

DRC

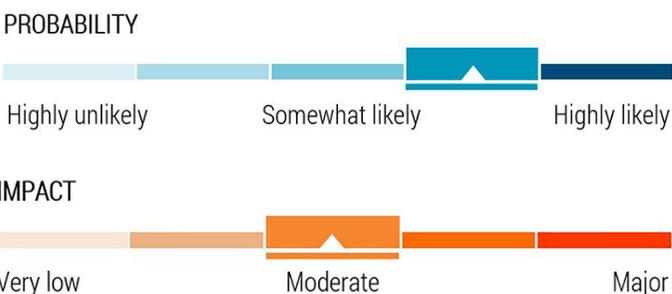
Political violence in urban centres

Outlook for June to December 2018

Frequent and recurrent protests across the country in recent years indicate an already high level of political tension that is likely to grow in the lead up to presidential elections on 23 December.

Since the beginning of 2015, over 700 protests across the country resulted in hundreds of civilian casualties, and the likelihood of further political violence is high.

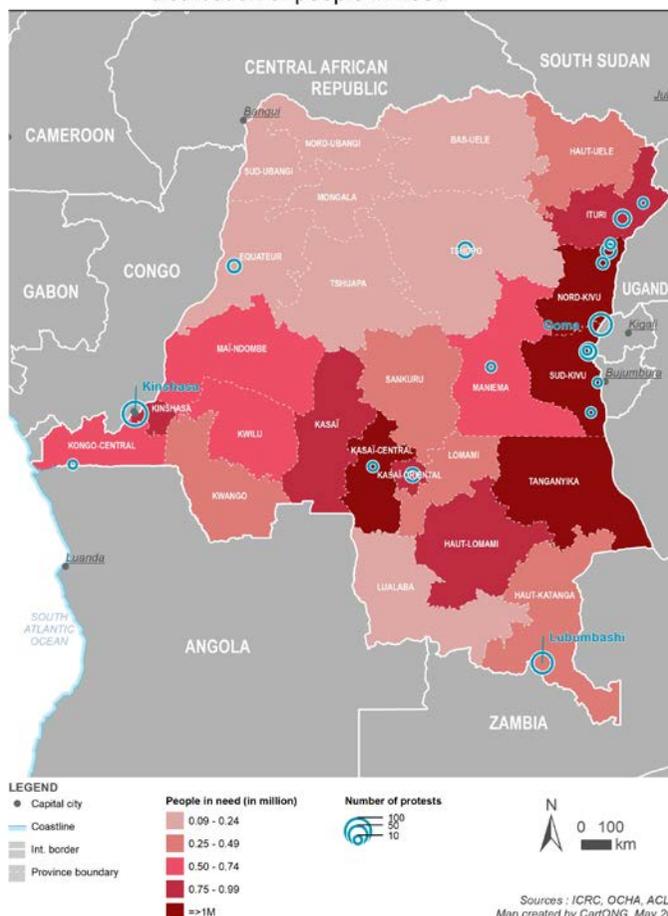
In addition to direct human rights and humanitarian protection concerns arising from violent responses to protests, increasing insecurity is also likely to drive health and livelihoods needs for urban populations, complicate access to services and constrain humanitarian efforts.



Limitations

Further disruption across the country beyond urban centres is expected, including in rural areas, but analysis of the broader humanitarian consequences across DRC is beyond the scope of this report.

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Predicted developments

As the electoral process moves forward towards elections at the end of the year **political tensions are likely to grow**.

The expected **publication of electoral lists** and decisions on the **use of voting machines** are likely to trigger further protests in urban centres across the country.

Civilian populations in the most affected cities will likely feel **direct humanitarian and human rights impacts** related to the political violence, while broader indirect humanitarian consequences across the country are also expected.

Key sectors impacted



Violence and insecurity
impact protection and livelihoods



Casualties
strain health services



Access to services
disrupted

Humanitarian constraints

Humanitarian access to several parts of the country is restricted due to security and physical constraints. Aid workers are regularly targeted by violence. The rainy season from October is likely to further constrain access to affected population.

Rationale

Protests and violence in past elections

Protests play a major role in political life in DRC. Political protests have been associated with violence in the past, including during the two elections of 2006 and 2011. Electoral delays caused protests in January, May and June 2005 that resulted in several deaths and injuries, and conflict broke out between supporters of the two major candidates, Joseph Kabila and Jean-Pierre Bemba, following the announcement of 2006 election results. International troops intervened to stop the fighting. Protests were also reported during the electoral process of 2011, though the situation remained relatively calm in comparison to 2006 (ICG 13/10/2016; Radio Okapi 14/10/2011; Le Monde 01/07/2005).

The current electoral cycle

Presidential elections that were due on 19 December 2016, at the end of Joseph Kabila's second and last constitutionally authorised term, have been postponed several times. The electoral commission announced the current schedule in November 2017, saying that the polls were to take place on 23 December 2018 (ICG 17/01/2018; ICG 13/10/2016). Since the end of 2017, organisation of the elections has been progressing but concerns around the electoral process remain. Uncertainties over the content of the electoral lists and the use of voting machines are among the major topics fuelling political tensions across the country, which have manifested in frequent protests (CENCO 15/05/2018; UNSC 01/03/2018). An audit by the International Francophone Organisation (IOF) revealed many irregularities with the electoral registration process, including loss of voter data in Nord Ubangui. In addition, the audit questions the inclusivity and transparency of the electoral process (Actualite CD 19/06/2018; RFI 18/06/2018).

The first protests against a proposed modification of the electoral law began in January 2015. In several towns, demonstrators accused the President of seeking to delay the presidential elections. Security forces violently repressed the protests, resulting in some 40 fatalities in less than a week, mainly in Kinshasa and Goma (ACLEDD 05/2018; HRW 24/01/2015; Radio Okapi 19/01/2015). Between the beginning of 2015 and the end of May 2018, over 700 protests were reported in up to 100 different locations across the country, including a significant number in major urban centres: 77 in Kinshasa, 67 in Goma, 65 in Lubumbashi and 36 in Bukavu. Along with Irumu, Kisangani, Beni, Mbuji-Mayi, Mbandaka and Butembo), 10 cities account for over 56% of the total number of protests across the country (see table below) (ACLEDD 06/2018).

Ongoing humanitarian crises

According to the 2018 Humanitarian Needs Overview (HNO), humanitarian needs are present in every province of DRC, with Nord-Kivu, Sud-Kivu, Kasai-Central and Tanganyika being most affected (see map). Ongoing violence, natural disasters and epidemics are the main drivers of humanitarian needs (OCHA 19/01/2018). Exposure to sustained humanitarian crises coupled with chronic poverty leaves large parts of the population highly vulnerable to shocks, as shown by the rapid deterioration in the humanitarian in Kasai following conflict in 2016, and in Ituri following the outbreak of violence in 2017. (NRC 28/05/2018; IRC 16/05/2018; ICG 17/01/2018; ICG 13/10/2016). Further violence and insecurity related to the electoral process is likely to exacerbate existing vulnerabilities.

Predicted developments

The high number and frequent recurrence of protests indicate an already high level of political tension that is likely to grow unless a peaceful resolution to the crisis is found. As the electoral process moves forward towards elections at the end of the year, higher tensions are likely to spill over and begin to have direct and indirect humanitarian impacts on civilian populations. Humanitarian scenario planning exercises have already identified a high risk of the electoral process negatively impacting the security situation across the country (OCHA 19/01/2018). A specific risk in the coming weeks and months is that publication of electoral lists and decisions on the use of voting machines trigger large-scale, violent protests in urban centres across the country.

Electoral lists

The electoral process will reach a critical juncture in the coming months with key events due to take place: candidate registration periods will open between 24 June and 8 July for the provincial elections and between 25 July and 8 August for the presidential and national elections. Presidential candidate lists are to be published on 24 August for the preliminary lists and 19 September for the final lists. Although the constitution does not allow a third term, and it remains unclear whether President Kabila will run, the fact he has not yet officially declared he will step down is causing uncertainty and concerns. Similarly, the position of Katumbi, a key opposition leader, remains unclear, although it is quite likely the government will seek to ban him from registering (Lalibre Afrique 16/05/2018; ICG 04/04/2018; CENI 05/11/2017). The potential candidacy of Jean-Pierre Bemba (who was acquitted by the International Criminal Court on 8 June) could further complicate the election. Not only is he Kabila's historical rival, but also his return could impede the opposition's efforts to unite (Crisis Group 15/06/2018).

Voting machines

The introduction of voting machines for the first time in DRC is another important source of controversy. The opposition, civil society and many foreign countries are concerned they might be delivered too late and/or be unusable in areas with poor infrastructure and unreliable electricity. At the end of May, a coalition of several opposition parties, including the two main parties, Union pour la Démocratie et le Progrès Social (UDPS) and Ensemble pour le Changement, published a declaration asking the government to renounce the use of the voting machines. Moreover, the utilisation of these voting machines is also increasing the risk of the election results being challenged, which could trigger unrest (Africanews 26/05/2018; ICG 04/04/2018; CENCO 15/05/2018). As of early June, the voting machines had still not been delivered and an audit of the machines that was supposed to be undertaken by British experts was cancelled by the National Independent Electoral Commission (CENI) arguing that it was not part of the electoral calendar (RFI 06/06/2018). So long as the status of the machines remains unclear, the issue is likely to fuel further political tensions between the government, opposition and their supporters.

Table: Number of protests by year and location

Locations	2015	2016	2017	2018 (until 31 May)	TOTAL
Beni	7	10	6	5	28
Bukavu	14	11	8	3	36
Butembo	1	6	8	0	15
Goma	21	19	20	7	67
Irumu	6	9	16	3	34
Kinshasa	18	37	14	8	77
Kisangani	12	14	4	3	33
Lubumbashi	13	21	24	7	65
Mbandaka	9	4	9	2	24
Mbuji-Mayi	10	10	5	0	25
Other locations	98	88	96	32	314
Total	209	229	210	70	718

Humanitarian impact

Protection: The excessive use of force by the police and military, including indiscriminate killing, arbitrary arrests and looting, is already frequent and widespread and likely to be a feature of further responses to opposition protests. Freedom of assembly and expression are severely restricted while authorities often act with impunity (UN 21/03/2018; Amnesty International 22/01/2018). In addition, there are indications that repression is on the rise: the number of violations of fundamental freedoms and political rights in the first three months of 2018 reached 260, compared to 177 recorded in 2017 (BCNUDH 25/04/2018; UNSC 01/03/2018). Given the strong association of violence with protests, the number of violent incidents is expected to increase during the electoral process.

Freedom of assembly: The use of live bullets by governmental forces against unarmed protesters is regularly reported (Amnesty International 10/05/2018; Amnesty International 22/01/2018; ICG 13/10/2016). Since the beginning of 2015, between 160 and 300 people, including women and children, are believed to have been killed during protests in addition to hundreds injured and arrested (CENCO 15/05/2018; ACLED 05/2018; HRW 09/04/2018; UN 21/03/2018).

Freedom of expression: The political space is shrinking as several media outlets have been shut down after expressing political opinions. Several journalists report being victims of intimidation or pressure. Active members of the civil society also face high protection risks (CENCO 15/05/2018; HRW 09/04/2018).

Looting: Looting of private goods by both governmental forces and protesters is common, including in churches. Security forces are poorly paid, which can lead them to abuse their position of power to ensure their livelihoods (CENCO 15/05/2018; ICG 13/10/2016).

Vulnerable groups: Children have regularly been taking part in the protests and child casualties directly related to protests have been reported. Children have also been arrested by the police, who claim that they are being used as shields on the “front lines” of protests by the opposition (OHCHR 03/2018; BCNUDH 24/01/2018; France24 31/12/2017; Jeune Afrique 17/11/2017; HRW 2017).

Access to basic services: Violence and insecurity are likely to further disrupt already weakened transportation, education and healthcare systems, complicating access to basic services (Amnesty International 10/05/2018; Amnesty International 22/01/2018). Increasing protests are likely to see more schools and health facilities being closed down or interrupted (Cath.ch 22/01/2015; Radio Okapi 19/01/2015).

Livelihoods: In the past, periods of political instability have been associated with economic downturn (ICG 13/10/2016). The current instability is showing a similar trend. In 2017, the inflation of the Congolese franc (CDF) was over 40%. Inflation rates in 2018 are

expected to increase further due to declining exports and high government spending (FAO 26/02/2018). Moreover, protests significantly slow down commercial activities in the affected areas, particularly urban centres. This is especially the case during the days of “ville morte” when the population is called to remain home and to keep stores closed (Radio Okapi 24/04/2018; Jeune Afrique 09/08/2017; Radio Okapi 19/01/2015).

Health: Excessive use of force during protests, including the use of teargas and live bullets, can cause high levels of casualties, including trauma cases. Although the health system is typically stronger in urban areas than rural areas in DRC, a large and quick increase in the number of trauma cases is likely to strain existing facilities (Amnesty International 10/05/2018; Amnesty International 22/01/2018; WHO 2016).

Humanitarian constraints

Humanitarian access to several parts of the country is restricted due to security and physical constraints (UNSC 01/03/2018). Aid workers are regularly targeted by violence. In 2017, around 10 attacks against aid workers were recorded per month on average (OCHA 04/12/2017). The rainy season, which lasts from October to June, is likely to further constrain access to affected population, as poor road infrastructure is vulnerable to heavy rains (OCHA 21/08/2017; FEWS NET 05/02/18). In addition, the rainy season can have a severe impact on densely populated areas which lie along lakes and rivers prone to flooding. Winds and floods can lead to the destruction of shelter and disruption of WASH systems, that can in turn spread waterborne diseases (UN 16/01/2018). In January, heavy rains in Kinshasa resulted in the damage or destruction of over 5,000 houses, 48 deaths and a significant increase in the number of cholera cases reported in the area (WHO 02/03/2018; Actualite.CD 09/01/2018).

The temporary shutdown of means of communications, including phone and internet services, is common, especially at times of social protests. This is likely to impede the delivery of emergency relief to affected population (HRW 09/04/2018; Amnesty International 22/01/2018).

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