

Summary

The Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) is poised to hold elections on December 20, 2023, featuring 24 candidates. However, the electoral landscape is characterized by unfavorable conditions, notably by the uncertainty of the sufficiency of voting cards as well as by the recurring violence putting potential voters at risk, in the eastern and other regions of the country.

Recent events and developments

The M23 rebel group, primarily led by Tutsis, resumed conflict in 2021 in Eastern DRC. M23 rebels have recently seized territory, such as the village Mushaki or Bunagana in North Kivu. In an attempt to facilitate a political settlement, the East African Community deployed a regional force (the EACRF) to act as a buffer between government troops and the M23. Despite EACRF efforts to minimize the conflict, violence between M23 and Congolese Armed Forces (FARDC) has continued. This recently led to protests against the ineffectiveness of peacekeeping efforts, which have not reduced intensity of the fighting. Moreover, the upcoming elections in December may be hampered by poorly managed access to voting combined with growing violence between the M23 and the FARDC that prevents many individuals from casting ballots. On May 20, in response to alleged anomalies in vote registration, there was an anti-government demonstration in the capital Kinshasa, which was strengthened by the rising fear of deepening insecurity amongst the citizens as well as by the cost of living. On July 13, the opposition spokesman Chérubin Okende, was shot and killed in Kinshasa. In September, 56 anti-UN protesters were killed in Goma. On November 7, as a result of fighting between M23 and the Congolese army, Goma's power line was cut, leaving hospitals and water systems powerless.

Impact assessment

More than a million people lack voter cards as a result of issues with voter registration, insurgent activity in North Kivu and the combat between the military forces and the M23. EACRF efforts to reduce the tensions have not been effective, leading the President to want to have the EACRF to leave by December 8 – upon the expiration of their mandate. He also called for the “accelerated withdrawal” for the UN MONUSCO mission. A substantial risk of localized violence in the form of fighting between the M23 and FARDC may continue and will likely be intensified if the EACRF and the UN peacekeepers leave. Notwithstanding several shortcomings, such as poor security and displacement of 300,000 citizens in eastern DRC as well as failure to improve citizens' living standards, current President Tshisekedi will run for re-election. He does this despite of his government being accused of uncontrolled corruption, state capture, patronage, and abuse of state resources. Additionally, after the election day, there is a chance of public disagreement with the outcome. For instance, if the opposition may question the legitimacy of a re-election of Tshisekedi. This would likely lead to anti-governmental protests in Kinshasa and other cities. After the previous in 2018, the elections were followed by a period of protests around which protesters and police clashed, leading to more than 50 deaths.

Advice from Forth Global

- Make sure all employees traveling to the DRC undertake a three-day HEAT training prior to deployment.
- Advise staff to avoid all non-essential travel to North Kivu and Ituri provinces. If travel is necessary, advise staff to plan their journey ahead, check the state of roads and travel with security detail in convoy.
- Advise staff to avoid governmental buildings, military bases, and crowded locations.
- If staff is in Goma, test crisis response plans and evacuation procedures. Ensure security plans are updated and appropriately distributed to workers on the ground.
- Continuously monitor local news and liaise with local partners to stay up to date with any developments in the region.

Customized advice

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