. Concepts such as “knowledge divide” and “digital divide” are therefore explained and put into the African context.

Finally, the promises, pointed out by several authors, of further democratization brought by the Internet are discussed. To provide some insight on the relative importance of access to technology when compared with other difficulties these countries still experience, some of the constraints to this rather technological approach are referred to here, but will be explored further in Part III of this book. It will be explained how the differing views on whether the Internet can be a positive force for democratization or a tool for authoritarian rulers can be applied to the Lusophone African context, bringing the importance of discussing context into the equation.