

[EXTRACT]

Dos Santos may call it a day after 32 years

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President José Eduardo dos Santos

Mandy Rossouw

Angolan president José Eduardo dos Santos may be stepping down ahead of the country's polls next year, according to Angolan news reports.

Dos Santos, who has served as Angolan president for 32 years, is seen as one of the strongmen in Africa and it is expected that if he steps down he will remain the power behind the throne.

Dos Santos may be replaced by the head of state-owned oil company Sonangol, Manuel Vicente, a spokesperson for the Popular Movement for the Liberation of Angola (MPLA) told Bloomberg.

"Any scenario is possible," said politburo member Rui Falcao de Andrade.

"We are talking about probabilities. No formal decision by the party has been taken."

The MPLA is due to have its elective conference in December, where the party will decide on its leader.

According to risk analyst Kim Moss, Dos Santos is facing increased anti-government sentiment this year and a divided ruling party – perhaps prompting his intention to resign.

But Dos Santos did the same in 2001 when the move was seen as a tactic to incite pro-government support and to repair divides in the MPLA.

“Thus the current news that he plans to resign may be a repeat of the 2001 strategy,” she said.

Chairman of the South Africa-Angola business council, Roger Ballard-Tremeer, told City Press that Dos Santos was facing a “pro-ethics silent revolution”.

“About 10?000 leaders from civil society are now all beating the drum of societal values that they feel has eroded in Angola.”

He added that Dos Santos was aware of the criticism against long-serving presidents in Africa.

“Dos Santos knows what the world thinks of long-serving presidents, so he is maybe responding to that,” Ballard-Tremeer said.

Vicente has “corruption baggage” and commands no popular support, which would make it possible for him and Dos Santos to have a relationship styled on the Russian model of president Dmitry Medvedev and former president Vladimir Putin.

Dos Santos effected a Cabinet reshuffle last year to ensure he fragments the MPLA and therefore remains the only person able to keep the party together, says Oxford University researcher Paula Cristina Roque.

“This strategy could, however, backfire and cause the party to unite against him. Angola could be heading towards an era of political contestation as the formula for this hybrid state evolves,” she said in her situation report for the Institute of Security Studies.

- City Press

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