

# Engaging Portuguese-Speaking Countries as a Diplomatic Foundation for Upcoming ICT-Fueled Geopolitics in the Artificial Intelligence Age

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**Abstract:** Large geopolitical actors display an understanding that the former countries of the Portuguese empire (Portugal, Brazil, Angola, Guinea-Bissau, Cabo Verde, Sao Tome and Principe, Mozambique, Timor-Leste) predominantly border strategic routes namely in the Atlantic Ocean, that include significant amounts of maritime exclusive economic zone (EEZ) control throughout the global seas. In international affairs, these territorial claims constitute important spheres of influence covered under the umbrellas of multiple multilateral organizations, including the European Union (EU), the African Union (AU), the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), and the BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China, South Africa). Geopolitics practitioners thus have interest in greater touchpoints with/in Portuguese-speaking (Lusophone) institutions like the Comunidade dos Pais de Lingua Portuguesa (CPLP, or the Community of Portuguese-speaking Countries) and similar regional associations connecting Lusophone African states. This paper provides additional foundational evidence about the viability of a Lusophone-first statecraft strategy in security and trade for the benefit of major global actors, with an emphasis on how advanced information communication technology (ICT) and AI policies will contribute to several expected outcomes in constructing physical and media connectivity infrastructures.

**Keywords:** Portuguese-Speaking, Diplomacy, Geopolitics, Technology, Artificial Intelligence (AI), Multilateral, Infrastructure, Foreign Policy, Lusophone, Africa, Atlantic

## Introduction

Growing global interconnectedness in the 21st century makes trade security more important than ever for states both large and small. Much of this conversation revolves around information communication technology (ICT) connectivity to access rapid networks of products, services, and relationships to grow economies and maintain national sovereignties. That said, traditional geopolitics principles still play a role in these macroeconomic dynamics, namely through strategic geography and policy positioning that influences the diplomatic direction of major international actors.

Given that much of today's world remains heavily shaped by the previous strength of former European colonial empires (Cardina, 2015; Subramanyam, 2012), it is important to underscore how imperial networks still influence international affairs even in the context of the emerging return to great power competition. One such overlooked system that is often overlooked is Lusophonia, or the Portuguese-speaking countries that share a former colonizer in Lisbon; in addition to modern-day Portugal, these countries include Brazil, Angola, Guinea-Bissau, Cabo Verde (Cape Verde), Mozambique, and Timor-Leste (East Timor) (Vogt, 2017). Most of these countries border the Atlantic Ocean and have significant presence there, especially considering the empowering element of Exclusive Economic Zones (EEZs) that these states can claim; in fact, Portugal by itself has been able to claim one of the world's largest EEZs due to the various island possessions it still controls (Da Silva & Pereira, 2020).

Naturally, these maritime territorial claims are more vital than ever for states to access as they look to benefit adequately from lucrative trading routes. This is doubly noteworthy for established and emerging powers as they have interests in exploiting economic opportunities in a "Global South" that has become more attractive to more developed states due to natural resource abundance and a growing ability to connect to international markets (Yau, 2024;

Chen & Meng, 2024). Among these larger states, China stands out here for both its directness in pursuing deeper relationships with lesser-known blocs like Lusophonia but also for its identification of spheres of influence it looks to establish outside of its near abroad. In this latter case, China has noticeably exhibited an intent to gain a greater foothold in what it calls “the Portuguese Sea” (Atlantic Ocean), and it expresses a belief from Beijing that such a goal is reasonably achievable (Da Silva et al., 2023). Previous studies note that China in particular has a special opportunity to engage with this part of the world through shared histories of Communism and colonialism, as connected through unique historical experiences as the Portuguese possession of the Chinese territory of Macau until 1999 (Vogt, 2017).

Case studies like Chinese involvement in Lusophonia thus highlight how a diplomatic strategy targeting the collective interests shared by these seven countries holds some logical merit in contemporary policymaking. The effect is further amplified by the known impacts of ICT penetration and use in societies beginning a transition towards full connectivity, impacts that can yield positive or negative results in fomenting publics’ opinions towards key regional and international actors (especially great powers like China and the United States) (Chichava, 2014; Jura et al., 2018; Jura & De Carvalho 2023; Arnold, n.d.). These impressions are further solidified by supporting sovereignty and security postures of Lusophone states, particularly those in the Atlantic that may not have a recent history with as many military or naval capabilities to properly take advantage of valuable EEZs (Kamal-Deen, 2015). Additionally, these efforts do not necessarily have to be bilateral in scope, as Lusophonia boasts robust membership in a wide range of multilateral organizations, including several which are bespoke to the sole interests of Portuguese-speaking states, as is elaborated in more detail in the following section.

**Lusophone Multinational Organizations**

The Lusophone countries are seen diplomatically in a number of forums, including in the following organizations with membership exclusively from these states:

- The Comunidade dos Países de Língua Portuguesa (CPLP), a “United Nations” of sorts for the Portuguese-speaking countries (all of which are member states) (CPLP, 2007)
- The Países Africanos de Língua Oficial Portuguesa (PALOP), or the African states which have Portuguese as an official language. The member states include Cabo Verde, Guinea-Bissau, Angola, Sao Tome and Principe, and Mozambique (Camoës, 2007; Xavier, 2024)
- The Partido Africano da Independência de Guinea-Bissau e Cabo Verde (PAIGC), a political movement with a post-colonial past that unites the two Lusophone states in the northwest African coast (Tricontinental, n.d.)

Table 1 below outlines these organizations and their policy directions in further representation.

Table 1. Lusophone Multilateral Organizations – Core Functions

CPLP	PALOP	PAIGC
Cultural and territorial integrity	Growing a shared culture	Cultivating national symbolism
Promote Portuguese language	Bolstering self-determination	Maintaining commitment to anti-colonialism
Coordinate pan-regional diplomacy	Supporting economic development	Organizing political solidarity

*Sources: CPLP (2007), Camoës (2007), Modern Diplomacy (2024), Tricontinental (n.d.)*

This centralized diplomacy additionally reflects Lusophonia's unique positioning in a series of regional multilateral organizations that have key influences over foreign policy, trade standards, and technology development. These organizations include:

- The European Union (OECD, 2024)
- BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China, South Africa) (Vogt, 2017)
- North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) (O'Hanlon, 2022)
- African Union (AU) (African Union, 2024)
- Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) (Soule, 2024; Soule, 2023)

These organizations are closely monitoring and responding to concerns and considerations around artificial intelligence (AI), whose potential in trade relationships appears to be growing in importance in domestic and international policymaking (Xiao, 2024). Table 2 below outlines how each of the Lusophone countries is a useful case study for AI policy models currently being promoted by some of these organizations.

Table 2. Noteworthy AI Policy Models Followed by Lusophone States

EU	BRICS	AU
Design through learning	Human centered	Uniting policies from individual member states
Development through labs	Coordination across institutions	Mitigating harmful biases
Clear directions for institutionalized innovation	Emphasis on standards and regulations	Building platforms for effective education

*Sources: OECD (2024), Centro Nacional de Inteligencia Artificial de Chile (2024), African Union (2024)*

#### *Notes on Asia cases*

Although parts of the former Portuguese-empire – namely Timor-Leste and Macau – are not directly connected to the Atlantic Ocean, these areas are nonetheless highly relevant towards understanding Lusophonia's sociotechnical influence in modern geopolitics. In the Asia cases, the impact of multilateral organizations like the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) is significant here. In contemporary ASEAN diplomatic dynamics, Timor-Leste has expressed extensive interest in joining the Southeast Asian bloc, as seen in its prolonged application process to the organization. Benefits to the expanded group – and to Timor-Leste in particular – include greater access and market size in the region's e-commerce industry, especially as powers like China show greater attention and potential demand in the membership's individual economies (Da Cruz Cardoso, 2023; Da Cruz Cardoso, 2024; Leandro, Leandro & Branco, 2023; Stanhope, 2025; Peng, 2019).

### **Connectivity Through Cables**

#### *Small States*

Timor-Leste also provides a model for developing Atlantic Lusophone states as they gain greater opportunities to connect to digital networks and marketplaces. This is presented visually in Figure 1 below, which highlights Timor-Leste's dependence on larger states, especially Australia (Talesco, 2017; Davidson, 2023; Tanner, 2024).



Figure 1. Timor-Leste Cable Connection Plan

Source: *Timor-Leste South Submarine Cable (2024)*

A similar dynamic has played itself out in Cabo Verde, an archipelago traditionally isolated in its weak communications infrastructure (McQuinn & Cojocar, 2022; Duarte, Yin & Li, 2017). As a result, initiatives like the Amílcar Cabral Project (Soule, 2024; Soule, 2023) and ECOWAS SHARE cable deployment are a boon to Praia's commitment to expanding its influence beyond its primary economic core tourism industry (Almond, 2017; Horta, 2024). The physical connection with the African mainland – as seen in Figure 2 below – can additionally only serve to benefit Cabo Verde as a more active player in regional affairs through closer ties to neighboring states like Senegal.



Figure 2. Cabo Verde – Senegal Cable Connection

Source: Olander (2022)

### *Larger Lusophone Powers*

One of Africa's largest targets for international investment and interaction is Angola, a state blessed with natural resources and – in the case of China – a shared Communist history supporting a decades-long relationship (Vogt, 2017). Angola is also strategically situated between the northern Gulf of Guinea and the tip of Southern Africa, a region notable for its connection between the economically prosperous North Atlantic and the Indian Ocean connecting to major Asian trading routes. In the age of the Internet, this also entails a capacity for laying and connecting substantial undersea digital cables to provide informational trade quickly across borders. Figure 3 highlights this in greater detail below.

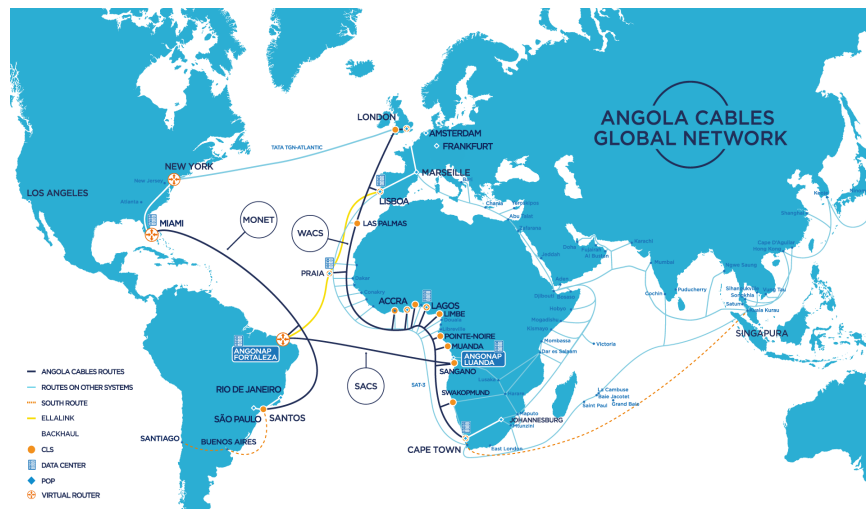


Figure 3. Angola Cable Network

Source: Angola Cables(n.d.)

The map above shows how Angola is a central node in a series of primary digital connections across the Atlantic Ocean. The Luanda centerpiece is directly connected to a number of points across the Western African coast, namely fellow Portuguese-speaking places like Praia. Luanda retains a direct tie to the historical and sociocultural heart of Lusophonia (Portugal) through a network traveling through Western Europe towards global capital centers like London. Angola also appears to have a cable connection running uninterrupted to Brazil, Lusophonia’s largest state and a dominant player in “Global South” affairs (Berg & Baena. 2024). This leading role for Brazil is similarly witnessed in Figure 4 below, as each of the five countries in the bloc are nodes in a direct connection from a singular “BRICS Cable” project (Gucki Riva & Henaut, 2014).



Figure 4. BRICS Cable Route

Source: Gucki Riva & Henaut (2014)

## Knowledge Acquisition and Use

Many of the Lusophone states – particularly those in Atlantic West Africa – face legitimacy pressures that require up-to-date understanding of security threats and calculation priorities. ICT is the main mechanism for these states to achieve such goals as obtained through the connectivity afforded them in the aforementioned cable networks. Here, two considerations generally rise to the top of the priority list in each of these states:

1. Political control/stability
2. Economic growth

Both of these considerations have benefitted from contemporary ICT innovations as produced organically or introduced by external states. While the potential implications for these technologies remain vast, the Portuguese-speaking states featured in this analysis are bolstered primarily via ICT (and now AI) advances that provide benefits in monitoring political, social, and ecological environments through surveillance and agricultural improvements.

### *Surveillance*

Given that security concerns are predominant in the minds of many developing country regimes today, it is not surprising that the ability to monitor potentially destabilizing activities in real time is an attractive capability for many of these states.

- In Angola, this is supported through financing and commissioning of platforms designed to address communications based on a list of non-approved topics deemed to be sensitive to the health of the Luanda regime by their nature, which could expose unflattering portraits of corrupt directions pursued by the government in its domestic and international policymaking (Fonseca, 2017; Verde, 2021). A similar policy has been pursued in Mozambique as well (Nhanale, 2021).
- In Cabo Verde, such an infrastructural foundation as supported by large international ICT conglomerates like Huawei was essential in forming a “smart city” dedicated towards public safety, at least as advertised at the surface level (AidData, 2018). This international development aid comes in tandem with innovation institutions and continuous education models to assist the country with adapting such systems for continued implementation (Macau Commerce and Investment Promotion Institute, 2024).

### *Agricultural Technologies*

Questions of economic prowess and potential additionally loom large in the prosperity conversations of states like the Lusophone countries (and especially in Lusophone Africa) that form a useful cross-section of case studies illustrating contemporary development challenges. Chief among industries attracting state-level and international focus in this area is agriculture, which allows for the organic growth of self-sustaining marketplaces that sustainably rise gross domestic product (GDP) in rural and urban environments. ICT – and by extension the promise of AI – can be effectively leveraged to promote the healthy development of domestic economies in the face of historically repressive post-colonial legacies (Vogt, 2017). From this lens, several Lusophone African countries stand out in the following manner given the consistent presence of agricultural tech aid in Lusophone economies over recent decades (Xinhua, 2022; Chichava, 2014):

- In Sao Tome and Principe, a land known for its lucrative cocoa and coffee crops has constructed an Agronomic and Technological Research Center (CIAT) that directly equips farmers with access and capability to leverage ICTs in their work (Leandro & Lobo, 2020; De Almeida Grande, 2022). This comes in tandem with the continued practice of leapfrogging that is evident throughout the developing world, with the farmers in this case presumably becoming more empowered on a potentially existential scale as mobile ICTs and AI tools remain accessible (Da Silva Miranda, 2020).
- In Angola, foreign aid in agriculture has become a core component of diplomatic agreements, particularly those from China. This aid is generally used for the informational purpose of farmers who can be better informed about weather and market conditions to grow their business and take advantage of any arbitrage opportunities (Aravidh & Chandrasekaran, 2019).
- In Guinea-Bissau, there is a concerted effort to solidify comparative advantage in the country’s valuable cashew supply (Santi & Weigert, 2022) alongside prioritization of infrastructure tied to field quality maintenance and irrigation, namely investment in dams (Matias, 2009).



## Conclusions

The wide-ranging use of ICT in the 21<sup>st</sup> century remains important to consistently re-evaluate in addressing contemporary problems in foreign affairs. This consideration is magnified in light of the rapid change and impacts of AI in sociopolitical contexts. This paper thus highlights in brief how the unique organizations of Portuguese-speaking states as case studies that can provide significant insight as to which ICT and AI-media effects are most viable and can just be best anticipated in this moment in international trade, security policy, and diplomacy.

Connectivity questions in the Lusophone countries in particular represent a critical area to address when analyzing the playing field for upcoming great power competition in the near to medium term. This is due to the reality that these states—and the technology support/investments they have received in the ICT/AI sector—straddle alignments towards the global East and the global West, thereby underscoring the challenging positions many of these “Global South” states occupy in current diplomatic interactions with the “Global North.” These positions will only become more firm as the connectivity and regulatory projects outlined above progress and standardize on a worldwide scale.

Given the currency of these issues, Lusophone affairs is consequently a sub-topic of foreign affairs that deserves more attention going forward, and these countries should continue to be observed within their respective positions in this multi-continental “region” as a result. This reality clearly reflects how findings in this and similar works require corresponding action items for international relations practitioners to employ in order to effectively build upon scholarship in contexts beyond siloed and closed academic and intellectual conversations. From this, it is furthermore clear that future research would do well to outline some of these action items for empowered policymakers who would benefit from a greater understanding about how foreign policy steps like the placement of more active and more visible diplomatic representation in Lusophone states and organizations—from Cabo Verde to the CPLP, and beyond—can most appropriately address the complex international policy considerations facing larger states when it comes to relationship building in this “region” in ways that meet broader geopolitical interests and globally-minded security calculations.

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