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Biometrics, Border Control and Surveillance in **ANGOLA**

Mapping the systems, vendors and rights risks along the borders with the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Namibia, and their implications for the 2027 elections

This report is based on field research conducted in Angola and on documentary analysis. Source identities have been protected where disclosure could create risk.



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ABOUT INTELWATCH

Intelwatch is a South African-based research and advocacy organisation dedicated to strengthening public oversight of state and private intelligence agencies in Southern Africa and around the world. It is also dedicated to monitoring security sector governance, human rights, and democratic accountability.

Through rigorous research, policy analysis and public reporting, Intelwatch seeks to hold states, corporations, and security actors accountable for practices that affect the rights and freedoms of ordinary people. This report was produced with support from field researchers operating across Angola, Namibia, and the Democratic Republic of Congo.

DISCLAIMER

This report is produced for informational and advocacy purposes. The views expressed are those of Intelwatch and do not represent the positions of any donor, government, or affiliated institution.

All sources have been verified to the extent possible; where sources requested anonymity, this has been respected. The report does not intend to defame any individual, company or institution, but to contribute to informed public debate on matters of legitimate public interest. Written questions setting out the report's principal findings, covering the procurement of the biometric contracts, the legal basis for intelligence access to identity data, and the operational status of the border systems, were put to the Ministry of the Interior and the Serviço de Migração e Estrangeiros on 30 June 2026. No response had been received by the date of publication, and the government's position as recorded in this report therefore rests on its own public announcements, official documentation and reported statements rather than on any direct reply to the matters raised.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

More than 50 years after independence from Portugal in November 1975, Angola's development stands at a decisive crossroads. Confronted by porous and poorly governed borders, endemic cross-border crime and unregulated trading, and seemingly unending instability in the neighbouring Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), the Angolan government has embarked on one of the most ambitious technological transformation programmes in its post-independence history: the mass deployment of biometric surveillance systems at its land border posts.

The legitimacy of this effort is not in dispute, given that Angola's borders are extremely porous, with associated economic and security implications. Illicit diamond smuggling, human trafficking, arms movements, and irregular migration are highlighted as serious threats to national security.¹ Hence, the case for a modern, technology-enabled border governance system has merit.

What this report demonstrates, however, is that the conditions under which these systems are being introduced — the opacity of procurement, the weakness of legal safeguards, the historical patterns of state repression, and the proximity of a pivotal electoral cycle (national elections are due in 2027)— transform an otherwise legitimate security management project into a potential instrument of surveillance overreach and accompanying authoritarian entrenchment.

Angola's biometric border programme is not a single, coherent initiative. It is, in reality, an overlapping patchwork of technologies,

vendors, and ministerial portfolios. At one level, it encompasses an US\$112 million national biometric border control system to be implemented through a partnership between the Polish company Technology for Business (T4B) and the Angolan company Dolinveste Lda, announced in February 2025.² It is envisaged that this system will deliver facial recognition, fingerprint scanning, iris detection, and voice recognition across land, air and potentially river entry points. On another level, a €130 million (about US\$139 million) contract with ANY Security Printing Company PLC of Hungary is advancing a biometric passport and national identity system through the Serviço de Migração Estrangeiros (SME).³ At another, albeit contested level, the British-Angolan firm Brithol Michcoma International has managed, since 2009, passport production and digital immigration platforms including biometric systems at the new Luanda international airport — though some government sources say it has been progressively sidelined since a change in ministerial leadership in late 2024.⁴

1 "Globalised Crime Index": <https://ocindex.net/2023/country/angola#:~:text=Angola's%20extensive%20borders%20and%20long,to%20address%20the%20situation%20adequately>, accessed on 8 April, 2026

2 'T4B to enhance border security in Angola': <https://t4b.com.pl/en/news/company-news/t4b-to-enhance-border-security-in-angola> accessed on 8 April, 2026

3 'Angola seals financing agreement for \$139M biometric passport contract': [https://www.biometricupdate.com/202306/angola-seals-financing-agreement-for-139m-biometric-passport-contract#:~:text=Categories-Angola%20seals%20financing%20agreement%20for%20\\$139M%20biometric%20passport%20contract,facility%2C%20plus%20other%20related%20services](https://www.biometricupdate.com/202306/angola-seals-financing-agreement-for-139m-biometric-passport-contract#:~:text=Categories-Angola%20seals%20financing%20agreement%20for%20$139M%20biometric%20passport%20contract,facility%2C%20plus%20other%20related%20services), accessed on 8 April, 2026

4 The company's own website states that it has been issuing passports since 2009. See Brithol Michcoma. <https://www.brithol.net/projects> accessed on 1 August 2026. Interview with a government source, Luanda, 6 March 2026.

This constellation of technologies, vendors, and institutional actors is concerning not only for its complexity and related challenges for interoperability, but in particular for the related opacity and the consequences thereof for accountable competent governance. Angola's public procurement system lacks transparency, and contracts of this magnitude — totalling more than US\$250 million combined — have been awarded without meaningful public tender, without parliamentary scrutiny, and without any published human rights impact assessment.⁵ The involvement of Dolinveste Lda, a company with no known track record in the provision of biometric systems, and its apparent link to the personal interests of the then-incoming Interior Minister Manuel Gomes da Conceição Homem, is emblematic of the wider systemic failure of Angola's procurement governance.⁶ That a ministerial transition prompted not only a change of vendor but the wholesale disruption of operational systems — leaving the country unable for a period to issue electronic passports for minors — suggests that patronage and personal considerations, not public interest, are driving forces behind these decisions. The government's position is different. The 2024 assessment of Angola's procurement system conducted under the Methodology for Assessing Procurement Systems (MAPS), jointly with the OECD, the African Development Bank and the

World Bank, benchmarked the country's legal and regulatory framework against international good practice and framed the outstanding problems largely as questions of accessibility, capacity and implementation rather than of integrity.⁷ That assessment is the basis on which the Angolan authorities maintain that their procurement protocols and modalities accord with best practice. However, this report challenges that account fundamentally, on the evidence of the specific contracts examined here. This report also notes that the government's own 2024 procurement report records that, of 4,389 procedures registered in that year, 89 per cent were closed procedures and only 7 per cent went to open public tender.⁸ Such opacity does not lend to accountability.

Effective data protection requires employment of policies, rules, and technical measures that keep personal or sensitive information secure, accurate, and properly used. At its core, it ensures that data is not accessed, shared, altered, or destroyed without authorization, and that people's information is handled lawfully and transparently. Angola's legal framework for data protection exists on paper. Law 22/11 of 2011, the Personal Data Protection Law, establishes principles of consent, purpose limitation and proportionality. The Data Protection Agency (APD), formally constituted only in 2019⁹, has shown some recent signs

5 Interview with a government source, Luanda, 6 March 2026. Also see: Negócios de Angola. "Government Conceals Names of Companies Awarded Direct Contracts, Raising Transparency Concerns". <https://www.negociosdeangola.com/en/government-conceals-names-of-companies-awarded-direct-contracts-raising-transparency-concerns/> accessed on 17 July 2026.

6 Interview with a government source, 6 March 2026

7 Assessment of Angola Public Procurement System 2024, carried out under the Methodology for Assessing Procurement Systems (MAPS) by the OECD, the African Development Bank and the World Bank together with the Government of Angola: <https://www.mapsinitiative.org/content/dam/maps-initiative/en/assessments/angola/maps-asseessment-angola-main-report.pdf> (accessed 1 August 2026). The assessment covers central government, local government and parastatals across the four MAPS pillars, and its recommendations focus on the accessibility of procurement rules and on institutional capacity.

8 Angolan Public Procurement Annual Report 2024, reported in Ver Angola, "Direct adjustment once again dominates public procurement", June 2025: <https://www.verangola.net/va/en/062025/Politics/44690/Direct-adjustment-once-again-dominates-public-procurement.htm> (accessed 1 August 2026). Of 4,389 registered procurement procedures, 89 per cent were closed procedures and only 7 per cent were subject to public tender.

9 'Personal Data in Angola': <https://www.dlapiperafrica.com/en/angola/insights/2021/personal-data-in-angola.html> accessed on 10 March 2026

of activity — including the imposition of fines on several private sector companies in 2024. But the APD's independence from the security and intelligence apparatus is undemonstrated, and its capacity to oversee the collection and use of biometric data by a heavily securitised state remains entirely untested.

There is no legal instrument specifically governing the use of biometric data in security and border control contexts in Angola. The National Security Law of 2024, the NGO Law signed by the President in early 2026, and draft legislation on “online disinformation” reveal a state that is actively tightening, not loosening, legal constraints on civil society and free expression.¹⁰ This is the environment into which hundreds of millions of dollars' worth of surveillance technologies are now being introduced.

The comparative record elsewhere on the African continent raises profound concerns — not about the technology in itself, but about how ineffectually its use is constrained by law once it has been installed. In Uganda, Huawei's Safe City infrastructure was utilised almost immediately for surveilling opposition politicians and the interception of encrypted communications.¹¹ In Ethiopia, another country that shares Angola's structural

combination of democratic deficits and securitised state, similar systems have been deployed against journalists and civil society.¹² In Kenya, the data from Huawei's surveillance cameras flows to police command centres with minimal legal oversight, despite the country being considered the most democratic in the region.¹³

Angola, however, presents a more severe risk profile than any of these comparators: it is a state that has not changed ruling party since 1975. The politics of power retention and compliance takes varying forms; from the deployment of lethal force against protesters at Cafunfo in 2021¹⁴ to the weaponising of criminal prosecutions to suppress political competition as recently as December 2025.¹⁵

The potential for surveillance overreach presents a very real danger in this context. The pending 2027 general elections cast a long shadow over this entire enterprise. Angola's ruling Popular Movement for the Liberation of Angola (MPLA) faces an unprecedented, genuinely competitive internal struggle for succession.¹⁶ That contest is unfolding as the ruling party's grip on the electorate loosens. Its 2022 margin was the narrowest in its history, it lost Luanda outright, and its base is ageing against a population that is overwhelmingly young,

10 Human Rights Watch. “Angola's President Signs Repressive Civil Society Law”. (2026, March 5). <https://www.hrw.org/news/2026/03/05/angolas-president-signs-repressive-civil-society-law> accessed on 17 July 2026.

11 Business and Human Rights Centre. “Uganda: New report details surveillance and spyware network that is endangering journalists and human rights activists”. (2025, August 11). <https://www.business-humanrights.org/en/latest-news/uganda-new-report-details-surveillance-and-spyware-network-that-is-endangering-journalists-and-human-rights-activists/> accessed on 17 July 2026.

12 Recorded Future. “State Digital Surveillance Risk Landscape”. (2026, June 17). <https://www.recordedfuture.com/research/state-digital-surveillance-risk-landscape> accessed on 17 July 2026.

13 Medium. “Africa's Smart Cities Are Not Neutral”. (2026, March 10). <https://medium.com/@raissasidat/africas-smart-cities-are-not-neutral-5486a0d33cd1> accessed on 17 July 2026.

14 ‘Angola: Security Forces Kill Protesters in Lunda Norte Province’: <https://www.hrw.org/news/2021/02/04/angola-security-forces-kill-protesters-lunda-norte-province> accessed on 20 February 2026

15 ‘When Politics Becomes a Crime in Angola’: <https://allafrica.com/stories/202601030138.html#:~:text=Maka%20Angola,reframed%20as%20instruments%20of%20terrorism>, accessed on 4 January 2026

16 ‘Internal struggles may weaken Angola's MPLA’: <https://www.emerald.com/expert-briefings/article-abstract/doi/10.1108/OXAN-DB290060/1214556/Internal-struggles-may-weaken-Angola-s-MPLAANGOLA?redirectedFrom=fulltext> accessed on 9 April, 2026. Also see Rafael Marques De Morais's analysis in Maka Angola. “Angola's Hidden Succession Crisis”. (2026, July 2). <https://allafrica.com/stories/202607030008.html> accessed on 1 August 2026)

increasingly urban and progressively less dependent on state-controlled information. The electoral space is correspondingly febrile. UNITA has never formally and unambiguously accepted the announced result of any multiparty general election in Angola since 1992: every cycle has been followed by disputes, allegations of irregularity or outright rejection — from Jonas Savimbi's rejection of the 1992 count and the resumption of the civil war, through the unsuccessful court challenges of 2012 and 2017, to UNITA's declaration in September 2022 that it did not recognise the figures announced by the National Electoral Commission.¹⁷ A biometric identity infrastructure of contested integrity is therefore being introduced into an electoral environment in which the losing party has not once conceded. The biometric infrastructure under construction — connecting border posts, airports, consular databases, and a central data hub near Luanda — creates technical capabilities for population surveillance and electoral manipulation that, in the absence of credible independent oversight, can be employed to serve the incumbent's interests. The reported plan to replace voter cards with national identity cards for electoral purposes¹⁸ links the biometric ID project directly to the question of who accesses voter registration, and by extension the franchise. Angola's electoral register has never been subjected to a comprehensive technical audit, and there are no credible guarantees of timely publication of voter rolls. This scenario does not contribute to building public trust and is wide open for manipulation.

This report does not argue that Angola should abandon biometric border management, but rather that the conditions under which these systems are being introduced must change in order to ensure the integrity and by extension the credibility they require with the Angolan people. Transparency in procurement, independent oversight of data use, legal reform to establish specific safeguards for biometric data, and genuine civic engagement in the governance of these technologies are not optional extras. In a state with Angola's securitised history, they are the minimum requirements for ensuring that the technology serves its citizens rather than a securitised surveillance agenda designed to manufacture and maintain their compliance.

KEY FINDINGS

1. There is no operational biometric system at the Angola–DRC border. Field research at five posts in Lunda Norte and Lunda Sul (Chissanda, Fortuna, Nachiri, Chilunge and Cassai-Sul) found no biometric controls in place. Crossings are governed by a seven-day paper “border pass” and a Congolese laissez-passer, checked manually. The only digital legacy is a defunct Israeli-installed video-surveillance cabin. The government has not claimed that these particular posts are functioning. It has, however, presented the programme as being in “active rollout” — the Ministry of the Interior's February 2025 announcement described an interconnected biometric system covering land borders, airports and ports within three years, and the December 2025 launch of the electronic

¹⁷ On the 1992 result and the return to war, and on UNITA's refusal to recognise the 2022 count, see VOA, “Angolan Opposition UNITA Rejects Ruling Party's Election Win”, 30 August 2022: <https://www.voanews.com/a/angolan-opposition-unita-rejects-ruling-party-s-election-win/6722856.html> ; on the unsuccessful 2017 challenge and on the Final Declaration issued by UNITA and the Frente Patriótica Unida in September 2022, see ISPI, “Angola's Political Earthquake: The Aftermath of the August 2022 Elections”: <https://www.ispionline.it/en/publication/angolas-political-earthquake-aftermath-august-2022-elections-36067> (both accessed 1 August 2026).

¹⁸ ‘Proposals to Amend Official Voter Registration Law’: <https://www.africa-press.net/angola/all-news/proposals-to-amend-official-voter-registration-law> accessed on 30 March 2026

passport was publicised as evidence of delivery — without disclosing how little of the land border network is in fact operational, or when it is expected to be fully operational.¹⁹

2. Santa Clara (Namibia border) is the sole functioning biometric post — and it is degraded. The KAVIE system at this site, originally installed by Huawei in 2013, reads passports and links in real time to the SME database in Luanda. Yet fingerprint and height capture have been discontinued “due to maintenance constraints”.²⁰ A system that cannot maintain a single pilot site casts doubt on the state’s capacity to deliver a US\$112 million national rollout.

3. The projects build a centralised identity infrastructure, not merely border tools. The Dolinveste–T4B system and the ANY passport contract are designed to interoperate through the SME and the Integrated Public Security Centre (CISP), feeding a unified citizen-identification database hosted at a new national data centre at Camama, near Luanda.²¹ The border framing understates the system’s reach into domestic identity governance.

4. Procurement is opaque, vendor-driven and tied to political interests.

The US\$112 million Dolinveste–T4B contract was reportedly a direct award classified as a strategic security initiative rather than an open tender,²² and successive interior ministers have repeatedly switched vendors — from Israeli firms to Huawei to T4B — in ways Angolan reporting links to personal and political enrichment rather than continuity.

5. Intelligence services can reach biometric data with no judicial oversight. At Santa Clara, the SME confirms that the State Intelligence and Security Service (SINSE) can request access to relevant data under established protocols.²³ Those protocols are undefined and unpublished. This unsupervised access to identity data, done without a legal mandate, is the report’s gravest rights concern.

6. The legal framework exists on paper but is unenforced against the state.

Angola’s Data Protection Law (Law 22/11) classifies biometrics as sensitive data, and the Constitution guarantees privacy. But the data-protection authority (APD) has weak capacity and has never investigated or sanctioned a ministry or intelligence body.²⁴

19 Angop, “Fronteiras nacionais vão ter sistema de controlo biométrico”, 26 February 2025: <https://www.angop.ao/en/noticias/politica/fronteiras-nacionais-vao-ter-sistema-de-controlo-biometrico/>; and Club of Mozambique, “Angola: Government unveils new electronic passport”, December 2025 <https://clubofmozambique.com/news/angola-government-unveils-new-electronic-passport/> (both accessed 1 August 2026). Neither announcement states that the Lunda Norte and Lunda Sul posts are operational; neither acknowledges that they are not.

20 Field interviews, Santa Clara border post, Cunene Province, November 2025; SME personnel (identities withheld).

21 O País, “Principal centro de dados do Executivo começa a operar em Fevereiro de 2026”, <https://www.opais.ao/> (accessed 15 June 2026). The Camama centre is run by INFOSI under the Ministry of Telecommunications, with the SME and CISP.

22 Reporting in the Angolan press indicates the contract was formalised through a direct-award procedure on national-security grounds; no competitive tender documentation has been published. See Ver Angola. “The country will implement biometric border controls to strengthen security”. <https://www.verangola.net/va/pt/022025/Defesa/43501/Pa%C3%ADs-vai-implementar-controlo-biom%C3%A9trico-nas-fronteiras-para-refor%C3%A7ar-seguran%C3%A7a.htm> accessed on 22 July 2026

23 Field interviews, Santa Clara border post, Cunene Province, November 2025; SME personnel (identities withheld). Also see: Club-K: “The Attorney General’s Office was informed that the law does not allow illegal recordings to be presented as evidence in court.” (2015, December 7). <https://club-k.net/index.php/politica/22875-pgr-foi-avisado-que-lei-nao-permite-que-gravacoes-ilegais-sejam-apresentadas-como-provas-em-tribunal> accessed on 22 July 2026

24 Intelwatch has found no public records of any APD investigating or sanctioning any ministry, state or intelligence body

7. The 2027 elections are the real stakes.

Angola does not run an independent biometric voter register; the roll is derived from the civil identity database (the Bilhete de Identidade). Proposals to replace voter cards with national ID cards would deepen that convergence, concentrating sensitive electoral data in a system reachable by the security apparatus during a contested succession.

8. A 50 per cent documentation deficit makes the system exclusionary by design.

With more than 50 per cent of citizens lacking a national ID²⁵, a biometric identity-and-voting infrastructure risks disenfranchising the undocumented and entrenching a two-tier citizenship which would likely burden the rural poor, the diaspora and border communities. The deficit also hands the state discretion over the registration process itself. Decisions about who is enrolled, and about which localities are prioritised for enrolment drives, determine who acquires the documents on which the franchise depends. Urban areas, which in Angola are now the strongest opposition constituencies, are the obvious candidates for exclusion by omission rather than by refusal. Comparable practice in the region is instructive: in Zimbabwe, the allocation of voter registration centres has repeatedly favoured ruling-party strongholds over opposition-leaning provinces and cities.²⁶

9. Counterterrorism and foreign interference narratives are being instrumentalised to justify surveillance expansion and chill dissent.

Following the July 2025 cost-of-living protests in which at least 22 people were killed and over 1,200 arrested²⁷, the Angolan state arrested and detained two Russian nationals and several Angolans on terrorism-financing and disinformation charges. The Russian nationals were subsequently convicted and handed eight and 11 year jail sentences each.²⁸ Some independent analysts argue there is a likelihood that with elections coming up in 2027, the 'terrorism' framing is being used to justify surveillance expansion and chill dissent.²⁹

10. Foreign vendor dependency raises data-sovereignty concerns.

Angola's surveillance stack is overwhelmingly foreign — Huawei (China), ANY (Hungary), T4B (Poland) and Semlex (Belgium), Brithol Michcoma (UK). The United Arab Emirates' EDGE Group announced in October 2025 that it is finalising an agreement with Angola's Ministry of Interior for a nationwide border security programme to be implemented by its subsidiary BEACON RED. There has not been any confirmation of a final agreement. Government sources interviewed during the filed research indicated that there is another foreign vendor, DRD, an Israeli supplier of the

25 Ver Angola: "Less than half of the Angolan population has an identity card, reveals the Minister of Justice". (2025, October 16). <https://www.verangola.net/va/en/102025/Society/46337/Less-than-half-of-the-Angolan-population-has-an-identity-card-reveals-the-Minister-of-Justice.htm> accessed on 16 July 2026

26 For comparable regional practice, see reporting on the Zimbabwe Electoral Commission's allocation of mobile voter registration centres, under which Bulawayo — an opposition-dominated province — received 152 centres against 354 for Midlands: allAfrica, "Zimbabwe: Uproar Over Reduced Matabeleland Mobile Voter Registration Centres", January 2022: <https://allafrica.com/stories/202201310424.html>; and the SADC Electoral Observation Mission's findings on urban disenfranchisement in the 2023 Zimbabwean elections, <https://kujenga-amani.ssrc.org/2024/02/15/zimbabwes-disputed-elections-and-the-sadc-observer-mission/> (both accessed 1 August 2026).

27 Institute for Security Studies, "Angola's wave of protests reflects historic lows in MPLA support", 11 August 2025, <https://issafrica.org/> (accessed 15 June 2026). Death tolls reported between 22 and 30 across sources.

28 Defence 24 Com. "Russian influence operation exposed in Angola" (26 July 2026). <https://defence24.com/geopolitics/russian-influence-operation-exposed-in-angola> accessed on 26 July 2026

29 Sami Bhattacharya: 'Turmoil in Angola: Ghost of Wagner or Politics of Survival?' 2026, April 22. <https://www.orfonline.org/expert-speak/turmoil-in-angola-ghost-of-wagner-or-politics-of-survival>

legacy border-surveillance systems installed from the late 1990s. However, this name could not be corroborated in any public record.³⁰ Huawei's "Safe City" platform, deployed in the country's northwest Zaire Province, embeds dormant facial-recognition capability and there is no saying if these will ever be utilised and whether that would be done in a transparent manner, given the culture of secrecy and opacity in the Angolan state and its security sector.³¹ The concern is not that the capability is used inconsistently, but rather that its activation is a discretionary administrative act. Facial recognition on this platform requires no additional procurement, no judicial authorisation and no public notification. No oversight body in Angola is positioned to detect whether it has been switched on, and how it is being utilised. The safeguard is therefore the forbearance of the authorities rather than any legal or technical constraint — and a safeguard of that kind is worth only as much as the political conditions of the moment allow.

11. Border surveillance in the diamond rich northeastern Lundas provinces sits under presidential, not ministerial, control. The elite "Chacais" unit of the Presidential Military House, a military force operating outside the SME/police chain and without identifiable external oversight, is involved in surveillance operations in the diamond provinces.³² What the field research establishes is the unit's role in the diamond provinces; what it does not establish is the extent to which this includes border and border post related activities, as distinct from the mining areas and their approaches. This report therefore does not assert that the Chacais exercise border control

functions. The uncertainty is itself significant: no public instrument defines where resource protection ends and migration control begins in the Lundas, or which chain of command governs the transition between them. Nor is there any published account of how surveillance in these presidentially controlled areas would be folded into the planned national biometric programme: whether data gathered by the Presidential Military House would be routed to the Camama data centre, who would then hold access rights to it, and under what legal authority. An amalgamation of that kind would extend presidential reach into the national identity infrastructure without any corresponding extension of oversight, and it is the scenario least visible to Parliament, the courts and the data-protection authority alike.

12. The securitisation case for biometrics is unproven. There is no evidence that biometric systems being introduced in Angola are yet demonstrating an impact by reducing trafficking, smuggling and irregular mining. If anything, the biometric systems are largely non-operational. Therefore, the stated security rationale for biometrics currently does not match the deployed reality at this juncture. This finding should not be read as a case for accelerating or hardening the rollout. The implication runs the other way: because the claimed security benefits are unevidenced and the deployed capability is minimal, the security impact and the cost-benefit case for further expenditure require close independent assessment before the next tranche of procurement rather than after it. That assessment should weigh the rights costs and the data-governance liabilities alongside any security gains.

30 Field interviews with some government sources, Lunda Norte, November 2025. The sources mentioned an Israeli firm "LRD"; however, this researcher could not confirm this name in public sources. There is a possible confusion with LR Group or the Mitrelli Group, both long-standing suppliers to the Angolan state. The vendor's identity remains unverified — itself indicative of the opacity of these contracts.

31 Biometric Update, "Chinese biometric surveillance technology deployed internationally amid criticism", October 2019, <https://www.biometricupdate.com/201910/> (accessed 15 June 2026). Also see: Digital Angola. "Digital Identity Systems — Biometric Registration & e-ID". (2026, March 11). <https://digitalangola.com/sectors/govtech/govtech-digital-identity/>

32 Interviews with intelligence sources (names withheld). November 2025

PURPOSE, SCOPE AND METHODOLOGY

Purpose. This report examines the implementation of biometric and related surveillance systems at Angola's land borders. It identifies the technical, political and legal realities of those systems, and assesses their consequences for the rights of migrants, refugees and Angolan citizens and for the integrity of the 2027 general elections. It is produced under Intelwatch's mandate of strengthening public oversight of state and private surveillance capability in the Global South. It is therefore analytical and critical: where it records the government's security rationale, it attributes that rationale to its source and assesses it, rather than endorsing it.

Scope. The study focuses on two contrasting frontiers, namely the Angola–DRC border in the diamond-rich Lunda Norte and Lunda Sul provinces and in Zaire and Cabinda, where instability and resource crime drive a militarised response; and the Angola–Namibia border at Santa Clara (Cunene), the country's busiest land crossing and the only post with a functioning biometric system. It also considers Angolan consular documentation problems in the DRC, Namibia and Zambia, the national identity and passport programme that underpins border identity checks, and the data infrastructure in Luanda that links them.

Methodology. The research used a qualitative design combining fieldwork and documentary analysis. Field research at five DRC-border posts in Lunda Norte and Lunda Sul was conducted between 10 and 14 November 2025, complemented by interviews in Luanda with personnel of the

SME, the Border Guard Police, the Integrated Public Security Centre (CISP), units of the Presidential Military House and individuals linked to SINSE. Interviews were also held with service users, namely, Angolan nationals, Congolese citizens as well as with Angolan civil society contacts. Documentary sources include Angolan legislation and presidential orders, company and vendor disclosures, parliamentary and regulatory material, and reporting by Angolan and international outlets and human-rights organisations.

Written questions to setting out this report's principal findings, covering the procurement of the biometric contracts, the legal basis for intelligence access to identity data, and the operational status of the border systems, were put to the Ministry of the Interior and the Serviço de Migração e Estrangeiros on 30 June 2026. No response had been received by the date of publication, and the government's position as recorded in this report therefore rests on its own public announcements, official documentation and reported statements rather than on any direct reply to the matters raised.

Source protection and limitations. Because the subject is securitised and highly sensitive issue, sources are not named where disclosure could create risk; several spoke only on condition of anonymity. Access to official documentation is heavily restricted, and the constant presence of intelligence operatives at border posts constrained direct observation — a methodological limitation that is itself a finding about the opacity of Angola's surveillance governance.³³ Some technical specifications and contract terms could not be independently verified and are reported as such.

³³ Field notes, Lunda Norte and Lunda Sul, November 2025. One researcher recorded being monitored at distance while attempting to photograph border infrastructure.

INTRODUCTION

In February 2025 Angola's Ministry of the Interior announced that the country's borders, airports and ports would be brought under an interconnected biometric control system within three years.³⁴ The announcement followed years of stalled modernisation, and it came at a time when political temperatures were beginning to heat up as the country entered the pre-electoral period. Elections are due in 2027. While the interior ministry's announcement is the immediate trigger for this study, the questions it raises are older: who builds Angola's identification systems, under what law, with what oversight, and to whose benefit?

Angola is a securitised state.³⁵ The Movimento Popular de Libertação de Angola (MPLA) party has governed since independence in 1975, and the intelligence services have, in practice, come to supervise much of the security apparatus.³⁶ Biometric identification deployed in such an environment does not arrive as a neutral administrative upgrade. It arrives as a capability, a capability to register, locate, sort, manage and, if required, exclude individuals and whole communities. And this capability will be in the hands of institutions with a documented record of operating opaquely, that have not been accountable to the Angolan citizenry, but rather to the presidency and ruling party, with limited checks on their activities.³⁷ This report situates the technology within that political reality.

The research is framed by international human-rights standards governing identity and surveillance: the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR),

particularly its protections of privacy, expression, movement and association; the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights; the African Union's Malabo Convention on Cyber Security and Personal Data Protection; relevant SADC protocols; and Angola's own constitutional and data-protection law. The SADC instruments in question are the Protocol on the Facilitation of Movement of Persons (2005) and the SADC Model Law on Data Protection (2013); the domestic instruments are the 2010 Constitution (Articles 11, 32, 34 and 40), the Personal Data Protection Law (Law 22/11 of 17 June 2011), the Identity Card Law (Law 8/2021) and Regulatory Decree 15/2022. Each is set out, with its provisions and its limitations, in the Legal Environment chapter below. These instruments require that any biometric system be necessary, proportionate, consented to where possible, and subject to independent oversight — the precise conditions this report finds to be inadequate or absent altogether.

34 Angop, "Fronteiras nacionais vão ter sistema de controlo biométrico", <https://www.angop.ao/> (English translation accessed 18 June 2026).

35 Paula Cristina Roque: "Governing in the Shadows: Angola's Securitized State". Oxford University Press, January 1, 2022

36 Country background: African Elections Research, Angola profile; and Background Notes on Angola's Biometric Border Control Agenda (Intelwatch, 2025).

37 CEDESA. "Policy brief-CEDESA". (2025, December 2). <https://www.cedesa.pt/2025/12/02/policy-brief-cedesa/> accessed on 27 July 2026

This report addresses six questions:

1. What biometric and surveillance systems actually operate at Angola's borders with the DRC and Namibia?
2. Who are the vendors and what are the terms of their contracts?
3. What law governs the collection, storage and use of this data?
4. How might these systems be used, or misused, for political surveillance and control?
5. What are the consequences for the rights of migrants, refugees and citizens?
6. What risks do they pose to the 2027 electoral process?

The chapters that follow take these in turn, moving from historical and political context to the systems themselves, the law, the elections and comparative experience, before setting out recommendations.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Angola's borders were drawn in the colonial period and inherited largely unchanged: roughly 2,646 km with the DRC (including 225 km bordering the Cabinda enclave), 1,427 km with Namibia, 1,065 km with Zambia, and 231 km of the Republic of the Congo around Cabinda — some 4,837 km of land and river frontier in total.³⁸ These long, porous and sparsely policed frontiers have shaped a security doctrine that treats the border less as a line of administration than as a theatre of war.

That doctrine was forged in conflict. During the late-1990s war in neighbouring Zaire/DRC — in which Angolan forces backed then rebel leader Laurent-Désiré Kabila against

then President Mobutu Sese Seko — Angola installed electronic surveillance along its eastern border, reportedly with Israeli assistance, using motion sensors and GPS tracking to monitor movement in militarily sensitive zones.³⁹

Around 2010, Angola significantly expanded its regional surveillance apparatus to monitor insurgent activity and illicit diamond flows in the Lundas. Spearheaded by General Manuel Hélder Vieira Dias 'Kopelipa', the then powerful head of the Presidential Security House, the state deployed Israeli-supplied 360-degree cameras with a 10-kilometer range at strategic outposts like Chissanda and Fortuna.⁴⁰

Two features of that legacy persist. First, rather than being guided by a coherent regulatory framework, the acquisition of surveillance capabilities has been entirely reactive, relying on ad hoc procurement that one source described as a mere "stopgap measure". Second, no public record exists of what happened to the data those systems collected: whether it was stored, transferred to Luanda, shared abroad, or destroyed. The cabins now stand abandoned and the cameras no longer function, but the question of the data is unanswered. This pattern of deploying, then neglecting, and finally abandoning- with no data-governance framework and no decommissioning procedure- recurs and it is a governance failure in its own right.

The securitised approach also has a documented human cost. On 25 September 2018, the Government of Angola officially launched the so-called "Operation Transparency", one of the largest migration control and illegal mining enforcement operations in the country, particularly

38 Border lengths compiled from CIA World Factbook and cartographic sources. <https://worldfactbookarchive.org/archive/2025/AO>. Figures should be treated as approximate.

39 Field interviews with some government sources, Lunda Norte, November 2025. The sources attributed the system to an Israeli firm "LRD"; however, this researcher could not confirm this name in public sources. There is a possible confusion with LR Group or the Mitrelli Group, both long-standing suppliers to the Angolan state. The vendor's identity remains unverified — itself indicative of the opacity of these contracts.

40 Field interviews with members of the Presidential Military House elite unit, Lunda Norte, November 2025.

targeting the diamond-rich provinces of Lunda Norte, Lunda Sul and Moxico in the north-east. The operation aimed to curb irregular migration and dismantle illicit mineral extraction networks, significantly affecting citizens of the DRC. Human Rights Watch and others documented rapid, opaque mass expulsions of Congolese nationals, physical violence and degrading treatment, with women and girls reporting sexual violence in detention and during deportation.⁴¹ HRW continued to record abuses against migrants in 2023 and 2024, indicating that the operation changed practice only temporarily and never built durable rights protections.⁴² The biometric programmes now under construction inherit this institutional culture and these programmes could target the vulnerable populations without adequate oversight to protect their rights from any abuses or overreach.

THE CURRENT SITUATION

Three developments converge in the present. The first is procurement — specifically, the acquisition of an integrated biometric border system coordinated through a new national control centre near Luanda.⁴³ In February 2025, the interior ministry announced the

Dolinveste–T4B integrated biometric system, a US\$112 million investment in border modernisation. Designed to monitor land, air, and potentially river entry points, the network signals a strategic shift toward centralised surveillance, with all operations coordinated through a national control centre near Luanda.⁴⁴ This complements the €130 million ANY Security Printing passport-and-identity contract signed in 2023 and financed by Hungary’s EXIM Bank, which covers biometric enrolment stations, a local personalisation facility and ten years of passport delivery through the SME.⁴⁵ Angola’s electronic passport was formally unveiled in December 2025 by Interior Minister Manuel Homem, confirming the identity programme has moved from contract to rollout.⁴⁶

The infrastructure is expanding on several fronts at once. A Huawei perimeter-monitoring system was inaugurated at the Luvo crossing in Zaire Province in 2025; a 190-camera video-surveillance network was opened in Cabinda in December 2025; and in late 2025 Angola was reported to be in final negotiations with the United Arab Emirates’ EDGE Group, through its subsidiary BEACON RED, for a nationwide border-surveillance and command programme built on artificial intelligence, command-and-control systems

41 Human Rights Watch, “Angola: Mass Expulsions of Migrants”, 16 October 2018, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2018/10/16/angola-mass-expulsions-migrants> (accessed 15 June 2026). Also see: Vatican News. “Angola - Operação Transparência”. <https://www.vaticannews.va/pt/africa/news/2018-11/angola-operacao-transparencia.html>

42 Human Rights Watch, World Report 2024: Angola, <https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2024/country-chapters/angola> (accessed 15 June 2026).

43 O País, “Principal centro de dados do Executivo começa a operar em Fevereiro de 2026”, <https://www.opais.ao/> (accessed 15 June 2026). The Camama centre is run by INFOSI under the Ministry of Telecommunications, with the SME and CISP.

44 Angop, “Fronteiras nacionais vão ter sistema de controlo biométrico”. <https://www.angop.ao/noticias/politica/fronteiras-nacionais-vao-ter-sistema-de-controlo-biometrico/> (accessed 18 June 2026). Ministério do Interior, minint.gov.ao (accessed 15 June 2026).

45 Biometric Update. “Angola seals financing agreement for \$139M biometric passport contract” (2023, June 1). <https://www.biometricupdate.com/202306/angola-seals-financing-agreement-for-139m-biometric-passport-contract>

46 Club of Mozambique, “Angola: Government unveils new electronic passport”, December 2025, <https://clubofmozambique.com/> (accessed 15 June 2026).

and unmanned platforms.⁴⁷ Whatever the fate of any single contract, the direction is unmistakable: a layered, centrally coordinated surveillance architecture is being assembled. Whatever the fate of any single contract, the direction the Angolan government wants to take is towards a layered, centrally coordinated surveillance architecture. Whether it is developing an effective interoperable architecture is a separate question, and so far, the evidence does not support assuming that it is/will be. The components have been procured piecemeal, from four different foreign suppliers, under separate ministerial authorities and on separate timelines, and no integration architecture or interoperability specification has been published. While centralisation may be the desired goal; fragmentation is the observable condition.

The second development is political. Although constitutionally barred from a third presidential term, President João Lourenço announced on 11 May 2026 his intent to seek re-election as MPLA leader at the party's 10 December congress. By retaining control of the ruling party, Lourenço is likely positioning himself to handpick the MPLA's 2027 presidential candidate. Angolan analysts warn this manoeuvre could establish a precarious dual-power structure, allowing Lourenço to maintain *de facto* influence over the state apparatus even after stepping down as head of state.⁴⁸ The third development is unrest:

the July 2025 cost-of-living protests and the state's securitised response. These three strands (a surveillance build-out, a contested succession and a government anxious about protests and the streets) should not be viewed as distinct trajectories. They are the intertwined and part of the same story, and the chapters that follow trace the connections between them.

JUSTIFICATION FOR BIOMETRICS

The government's case for biometric border control rests on the defence of sovereignty and the fight against crime. Officials present Angola's borders as conduits for irregular migration, diamond and gold smuggling, illegal mining, arms and fuel trafficking, poaching and human trafficking, and frame biometric verification as the means to identify individuals, detect fraudulent documents and deny entry to those flagged as security risks.⁴⁹ This framing draws additional force from the conflict in the eastern DRC and from a counter-terrorism narrative intensified after July 2025. That narrative was advanced by Angolan officials themselves in the weeks after the July 2025 protests and was given institutional form in the terrorism-financing and disinformation prosecutions brought against two Russian nationals and several Angolans — a framing that Angolan journalists and independent analysts have contested from the outset.⁵⁰

47 Military Africa, "Angola and EDGE Group near border security deal", 9 November 2025, <https://www.military.africa/2025/11/angola-and-edge-group-near-border-security-deal/> (accessed 18 June 2026).; DefenceWeb, "EDGE Group to provide border security solution to Angola", <https://defenceweb.co.za/border-security-2/edge-group-to-provide-border-security-solution-to-angola/> 28 October 2025.

48 Reporting on the MPLA succession contest, 2025–2026; see Sunday Independent, "Is João Lourenço plotting a third presidential term in Angola?", <https://sundayindependent.co.za/dispatch/2025-12-27-is-joo-lourenco-plotting-a-third-presidential-term-in-angola/> 27 December 2025. Also see: Horizon Engage, "Angola: Lourenco's Succession Race Heats Up With Speaker Selection". (2025, November, 26). <https://horizon-engage.vercel.app/insights/angola-lourenco-s-succession-race-heats-up-with-speaker-selection>

49 Government rationale as set out by the Ministry of the Interior and the SME in public statements accompanying the 2025 announcements. Also see Ver Angola, "Issuing electronic passports is now a reality throughout the country". (2026, March, 20). <https://www.verangola.net/va/en/032026/Society/48139/Issuing-electronic-passports-is-now-a-reality-throughout-the-country.htm>. Also see, "

50 Observador, "Rafael Marques acusa Presidente e Governo angolano de terrorismo de Estado", 20 August 2025, <https://observador.pt/2025/08/20/rafael-marques-acusa-presidente-e-governo-angolano-de-terrorismo-de-estado/> (accessed 18 June 2026).

Three problems undermine that justification. First, the evidentiary basis is thin. Striking figures that have been thrown around include claims that around 85 per cent of those involved in illegal diamond and timber extraction are foreign nationals, or that some 18,000 Congolese refugees in Lunda Norte are unaccounted for. However, these claims can only be traced to Angolan security sources and provincial officials rather than to independent or verifiable data, and they have hardened into policy rationale without scrutiny.⁵¹ Unsourced statistics presented as fact are a recurring weakness in official narratives.

Second, there is no evidence the systems work and are properly maintained. The deployed reality is a single degraded pilot project at the Santa Clara border, defunct equipment in the Lundas, inactive biometric gates at Luanda's new airport, and a passport scheme that initially covers only new issuances rather than renewals. A capability that is largely non-operational cannot be reducing the harms invoked to justify it. The international literature is in any case sceptical that biometric border systems meaningfully suppress determined cross-border crime, which adapts around fixed control points— as the river crossings and informal markets on the DRC frontier illustrate.

Third, the justification is selective. The counter-terrorism and “foreign interference” frame deployed after the July 2025 protests, culminating in the prosecution and conviction of two Russian nationals and several Angolans

for terrorism financing and disinformation, has been challenged by independent observers as a political instrument rather than a documented threat.⁵² When threat narratives expand to justify surveillance infrastructure precisely as domestic dissent rises, the technology's stated purpose and its likely function diverge. That divergence, rather than the technology itself, is the core concern addressed in this report.

THE LEGAL ENVIRONMENT

On paper, Angola has the elements of a well-rounded data-protection regime. The 2010 Constitution guarantees the right to privacy and protection of personal data (Articles 32 and 34) and freedom of expression (Article 40), and frames peace and national security as state pillars (Article 11).⁵³ The Personal Data Protection Law (Law 22/11 of 17 June 2011) classifies biometric data as sensitive, requiring a legitimate purpose, consent and security safeguards, and establishes a supervisory authority, the Autoridade de Protecção de Dados (APD).⁵⁴ The Identity Card Law (Law 8/2021) and Regulatory Decree 15/2022 define biometric identifiers — fingerprints, facial geometry, iris — and set technical standards for the electronic ID and its interoperability with other databases.⁵⁵

While the APD has sanctioned some private organisations, it appears to have its hands tied when it comes to the state and state institutions. It appears there is no record of the APD investigating or sanctioning a ministry, the SME or an intelligence body for

51 The 18,000 figure derives from a 2017 statement by the then Governor of Lunda Norte; see VOA Português, “Refugiados congoleses na Lunda Norte chegam a 18 mil”. <https://www.voaportugues.com/a/refugiados-congoleses-na-lunda-norte-chegam-a-18-mil/3842210.html> (accessed 15 June 2026). The 85% figure is attributed to unspecified Angolan security sources and is unverified.

52 Observador, “Rafael Marques acusa Presidente e Governo angolano de terrorismo de Estado”, 20 August 2025, <https://observador.pt/2025/08/20/rafael-marques-acusa-presidente-e-governo-angolano-de-terrorismo-de-estado/> (accessed 18 June 2026).

53 Constitution of the Republic of Angola 2010, Articles 11, 32, 34 and 40. https://www.constituteproject.org/constitution/Angola_2010

54 Lei n.º 22/11 de 17 de Junho. See, Lexology, “Personal Data and Cybersecurity in Angola”. <https://www.lexology.com/library/detail.aspx?g=dc282a8c-5dbf-455e-88c4-48ac2173e48d>

55 See Digital Angola, “Digital Identity Legislation and Governance Framework”. <https://digitalangola.com/regulation/regulation-digital-identity-law/> accessed 18 June 2026).

unlawful data handling.⁵⁶ A data-protection law that operates only against private actors, and never against the most powerful data controllers in the country, offers citizens at best only partial remedy for data violations. The proportionality and consent requirements that the law states are, for state surveillance purposes, unenforced.

In terms of the APD's mandate, the most serious gap concerns its ability to provide oversight of the intelligence services and sanction it where necessary. While the SME confirms that SINSE "can request access to relevant data under established protocols," these procedures remain unpublished and exempt from judicial authorisation. Furthermore, a glaring legal vacuum exists: no statutory standards dictate when intelligence agencies may acquire sensitive identity, biometric, or mobility data, nor is there any independent oversight body to review these requests.⁵⁷ This vacuum is compounded by the National Security Law (Law 15/24 of 10 September 2024), which jurists and civil-society figures argue creates a broad duty on citizens to cooperate with the security apparatus- a legal posture that in effect normalises and enables, rather than constrains, surveillance.⁵⁸

The framework governing data taken from non-citizens is thinner still. Migrants and asylum-seekers intercepted at remote posts present a distinct problem. Biometric registration of migrants, asylum-seekers and refugees is not objectionable in itself: properly governed, it can improve administrative efficiency, guard against document fraud and give displaced people a durable proof of identity they would otherwise lack.

What determines whether it protects or endangers them is the presence of strict purpose limitation, tightly bounded use and independent oversight. None of those conditions is met in the Angolan setting. Those processed at remote posts are in no position to give meaningful, informed consent to enrolment, and no published rule restricts what is subsequently done with the data taken from them. Furthermore, allowing domestic intelligence services subsequent access to this biometric data directly conflicts with Angola's obligations under the 1951 Refugee Convention and the African Union refugee framework, actively undermining the core principle of non-refoulement. The capability of biometric data to expose a refugee's identity and location creates a severe friction point: state mandates for border intelligence collide directly with the humanitarian obligation to protect vulnerable populations.

International standards sharpen the assessment. The ICCPR protects against arbitrary or unlawful interference with privacy (Article 17, elaborated in the Human Rights Committee's General Comment 16) and protects expression, assembly and association (Articles 19, 21 and 22). These are rights that mass identity surveillance can chill. The African Charter and the AU's Malabo Convention set continental data-protection principles, and the SADC⁵⁹ framework presumes harmonised, rights-respecting data handling. Angola is bound by the Malabo Convention, which it ratified on 11 May 2020 and which entered into force on 8 June 2023; Articles 13 and 14 require lawful, purpose-limited processing and impose additional conditions on sensitive data, and

56 PLMJ, "Personal Data and Cybersecurity in Angola" (accessed 15 June 2026). <https://www.plmj.com/en/knowledge/informative-notes/Personal-Data-and-Cybersecurity-in-Angola/33477/>

57 Field interviews, Santa Clara, November 2025.

58 See: International IDEA: "President Lourenço enacts legislation curtailing civil liberties". (accessed on 19 June 2026). <https://www.idea.int/democracytracker/report/angola/august-2024>. Also see: Human Rights Watch, "Angola: Proposed Security Law Threatens Rights". (2024, April 23). <https://www.hrw.org/news/2024/04/23/angola-proposed-security-law-threatens-rights>

59 Data Protection: Southern African Development Community (SADC) Model Law. https://www.itu.int/en/ITU-D/Projects/ITU-EC-ACP/HIPSSA/Documents/FINAL%20DOCUMENTS/FINAL%20DOCS%20ENGLISH/sadc_model_law_data_protection.pdf accessed on 1 August 2026.

Article 11 obliges states parties to maintain an independent data-protection authority.⁶⁰ The African Charter, by contrast, contains no express privacy guarantee, which is why the continental and regional data-protection instruments rather than the Charter itself carry the analytical weight here.⁶¹ Angola also joined INTERPOL's I-24/7 information-sharing platform under a 2024 cooperation protocol, which connects border and migration systems to international databases with facial-recognition functionality, thus extending the reach of identity data beyond national control without a published domestic legal basis for that integration.⁶²

Finally, the electoral registration law connects identity to the vote. Angola does not operate an independent biometric voter register; the electoral roll is derived from the civil identity database administered by the state, and proposals to replace voter cards with the national ID card would fuse the two more tightly.⁶³ The instrument is the Law on Official Electoral Registration (Lei do Registo Eleitoral Oficioso), Law 8/15, as amended and republished as Law 13/25 of 1 December

2025. Under the amended law, in-person registration is discontinued in favour of automatic registration drawn from the identity database; the executive is obliged to transmit the citizens' electronic file (Ficheiro Informático dos Cidadãos Maiores) to the National Electoral Commission whenever it requests it, rather than on a fixed annual deadline; and the voter card is to be used for the last time in the 2027 elections, after which the Bilhete de Identidade becomes the sole registration credential.⁶⁴ The legal silence on how that fused database is audited, who may access it, and how individuals correct or contest their records is the thread that runs from this chapter to the question of the 2027 elections. This leaves major concerns in play around these systems might be employed to advantage incumbents.

THE POLITICAL ENVIRONMENT

The MPLA has held power since 1975, but its dominance is no longer immutable. In the 2022 elections, the most competitive in Angolan history, it won just 51.17 per cent to UNITA's 43.95 per cent and lost the

60 African Union Convention on Cyber Security and Personal Data Protection (Malabo Convention), adopted 27 June 2014, entered into force 8 June 2023. Angola deposited its instrument of ratification on 11 May 2020: see the AU status list reproduced at <https://dataprotection.africa/malabo-convention-set-to-enter-force/> (accessed 1 August 2026). Also see African Union Convention on Cyber Security and Personal Data Protection. https://au.int/sites/default/files/treaties/29560-treaty-0048_-_african_union_convention_on_cyber_security_and_personal_data_protection_e.pdf accessed on 1 August 2026. Articles 13 and 14 require lawful and purpose-limited processing and impose additional conditions on sensitive data; Article 11 obliges states parties to establish an independent data-protection authority.

61 SADC Model Law on Data Protection (2013) and SADC Protocol on the Facilitation of Movement of Persons (2005). The African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights contains no express guarantee of privacy, which is why the continental and regional data-protection instruments carry the analytical weight in this section.

62 See: Governo de Angola, "Ministro Do Interior Preside Acto De Assinatura Do Protocolo De Cooperação No Domínio Da Partilha Do Sistema De Comunicação Policial Da Interpol". <https://minint.gov.ao/web/noticias/ministro-do-interior-preside-acto-de-assinatura-do-protocolo-de-cooperacao-no-dominio-da-partilha-do-sistema-de-comunicacao-policial-da-interpol>. (accessed on 19 June 2026).

63 See: Africa Press, "Proposals to Amend Official Voter Registration Law". <https://www.africa-press.net/angola/all-news/proposals-to-amend-official-voter-registration-law>

64 Lei do Registo Eleitoral Oficioso, Law 8/15, as amended and republished as Law 13/25 of 1 December 2025. See the National Assembly record at https://parlamento.ao/Slider_30644 and Angola24Hora, "Propostas de Alteração à Lei do Registo Eleitoral Oficioso aprovadas por unanimidade na especialidade", 6 August 2025: <https://www.angola24horas.com/politica/item/32489-propostas-de-alteracao-a-lei-do-registo-eleitoral-oficioso-aprovadas-por-unanimidade-na-especialidade> (both accessed 1 August 2026).

capital, Luanda.⁶⁵ Against that backdrop, the surveillance build-out can translate as a tool of regime security / power retention interests, as much as border national security concerns. Three political dynamics support this point.

Firstly, the issue of presidential succession. President Lourenço, constitutionally barred from running in the 2027 elections having reached his two-term limit, announced on 11 May 2026 his intention to remain MPLA leader at the party's congress slated for December 2026. If he wins at the congress, he will be in a position to influence the selection of his party's candidate for the 2027 elections.⁶⁶ His strategy reportedly includes promoting a younger successor while maintaining control over party structures and political direction.⁶⁷ The precedent, however, cuts both ways. José Eduardo dos Santos retained the MPLA presidency for a year after Lourenço took office as head of state in September 2017, and the dual-power arrangement did not hold. Lourenço moved quickly to replace dos Santos-aligned generals and intelligence chiefs, to restructure the presidency and the security apparatus, and to target the dos Santos family's holdings in Sonangol, telecommunications and banking, framing anti-corruption as a break with the past. Dos Santos stood down as party leader in September 2018.⁶⁸ Control of the party did

not, in the end, secure control of the state, because it did not carry with it command of the coercive institutions, the state budget or the patronage channels that had sustained his authority for decades. There is accordingly no guarantee that the MPLA presidency will deliver Lourenço the influence he appears to be seeking. His strategy reportedly includes promoting a younger successor while maintaining control over party structures and political direction. Whether he has drawn the obvious lesson from his predecessor's fall — that party office is not where power in Angola actually resides — is an open question. If he has, the implication is that his position after 2027 will rest less on the MPLA presidency than on continued influence over the security and intelligence services, the budget and the networks that run through them. That is precisely the terrain on which the surveillance architecture described in this report is being built, and it is one reason why the identity of the institutions holding biometric data matters as much as the technology itself.

The race for the MPLA leadership includes Higino Carneiro, whose candidacy was annulled by the party in July 2026⁶⁹ (see below), Jose Carlos Almeida and Antonio Venancio, all of whom have expressed their intentions to run. Additionally, Irene Neto, daughter of Angola's first president Augustino

65 See: Good Governance Africa, "Angola post-election analysis: at a crossroads, or more of the same?" (2022, September 7). <https://gga.org/angola-post-election-analysis-at-a-crossroads-or-more-of-the-same/>. Also See, "Maka Angola: LOURENÇO LOSES LUANDA". (2022 August 25). <https://www.makaangola.org/2022/08/lourenco-loses-luanda/>

66 Bloomberg. Angolan President Seeks New Ruling Party Term. <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2026-05-11/angolan-president-seeks-new-ruling-party-term-jornal-reports> accessed 1 August 2026

67 Bloomberg. Angolan President Hints At Successor Who Can Do 'Better Than Me'. <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2025-07-23/angolan-president-hints-at-successor-who-can-do-better-than-me> accessed 1 August 2026

68 On the 2017–18 transition, see Associated Press reporting that the MPLA agreed to Lourenço's candidature for the party presidency in September 2018, dos Santos having remained party leader for a year after leaving the state presidency: <https://www.foxnews.com/world/angolas-new-leader-set-to-take-over-as-ruling-party-chief> (accessed 1 August 2026).

69 Ver Angola. "Analysts say that the invalidation of Higino Carneiro's candidacy for the MPLA was expected". <https://www.verangola.net/va/en/072026/Politics/49560/Analysts-say-that-the-invalidation-of-Higino-Carneiro's-candidacy-for-the-MPLA-was-expected.htm> accessed on 1 August 2026

Neto has not ruled out a potential candidacy according to reports in the Angolan media.⁷⁰ Were she to stand, Irene Neto would be the first woman to contest the presidency of the MPLA.

The contest has been accompanied by the apparent weaponisation of the law and justice system against some of the aspiring candidates. For instance, criminal cases against Carneiro were reactivated by the Attorney-General's Office in December 2025, days after Lourenço's announcement of his intention to seek re-election for the MPLA leadership.⁷¹ The cases relate to alleged irregularities during his time in public office. In Case 46/19, Higino Carneiro is accused of embezzlement involving the alleged misuse of public funds during his tenure as governor of Cuando Cubango (2012 - 2016). In Case 48/20, he faces charges of

aggravated fraud related to the management of more than 60 vehicles during his time as governor of Luanda. Both cases centre on the management of public assets and funds.

On 31 March 2026, the Attorney General's Office reportedly announced that one of the cases had been dropped after the company RCMJ-Investimentos withdrew its complaint, citing insufficient evidence.⁷² As a result, Higino Carneiro ceased to be a defendant in that particular case. Higino Carneiro was once again summoned to the Attorney General's Office (PGR) on 13 May 2026 to provide statements in a case related to the procurement of vehicles during his tenure as Governor of Luanda in 2017.⁷³

The state's intensive money laundering and embezzlement investigation has been described by some analysts as a "calculated

70 Plataforma, "Angola: Joao Lourenco announces bid for re-election as MPLA President". (2026, May 11). <https://www.plataformamedia.com/en/2026/05/11/angola-joao-lourenco-announces-bid-for-re-election-as-mpla-president/>

71 Ipotnews: "Angola opens graft case into would-be ruling party leader". (2026, June 24). https://www.indopremier.com/ipotnews/newsDetail.php?jdl=Angola_opens_graft_case_into_would_be_ruling_party_leader&news_id=1734287&group_news=ALLNEWS&taging_subtype=PORTUGAL&name=&search=y_general&q=PORTUGAL,%20&halaman=1 accessed on 22 July 2026

72 Novo Jornal. "Higino Carneiro cleared of fraud charges involving vehicles while he was governor of Luanda-RCMJ-Investimentos Company withdraws the complaint". <https://novojornal.co.ao/sociedade/detalhe/higino-carneiro-livre-do-processo-de-burla-com-viaturas-enquanto-governador-de-luanda---empresa-rcmj-investimentos-retirou-a-queixa-70808.html> accessed on 22 July 2026

73 Novo Jornal. "Higino Carneiro accuses an 'invisible hand' of reviving dead process to harm his candidacy for the leadership of the MPLA". <https://novojornal.co.ao/politica/detalhe/higino-carneiro-acusa-mao-invisivel-de-ter-feito-renascer-um-processo-que-ja-estava-morto-para-lhe-prejudicar-a-candidatura-a-lideranca-do-mpla-7-1780.html> accessed on 22 July 2026

proxy war aimed at settling a brewing leadership dispute”.⁷⁴ Carneiro himself subsequently alleged there was an “invisible hand” manipulating proceedings to block his candidacy.⁷⁵ As indicated above, Carneiro’s candidacy was annulled by the MPLA in July 2026. Media reports indicate that he will challenge the decision to reject his candidacy.⁷⁶

Interior Minister Manuel Homem, the figure driving biometric procurement, has been touted as a younger successor in line with President Lourenço’s stated preference for younger leaders.⁷⁷ Homem has also come

under scrutiny amid reports that he is under investigation by the state administration inspectorate (IGAE) over the alleged misuse of funds at the SME.

The second important contextual aspect is the role of the intelligence services. SINSE, headed by Fernando Garcia Miala, is widely reported to direct security operations from behind the scenes without a clear legal mandate, and its influence reaches into the bodies that hold identity data. Within Angola’s paramilitary structures such as the SME, SIC, and even the Office of the Attorney General (PGR), there are elements of the

74 Channel Africa. “ANGOLA RULING PARTY SPLITS OVER HIGH-STAKES LEADERSHIP DISPUTE”. (2026, June 25). <https://www.channelafrica.co.za/channelafrica/news/angola-ruling-party-splits-over-high-stakes-leadership-dispute/> accessed on 1 August 2026. Carneiro’s exclusion makes Angola’s succession more problematic. The invalidation of his candidacy for the MPLA presidency effectively guarantees João Lourenço’s victory at the upcoming December party congress. However, this engineered consensus fails to resolve the looming question of who will lead Angola post-2027. The broader significance of Carneiro’s exclusion extends far beyond his individual political prospects. His candidacy presented a rare opportunity for the MPLA to showcase an evolution in its internal democratic processes after nearly fifty years of uninterrupted rule. Instead, by dismissing his challenge, the party has regressed to its entrenched habit of equating internal leadership contests with disloyalty. President Lourenço does not need to pursue an unconstitutional third presidential term to maintain his grip on the state. By securing his ongoing role as MPLA president, he positions himself to handpick the party’s 2027 national candidate, thereby preserving his political authority from behind the scenes. While sidelining Carneiro solidifies Lourenço’s immediate control over the succession process, it plunges the Angolan electorate into deep uncertainty regarding the nation’s future leadership. This exclusionary strategy carries escalating risks for the ruling party. While the MPLA’s political machinery remains formidable in rural strongholds where opposition groups encounter persistent structural barriers to organizing, its traditional electoral base is aging. In stark contrast, Angola’s demographic reality is defined by an overwhelmingly young, urbanised, digitally connected, and increasingly impatient population. The opposition party UNITA’s robust performance in Luanda during the 2022 elections laid bare the magnitude of this societal shift. High unemployment and stagnant living standards offer these younger voters little incentive to uphold the political status quo. Ultimately, the MPLA can easily manipulate access to its own party congress, but it cannot contain the broader societal transformations currently underway in Angola. The proliferation of social media has steadily eroded the party’s historical dominance over the flow of information. A competitive, transparent internal leadership contest could have served as a vital adaptive mechanism for the MPLA ahead of the 2027 elections. By stifling internal debate, the party is inadvertently forcing political competition outside of its institutional framework, creating an environment that will be significantly harder to manage and far more prone to disruption.

75 Reporting in Novo Jornal and other Angolan outlets, 2025–2026. The Attorney-General’s Office (PGR) reports to the President of the Republic, a point frequently raised in debates over institutional independence.

76 Ver Angola. “Higino Carneiro will appeal the annulment of his candidacy for the presidency of the MPLA”. <https://www.verangola.net/va/en/072026/Politics/49566/Higino-Carneiro-will-appeal-the-annulment-of-his-candidacy-for-the-presidency-of-the-MPLA.htm> accessed on 1 August 2026

77 Diário dos Negócios, “Manuel Homem ganha protagonismo e surge como potencial sucessor de João Lourenço”. (2026, March 17). <https://diariodosnegocios.com/manuel-homem-ganha-protagonismo-e-surge-como-potencial-sucessor-de-joao-lourenco/>

SINSE operating on secondment.⁷⁸ Whenever the SIC carries out an operation, the authorities often issue a joint communiqué involving the SIC, SINSE, and PGR. Viewed from this perspective, SINSE is the body that commands, from behind the scenes, almost all defence and security forces, despite lacking any legal mandate.⁷⁹ As one specialist on Angola's security architecture put it to Intelwatch, SINSE is better understood as a regime-preserving institution than as an autonomous one. It strengthens whoever controls the presidency rather than dictating political outcomes of its own. It can shape, warn, discipline and protect, but it does not control or dictate.⁸⁰ This means that the danger in an unsupervised SINSE's access to biometric data is not that an intelligence agency will operate as a rogue power centre, but that the presidency will acquire through it a capacity for population-level visibility that no court, regulator or parliamentary body is positioned to check.

José Coimbra Baptista Junior, the current Director-General of the SME, had previously served as Deputy Director-General of SINSE, reinforcing perceptions of direct influence.⁸¹ The 2022 withholding of UNITA

leader Adalberto Costa Júnior's passport by the SME and the subsequent leaking of his personal identity and travel details⁸², which he attributed to political control by the intelligence services, suggests that identity document systems have already been weaponised against an opposition figure, a weaponisation that could be repeated with greater effect under a more sophisticated biometric regime.

The third and also significant aspect is the management of dissent. The July 2025 protests, sparked by a 33 per cent diesel price rise, left at least 22 dead, around 200 injured and more than 1,200 arrested. The MPLA branded the unrest "unpatriotic".⁸³ The subsequent detention of two Russians and several Angolans on terrorism-financing charges- whose trial opened in March 2026- anchored a "foreign interference" narrative that some journalists and observers, including the journalist Rafael Marques de Morais, argue is being used to legitimise repression and a controlled succession.⁸⁴ Those proceedings have since concluded with the two Russian nationals being convicted and sentenced to eight and eleven years' imprisonment respectively.⁸⁵ The verdicts

78 Minint. "Coordination of Work: Joint Offices Responsible for SIC and SINSE in the Fight Against Crime". <https://minint.gov.ao/web/noticias/coordena%C3%A7%C3%A3o-de-trabalho-junta-respons%C3%A1veis-do-sic-e-sinse-para-o-combate-a-criminalidade> accessed on 22 July 2026

79 Interviews with SINSE officials. January 2026

80 Interview with a specialist on Angola's security architecture, 2026 (identity withheld).

81 Club-k. "Baptista Júnior appointed Deputy Director-General of SINSE". (2014, October 9). <https://www.club-k.net/index.php/bastidores/19188-baptista-junior-nomeado-dg-adjunto-do-sinse> accessed on 22 July 2026

82 VOA. "UNITA urges the Attorney General's Office to investigate and hold accountable those who leaked its president's travel documents." (translated to English from Portuguese). (2022, June 21). <https://www.voaportugues.com/a/unita-insta-pgr-a-investigar-e-responsabilizar-quem-divulgou-documentos-e-viagem-do-seu-presidente/6626079.html> accessed on 22 July 2026

83 Al Jazeera. "At least 22 killed at Angola fuel price hike protests, authorities say". (2025, July 30). <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2025/7/30/at-least-22-killed-at-angola-fuel-price-hike-protests-authorities-say> accessed on 22 July 2026.

84 According to a 24 March 2026 BBC report, "Many Angolan journalists and activists strongly contest the idea that the protests weren't organic and say Angolan authorities might be using the Russians as scapegoats." See. BBC. "Inside the alleged Russian operation to trigger anti-government protests in Angola". <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/c1mk1zkz4ljo> accessed on 22 July 2026. Also see, Rafael Marques de Morais: "A Spy Network That Exists Only on Paper", article in Maka Angola. <https://www.makaangola.org/en/author/rafael-morais/page/2/?tztc=1> accessed on 22 July 2026.

85 Defence24, "Russian influence operation exposed in Angola", 26 July 2026: <https://defence24.com/geopolitics/russian-influence-operation-exposed-in-angola> (accessed 1 August 2026).

settle the legal question without settling the political one. The evidentiary basis of the “foreign interference” account remains contested by Angolan journalists and independent analysts, and the convictions have, if anything, entrenched the narrative on which further securitisation is being justified. The continued, widely contested detention of activist Osvaldo Caholo, whose charges the jurist Rui Verde has questioned, and the unresolved 2021 Cafunfo shootings in Lunda Norte, illustrate a pattern: force and prosecution deployed against political expression, with little transparent accountability. Surveillance infrastructure employed in this environment would raise legitimate concerns about weaponised political agendas and the paucity of oversight, and appropriate checks and balances to prevent misuse.

THE BIOMETRIC PROJECTS

The vendor landscape

Angola’s identity and surveillance stack is built almost entirely by foreign suppliers, switched repeatedly as ministers change. The UK-linked firm Brithol Michcoma International has managed SME documentation systems for roughly two decades, including passport production and the facial and iris-recognition systems at Luanda’s new airport. It is now being displaced.⁸⁶ The Belgian company Semlex has supplied passport and digital-identity infrastructure since 2008⁸⁷; the UK

company HID CID-Limited⁸⁸ was awarded a US\$6.04 million equipment contract under Presidential Order 26/22 of January 2022, alongside a passport-booklet order to Brithol Michcoma Angola.

Hungary’s ANY Security Printing holds the €130 million passport contract⁸⁹; China’s Huawei supplies perimeter and “Safe City” systems; and the US\$112 million integrated biometric contract went to the Angolan firm Dolinveste Lda (legally registered, per the *Diário da República*, as Dolliveste, Limitada) in consortium with Poland’s T4B.⁹⁰

The procurement is opaque. The Dolinveste–T4B award was reportedly a direct contract justified as a strategic national-security initiative rather than a competitive tender. Highly placed government sources links the serial vendor changes (Israeli firms under dos Santos, Huawei under one minister, T4B under the next) to personal and political benefit rather than to capability or continuity.⁹¹

Despite multimillion-dollar contracts- over US\$112 million for biometric expansion and €130 million for electronic passports- a key finding of this research is that there is currently no biometric system in place at Angola’s border posts with the DRC. This absence contrasts sharply with announced investments and the official narrative of national security modernisation. However, it is important to note one exception: the Santa Clara border post in Cunene, inaugurated in

86 Club-K, “Ministro em braço de ferro com empresa britânica”, <https://club-k.net/> (accessed 15 June 2026).

87 See: Digital Angola, “Semlex Group Angola — Biometric Identity & ePassport Infrastructure”. <https://digitalangola.com/entities/semlex-angola/>. (Accessed on 21 June 2026)

88 According to the UK government website, the company which was known as HID CID-Limited from 29 April 2020 to 6 February 2025 has changed its name to TOPPAN SECURITY LIMITED. See: <https://find-and-update.company-information.service.gov.uk/company/12027509> (Accessed on 21 June 2026)

89 <https://www.any.hu/en/any-contracts-with-angola-to-supply-a-biometric-passport-issuing-system/> accessed on 16 October 2025

90 See Angop, “National borders to have biometric control system”. (2025, February 26). <https://www.angop.ao/en/noticias/politica/fronteiras-nacionais-va-ter-sistema-de-controlo-biometrico/>. Also see T4B, “T4B to enhance border security in Angola”. (2025, February 26). <https://t4b.com.pl/en/news/company-news/t4b-to-enhance-border-security-in-angola>. On the name discrepancy: the company is variously rendered Dolinveste, Dollivest and Dolliveste; the official registry form is Dolliveste, Limitada. This report uses “Dolinveste” for consistency with the Ministry of the Interior and project documentation.

91 Interviews with some highly placed government officials. January 2026.

2024, where a functional biometric system has been installed, albeit in isolation and without continuity across other border points.

The deficiency is not only one of coverage but of interoperability. What exists is a set of parallel installations that do not communicate with one another. The Santa Clara system connects to the SME database in Luanda but not to the CISP camera networks, nor to the systems operated by the Presidential Military House in the Lundas.⁹² The Huawei installations in Zaire and Cabinda feed command centres rather than migration records. Consular posts remain dependent on Brithol's platform while the passport programme is said to have moved to a different vendor.⁹³ The paper border passes that are used along the DRC frontier are connected to nothing at all. No integration specification has been published, and the vendor changes of 2024 and 2025 severed rather than extended such links as did exist — the resulting inability to issue passports for minors being the clearest illustration. Fragmentation of this kind is not merely inefficient: it multiplies the number of separately governed copies of the same sensitive data, and it makes the retention, access and deletion rules, already unpublished, impossible to audit even in principle.

Santa Clara: the lone functioning system

As noted above, a key finding of this research is that the Santa Clara border, opposite Namibia's Oshikango, is Angola's only operational biometric post, handling roughly 1,000–1,300 crossings a day.⁹⁴

The biometric border control system introduced at Santa Clara in June 2024 became the pilot site equipped with a biometric system fully integrated into the SME, with real-time connectivity to the central database in Luanda, marking a tangible step towards modernising national migration control. The deployment of biometric kits with single-print technology introduced mobile identification capability, enabling faster identity verification and reducing the risks of irregular entry or document fraud. At the same time, the new Dr António Agostinho Neto International Airport began operating with biometric systems linked to the SME headquarters, representing visible progress through enhanced automation, centralised migration data, and improved passenger traceability. Equally significant, Angolan consulates remain connected to the SME's central system with technical support provided by Brithol, underscoring the existence of an integrated infrastructure for document and migration management at both national and international levels.

Although the modernisation of SME systems began under former Interior Minister Eugénio César Laborinho (2019 - 2024), progress has since stalled, a development attributed by sources to ministerial changes and the desire by the new minister to have his preferred companies take over the implementation of the projects.⁹⁵ Biometric gates at the airport remain inactive, and similar issues affect consular services, which continue to rely on Brithol's technical support.

Despite maintaining uninterrupted assistance for over a year and a half, some SME sources told Intelwatch that Brithol has not been paid for services rendered.⁹⁶ According to the sources, the company's continued

92 Field interviews, Santa Clara border post, Cunene Province, November 2025; SME personnel (identities withheld).

93 Interviews with government officials (names withheld). November 2025.

94 Field interviews, Santa Clara border post, Ibid.

95 Interviews with government officials (names withheld). November 2025. Also see, Club-K. "Minister in a power struggle with British company." (translated to English from Portuguese). https://club-k.net/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=57886:ministro-em-braco-de-ferro-com-empresa-britanica&catid=8&lang=pt&Itemid=1071 accessed on 22 July 2026

96 Interviews with SME officials (names withheld). November 2025.

involvement has been driven largely by institutional commitment, though it is now reaching operational exhaustion. The partial replacement of Brithol in infrastructure projects, combined with its exclusion from the electronic passport process, has created operational challenges, including difficulties in issuing passports for minors.⁹⁷ This situation underscores broader concerns about policy continuity, institutional coordination and the sustainability of Angola's migration and border management systems.

The questions that matter for rights are unanswered: under what legal authority the data is held, how long it is retained, who beyond the SME may access it, what is shared with Namibia, and what becomes of the data of those refused entry. That a flagship pilot cannot sustain its full biometric function is the clearest available indicator of the state's capacity to run a US\$112 million national system.

The DRC border (Lundas): paper, defunct cameras

Across the DRC frontier the contrast is stark. At Chissanda, Fortuna, Nachiri, Chilunge and Cassai-Sul there is no biometric control. In the absence of digital systems, migration control at border posts in Lunda Norte and Lunda Sul relies on a bilateral agreement between Angola and the DRC. On the Angolan side, a "Border Pass" is issued, valid for seven days and renewable. On the DRC side, an "Individually Issued Laissez-Passer" is provided. These documents are in basic paper format, verified manually without any biometric component, with no connection to national databases. There are no publicly available

uniform or transparent criteria; decisions often rest with the discretion of border officials, meaning that travellers may be refused entry at the whim of migration officers.⁹⁸

Most posts lack electricity, connectivity and permanent infrastructure. Notably, Chissanda is the only border post in the eastern region with a mobile network antenna- all other border posts in the area lack such infrastructure. This is significant as it suggests that digital biometric systems, which require connectivity to function, are essentially inoperable at most DRC border posts due to infrastructure gaps.

Two other factors deserve emphasis. First, the only surveillance legacy here is the abandoned Israeli-era video cabin described earlier. It is inoperative and its data is unaccounted for. Second, surveillance in the diamond Lundas is run not by the SME or ordinary police but by the elite "Chacais" unit of the Presidential Military House, deployed to protect resource interests and operate sensitive systems.⁹⁹ That places border monitoring in this region under presidential rather than ministerial control, outside the standard accountability framework, with surveillance data centralised in the presidential apparatus and no evidence of civilian or parliamentary oversight. The unit's opacity is illustrated by the 2021 "Lussati case", in which a Presidential Guard officer, Major Pedro Lussati, was convicted over a ghost-soldier payroll fraud- a scandal that exposed how little external scrutiny these structures attract.¹⁰⁰ In the same provinces civil society groups have long documented violence and displacement around diamond mining by state and private security -the human backdrop against which resource-linked surveillance operates.¹⁰¹

97 Interviews with government officials (names withheld). January 2026

98 Field research, Lunda Norte and Lunda Sul, 10–14 November 2025.

99 Field interviews, Lunda Norte, November 2025.

100 See CM Jornal, "Julgamento do major Lussati começa em Luanda, em megaprocesso com 49 réus e 200 testemunhas". <https://www.cmjornal.pt/mundo/detalhe/julgamento-do-major-lussati-comeca-em-luanda-em-megaprocesso-com-49-reus-e-200-testemunhas> (accessed on 22 June 2026).

101 Correio da Manhã, "POPULARES DAS LUNDAS CONTAM ABUSOS NA EXPLORAÇÃO DIAMANTÍFERA ANGOLANA". <https://www.correiodamanhacanada.com/populares-das-lundas-contam-abusos-na-exploracao-diamantifera-angolana/>. (accessed on 22 June 2026). Also see US Department of State, "2024 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: Angola". <https://www.state.gov/reports/2024-country-reports-on-human-rights-practices/angola/> (accessed on 22 June 2026).

Zaire and Cabinda: Chinese cameras and a militarised enclave

Where digital surveillance does function on the DRC frontier, it is Chinese manufactured and non-biometric. In Zaire Province a Huawei “cross-border crime monitoring” system was inaugurated in 2025, the fourth such installation in the province. The system comprises a 16-metre tower with a 30 km electro-optical camera linked to command centres in Luanda.¹⁰² It sits within Huawei’s “Safe City” framework, which embeds facial and licence-plate-recognition capability.¹⁰³ There is no public confirmation those features are active in Zaire, but they are present in the platform and can be enabled at the authorities’ discretion- a latent capacity that is itself a governance risk.

In December 2025 a 190-camera system was opened in Cabinda, and border posts there have been fitted with 30 km cameras. Cabinda is not a routine border: it is an oil-rich enclave with a long history of separatist activity by the Front for the Liberation of the Enclave of Cabinda (FLEC) and one of the most militarised regions in the country.¹⁰⁴ The choice to concentrate dense camera surveillance there raises an unavoidable question the official “migration management” framing does not answer: whether the system targets a domestic political movement as much as cross-border crime.

THE DATA HUB AND THE EDGE LAYER

What ties these systems together is the issue of centralisation as a design intention

rather than as an achieved condition. On the fragmentation of what is actually deployed, and on what that fragmentation does to data governance, see the discussion of interoperability above. The new national data centre at Camama, near Luanda, operated by INFOSI under the Ministry of Telecommunications with the SME and CISP, is designed to host citizen-identification and migration data locally and integrate it across the national fibre network.¹⁰⁵ The Dolinveste-T4B system is explicitly intended to make existing tools (e-passports, visa platforms) interoperable into a unified database for citizen identification and migration control. At the end of 2025, the Angolan government was in negotiations with the United Arab Emirates (UAE) company, EDGE Group which would result in the addition of an artificial intelligence (AI)-driven command-and-control and unmanned-systems layer on top.¹⁰⁶ Individually, each procurement by the Angolan state can be defended as border modernisation. Assembled, they describe a single, centrally held, foreign-built identity and surveillance infrastructure- which is precisely why the absence of oversight so much.

SURVEILLANCE ARCHITECTURE AND ITS IMPLICATIONS FOR THE 2027 ELECTIONS

The systems described above are not isolated projects but tiers of one architecture.

Land-border biometrics are complemented by an expansive maritime surveillance network-centred on the modernised Soyo naval base, patrol vessels, and

102 Africa Press, “Surveillance system for border area with DRC inaugurated in Luvo” <https://www.africa-press.net/angola/all-news/surveillance-system-for-border-area-with-drc-inaugurated-in-luvo> (accessed 22 June 2026).

103 On Huawei Safe City and its African footprint: SOG-LUISS, “The Chinese Supply of Surveillance Technology to Africa” <https://sog.luiss.it/sites/sog.luiss.it/files/passalacqua%202.pdf> (accessed 22 June 2026).

104 Angop, “Postos fronteiriços de Cabinda equipados com câmaras de vigilância” <https://www.angop.ao/noticias/politica/postos-fronteiricos-de-cabinda-equipados-com-camaras-de-vigilancia/> (accessed 22 June 2026).

105 O País, “Principal centro de dados do Executivo começa a operar em Fevereiro de 2026” <https://www.opais.ao/economia/principal-centro-de-dados-do-executivo-comeca-a-operar-em-fevereiro-de-2026/> (accessed 22 June 2026).

106 Military Africa, 9 November 2025: “Angola and EDGE Group Near Border Security Deal” <https://www.military.africa/2025/11/angola-and-edge-group-near-border-security-deal/> (accessed 22 June 2026).

aircraft-ostensibly designed to counter terrorism and organised crime¹⁰⁷. Internally, this architecture relies on urban camera networks operated by the CISP, alongside the Special Security Corps for Strategic Minerals (CESME), established in 2018 to police diamonds and other high-value assets. Ultimately, these overlapping domains (sea, land, city, and mine) constitute a layered apparatus that could be used more for securing the prevailing political-economic order rather than only for traditional territorial defence.

The electoral danger flows from the data layer, not as much from the cameras. Because Angola's voter roll is derived from the civil identity database rather than from an independent biometric register run by the National Electoral Commission (CNE), any centralisation of the national identity system has direct electoral consequences. Proposals to replace voter cards with the national ID card would complete that convergence, making the same database that feeds border control and is reachable by intelligence services the source of the electorate itself.

The integrity record of that database is poor. The electoral register has never been subjected to an independent, comprehensive technical audit; UNITA and other opposition parties demanded such audits across the 2012, 2017 and 2022 cycles and were refused, and UNITA alleged that more than 2.5 million deceased people remained on the 2022 rolls.¹⁰⁸ Allegations that individuals linked to the Presidential Military House are embedded within the CNE (which the Commission denies) deepen opposition mistrust of who controls electoral data and systems.¹⁰⁹

Three risks present themselves with respect to the 2027 elections:

The first is targeting. As evidenced by the SME withholding Costa Júnior's passport in 2022, the state does not need a fully operational biometric infrastructure to exercise control. When combined with unsupervised intelligence (SINSE) access and centralised control over civil credentials, even a partial database provides a potent mechanism for surveilling and suppressing political opponents.

The second is exclusion: with roughly 40 per cent of citizens undocumented, an identity-anchored voting system risks disenfranchising the poor, the diaspora and border communities unless a credible civil-registration drive precedes it.

The third is chilling: the visible expansion of surveillance, coupled with a counter-terrorism narrative that criminalises protest, can suppress participation before a single vote is monitored.

The decisive point is that the threat to the 2027 elections does not require the biometric system to work. It (the threat) is embedded in the political control of an unaudited identity database, the legal vacuum around intelligence access, and the climate of fear the architecture projects. International standards for digitally enabled voter registration (including transparency, independent audit, data protection, non-discrimination and an independent electoral body) are the measure against which Angola falls short, and the standard to which the recommendations below hold it.

107 See African Security Analysis, "Angola Strengthens Maritime Domain Awareness". <https://www.africansecurityanalysis.org/reports/angola-strengthens-maritime-domain-awareness>. (accessed 22 June 2026). Also see: Defence Web, "Angola receives first tank landing craft from CMN; inaugurates refurbished Soyo naval base". <https://defenceweb.co.za/featured/angola-receives-first-tank-landing-craft-from-cmn-inaugurates-refurbished-soyo-naval-base/> (accessed 22 June 2026).

108 VOA Português, "Há mais de 2,5 milhões de mortos nas listas eleitorais de Angola, diz UNITA" <https://www.voaportugues.com/a/h%C3%A1-mais-de-2-5-milh%C3%B5es-de-mortos-nas-listas-eleitorais-de-angola-diz-unita/6620404.html>. (accessed 22 June 2026).

109 RTP Notícias. https://www.rtp.pt/noticias/mundo/unita-diz-que-se-presidente-de-angola-intervier-as-eleicoes-serao-transparentes_n1399341 (accessed 22 June 2026).

COMPARATIVE PERSPECTIVES

Angola's trajectory is not unique, and comparative experience clarifies both the risks and the available remedies. While India's Aadhaar- the world's most extensive biometric architecture- has been credited with expanding access to services streamlined access to state welfare, it remains highly contested for systematically excluding marginalised populations and enabling pervasive mission creep, as citizen data is repurposed far beyond its foundational mandate.

In the 2017 Puttaswamy judgment India's Supreme Court affirmed privacy as a fundamental right while upholding Aadhaar for limited welfare uses. It established that biometric systems must be tested against constitutional privacy guarantees.¹¹⁰

Kenya offers the most directly useful precedent from the African continent. Its Huduma Namba biometric identity scheme was halted by the High Court over inadequate data-protection safeguards and the absence of an adequate legal framework. The judgement demonstrated that an African court could stop a large biometric programme that proceeds without rights protections.¹¹¹ Kenya's subsequent course is equally instructive. The Huduma Namba enrolment ultimately failed, at considerable public cost, and was replaced by the Maisha Namba, a redesign framed explicitly as a response to the earlier scheme's legal and data-protection shortcomings.¹¹² The lesson for Angola is twofold: a biometric identity programme built without a lawful basis and without public confidence is not only a rights hazard, it is also liable to fail on its own administrative terms. Zimbabwe shows

the opposite path: biometric voter registration and identity systems deployed within a surveillance-heavy environment that human-rights groups link to exclusion and political monitoring.¹¹³

The European Union's General Data Protection Regulation matters in this report here for a specific reason: it classifies biometric data as a special category requiring explicit consent, purpose limitation, data minimisation and impact assessments.¹¹⁴ Although not directly applicable in Angola, these standards serve as an important reference framework for European technology providers- ANY of Hungary, Semlex of Belgium, T4B of Poland- operating in biometric and digital identity systems globally. The lesson across these cases is consistent: biometric systems are neither inherently benign nor inherently abusive; their character is decided by the strength of the legal safeguards, the independence of oversight and the integrity of the institutions that hold the data. On each of those measures Angola is, at present, unprotected. However, the Kenyan and Indian precedents show that courts and civil society can still set limits.

110 Supreme Court of India, Justice K.S. Puttaswamy v Union of India (2017) <https://indiankanoon.org/doc/127517806/> (accessed on 22 June 2026); Amnesty International, "India: Aadhaar judgment and privacy", 2018.

111 Privacy International. "Kenyan Court Ruling on Huduma Namba Identity System: the Good, the Bad and the Lessons" <https://privacyinternational.org/long-read/3373/kenyan-court-ruling-huduma-namba-identity-system-good-bad-and-lessons> (Accessed on 22 June 2026).

112 DPI Africa, "Digital Public Infrastructure in Kenya: The Impact of M-Pesa and Huduma Namba", October 2024: <https://dpi.africa.com/digital-public-infrastructure-in-kenya-the-impact-of-m-pesa-and-huduma-namba/> (accessed 1 August 2026).

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RECOMMENDATIONS

The following recommendations are addressed to the actors whose conduct shapes the rights consequences of Angola's biometric expansion. They are framed from an oversight and accountability perspective, not as security policy prescriptions.

TO THE GOVERNMENT AND PRESIDENCY

- Place a moratorium on the national biometric rollout and on migrating voter cards to the national ID card until an independent legal and data-protection framework, with judicial oversight of intelligence access, is in force.
- Publish the Dolinveste-T4B, ANY, Huawei and any EDGE contracts, including data-governance, retention, access and decommissioning terms, and subject future awards to open, competitive tender.
- Remove surveillance functions in the Lundas from the Presidential Military House and place all border surveillance under accountable civilian and parliamentary oversight.

TO THE MINISTRY OF THE INTERIOR AND THE SME

- Publish data protection impact assessments for every biometric border system, specifying legal authority, retention periods, access rules, cross-border sharing (including with Namibia and INTERPOL) and the treatment of data from those refused entry or holding refugee status.
- Establish a clear data-migration and decommissioning protocol so that identity data is protected when vendors change. This will also plug the gap that currently leaves SME data hostage to contractual disputes.
- Prioritise a transparent civil registration drive for the undocumented before any identity-anchored voter system, to prevent disenfranchisement.

TO THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY

- Enact a statutory framework governing intelligence access to identity, biometric

and mobility data, requiring prior judicial authorisation and an independent review body, and revisit the citizen cooperation provisions of the National Security Law (Law 15/24).

- Mandate parliamentary scrutiny of surveillance procurement and require annual public reporting by the APD on complaints, investigations and sanctions.

TO THE DATA-PROTECTION AUTHORITY (APD) AND THE JUDICIARY

- Use existing powers under Law 22/11 to investigate state data controller including the SME and intelligence bodies and report publicly. The APD's credibility depends on demonstrating that the law binds the state.
- Courts should test biometric and electoral data systems against the constitutional right to privacy, drawing on the Kenyan Huduma Namba and Indian Puttaswamy precedents.

TO THE CNE AND ELECTORAL STAKEHOLDERS

- Commission an independent, comprehensive technical audit of the electoral register before 2027, with opposition and civil society observation, and publish the methodology and results.
- Guarantee that no body linked to the Presidential Military House has operational access to electoral systems or data.

TO SADC, THE AFRICAN UNION AND INTERPOL

- Develop a rights-based, harmonised standard for biometric border systems consistent with the SADC Free Movement Protocol and the Malabo Convention, so

that regional interoperability does not become a shared surveillance footprint.

- Condition data sharing (including via I-24/7) on demonstrable domestic data protection safeguards and oversight.

TO INTERNATIONAL PARTNERS, DONORS AND VENDORS

- Hungary's EXIM Bank and the European vendors (ANY, Semlex, T4B) should apply, and publicly report against, their home jurisdiction data protection standards to their Angolan deployments, and condition financing on transparency and oversight.
- Donor and partner states engaging Angola

on security cooperation should make support conditional on civilian oversight and rights safeguards. They should also fund civil-society monitoring.

TO CIVIL SOCIETY, MEDIA AND ACADEMICS

- Sustain documentation of surveillance contracts, deployments and abuses, and pursue strategic litigation testing biometric systems against constitutional and regional rights standards.
- Build public understanding, including in the diaspora and border communities, of how identity, border and electoral data converge.

CONCLUSION

Angola's biometric border programme is defined by a stark contradiction between official rhetoric and operational reality. While the government touts a modern, interconnected apparatus designed to secure the nation's frontiers, the infrastructure on the ground is characterised by fragmentation, rather than a biometric system with an integrated national capability.

It currently amounts to a single degraded pilot programme at Santa Clara, defunct cameras and reliance on paper passes along the DRC border, inactive gates at the new international airport, and an electronic passport scheme still in its infancy. Despite more than US\$250 million in committed contracts, the state's security rationale remains entirely unproven and physically inoperable across most of the territory.

However, this operational failure should not be mistaken for benign incompetence; rather, it is the core warning. The enduring legacy of these projects is not functional border control, but the quiet consolidation of a centralised, foreign-built identity infrastructure. This architecture extracts data directly from the civil registry, the foundation of the electoral roll. It remains fully accessible to intelligence services operating without meaningful legal constraint. Procured opaquely during a contested political succession, it arms a state with a documented history of weaponising its security apparatus against domestic dissent. The threat to civil liberties and the integrity of the 2027 elections does not require the border technology to function as advertised. The true danger lies in the latent capabilities

currently being embedded: an unaudited national identity database, a legal vacuum surrounding surveillance, and a political climate where counter-terrorism rhetoric is routinely deployed to criminalise protest.

Yet there is still room to act. The trajectory toward digital authoritarianism is not linear, nor is it inevitable. Angolan journalists and civil society organisations continue to rigorously document and challenge these encroachments. Furthermore, courts in other jurisdictions have established legal precedents for halting biometric expansions where constitutional safeguards are absent, and Angola's own Constitutional Court has shown a willingness to enforce procedural boundaries. Whether this emerging architecture serves as an instrument of accountable governance or a mechanism for state control will not be decided by foreign vendors or government ministries. It will be determined by the resilience of the rule of law, the establishment of independent oversight, and sustained public vigilance. The critical window to secure these democratic safeguards is closing. Action must be taken before the 2027 elections, not in their aftermath.