

DRC Election Analysis **FM Radio + Social Media**

Analysis of key issues, threats, INGOs and public perception: November 1 - 30, 2023



CRISIS ANALYSIS
DR CONGO



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Key findings for the humanitarian, development and peacebuilding community

Domestic Partisan Hate Speech and Electoral Violence is a Widespread Concern

- During the month of November, DRC radio broadcasts have made mention of several instances of hate speech and electoral violence. The alleged responsible parties are domestic political partisans. There is concern that these incidents can spread into more widespread violence as the election draws closer.

CENI is criticized for Alleged Partisanship and Inadequacy

- Opposition candidates believe that the current administration is operating an opaque and ineffective electoral commission (CENI) in order to keep the incumbent president in power.
- Additionally, security and logistical challenges signal expectations of low turnout and disenfranchised voters.

INGOs Generally Avoid Perceptions of Partisanship During Fraught Election Period

- Despite lingering accusations of complicity with rebels and other forms of disinformation among a minority of social media users, overall sentiments towards INGOs on Twitter and Facebook tend to be positive and data suggests that most users perceive INGOs as neutral, despite the current electoral context.
- Sentiments towards MONUSCO, in contrast, are overwhelmingly negative as has been observed in prior study periods.

Partisan Hate Speech and Threats of Election Violence

Radio Monitoring Indicates Widespread Concern for Election-related Violence

The regularity with which the potential for hate speech and election-related violence is discussed on radio (77 mentions in our sample of 252 clips) indicates a significant risk. The credibility of this concern is bolstered by the wide range of domestic and foreign actors discussing this threat. These include: CENI regional offices, local NGOs, MONUSCO officials, European election observers, journalists, student groups, and the International Criminal Court.

Observed instances and predictions of hate speech are often unspecific, but messages are assumed to align with regional, political, and ethnic rhetoric.

Report of armed groups sowing unrest to gain political leverage

Certain territories will not participate in the election due to instability and violence. This may benefit NSAG and encourage them to destabilize areas prior to the election.

National police chased local militiamen out of the territory of **Ubundu in the Tshopo province**, who had been sowing unrest **'for electoral demands.'** This violent conflict has led to widespread panic and a 3 day 'suspension of activities,' despite repeated calls for peace.

(Source)

The NGO Réseau pour les droits de l'homme reports that they have, "documented hate speech and incitement to violence... by certain candidates in the legislative elections in Butembo."

Reports of election-linked unrest across the country

Broadcasts have underscored concerns of possible violence across our monitored region of North Kivu, South Kivu, and Ituri. Additional election-linked violence has been reported elsewhere in the DRC, most notably in Haut-Katanga, where violent clashes took place between the ruling party's UDPS youth group and supporters of opposition candidate.



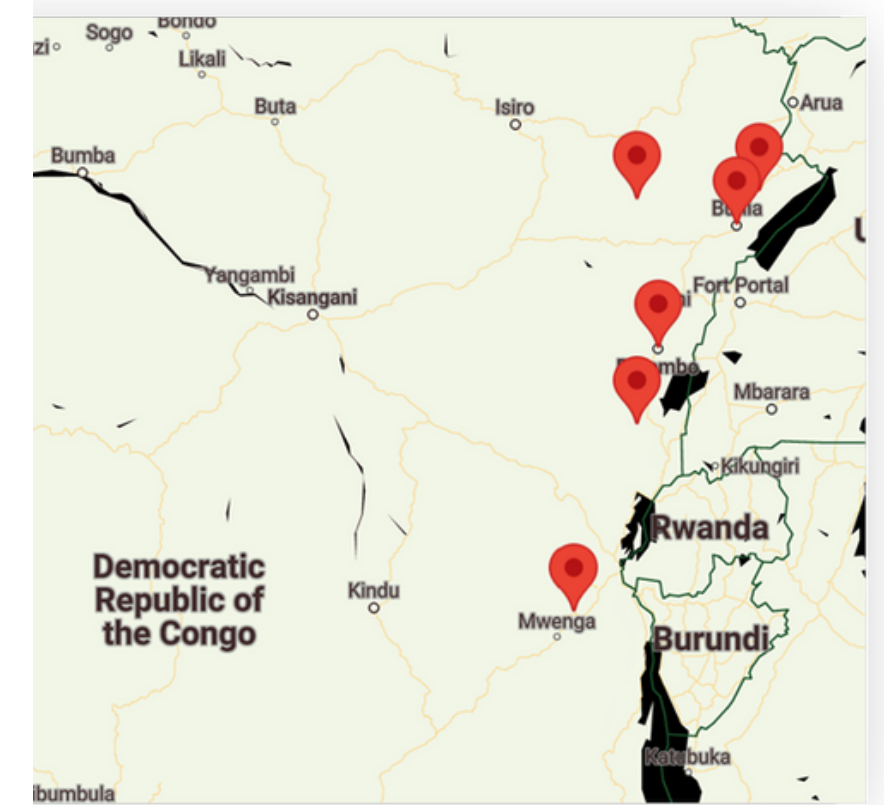
Radio Maendeleo (6-Nov-2023)

Sometimes, there is tension between communities [in Bandundu]. These tensions become much more troublesome, much stronger with political leanings... the other group becomes an adversary. **Tensions become so palpable that they reach a boiling point.** (Source)



Radio Okapi (8-Nov-2023)

Many people deplore the repeated clashes in the town of Kasumbalesa, involving members of political parties, **without appropriate measures being taken to stop the spiral of violence.** (Source)



Locations of Potential Violence in Eastern DRC

Mentioned on Radio

Perceived lack of credibility for CENI

CENI is associated with several major negative themes:

- 1. **Lack of Transparency.**
- 2. **Non-neutrality (association with Pres. Tshikenedi).**
- 3. **Inability to navigate instability and overcome violence.**
- 4. **Inability to effectively provide all eligible voters with functional access to vote.**

CENI credibility was the most discussed topic in our sample of radio coverage of the election. Concerned citizens and opposition candidates alike have lamented the lack of transparency in the CENI. These critics cite the lack of **‘real time provisioning of electoral information.’** As of November 14, 12 cases had been brought against the CENI, and the outcome of these cases could lead to a **delay in the elections.** (Source)

CENI personnel face grave safety issues as well: During the registration of voters, the **CENI lost thirty-three agents and police officers by drowning or victims of armed groups.** (Source)

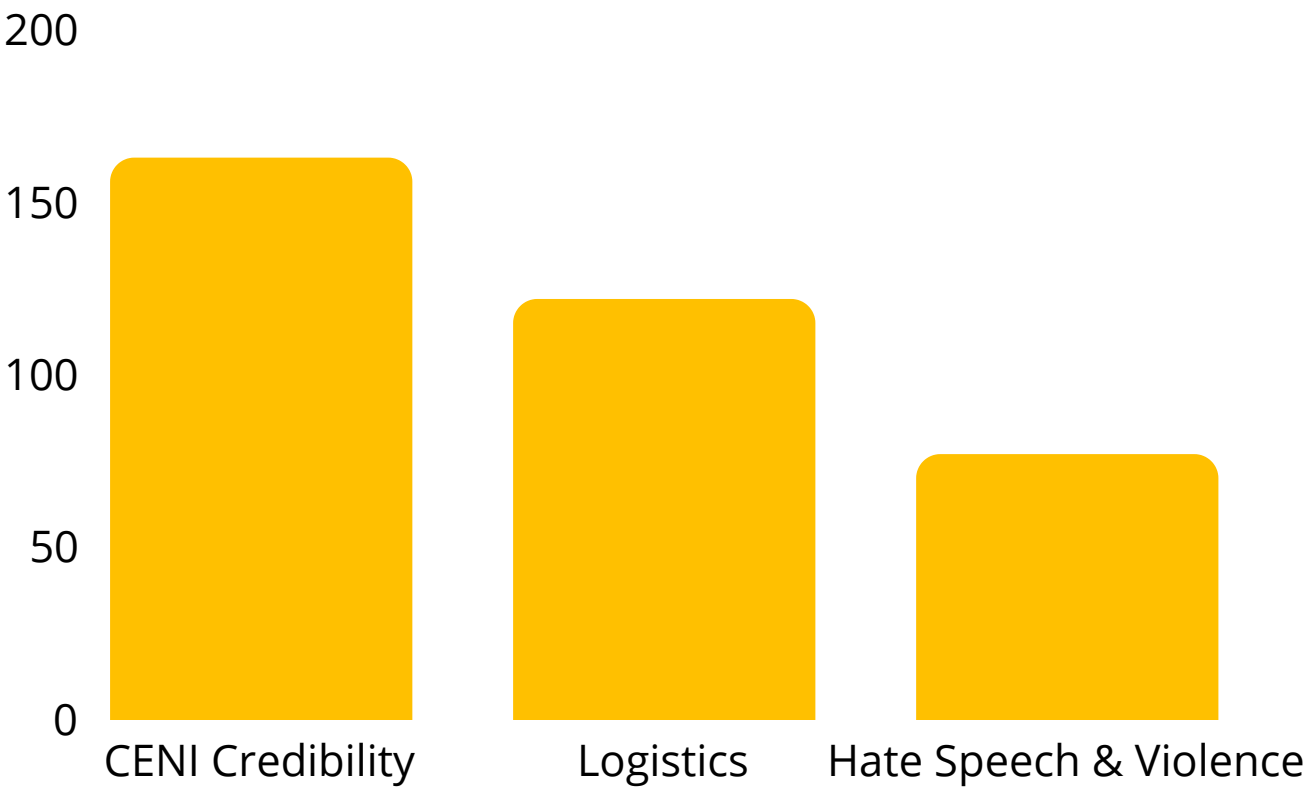
Report of current government discouraging political organizing

Felix Tshikenedi’s government and its supporters are issuing thinly veiled threats discouraging political action. The governor of Kasai Central stated that **the area was Pres. Tshikenedi’s “turf”** and that opposition candidates should **“seek votes elsewhere.”**

Additionally, enforcement of ‘early campaigning’ rules has led to **“clashes between militants of the majority and opposition who want to block each other’s elections initiatives.”** (Source)

Frequency of Key Elections Topics

Sample: 252 radio clips discussing election



Radio Okapi (24-Nov-2023)

The CENI cannot claim transparency whatsoever. It's not only an issue of trust, but also mobilizing the electorate. **If people don't believe [CENI], they won't trust them.** (Source)



Radio Okapi (24-Nov-2023)

There are fears that persist regarding the deployment of electoral voting across the country, given **several challenges facing CENI, in particular the insecurity in the provinces and territories located under a state of siege.** (Source)



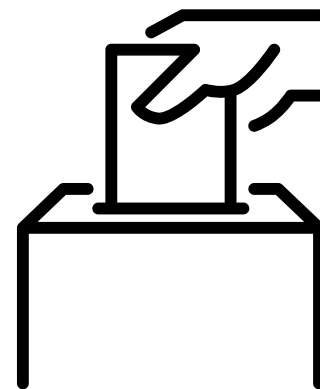
Signals Point to Low Voter Turnout

Frequent Discussion of Logistical Challenges on Radio

In addition to concerns with CENI's capability, there is regular discussion of a variety of general logistical challenges to the execution of a smooth election.

- More than one million citizens deprived of voting cards, after the constraints in the organization of the enrolment process.
- Criticism that campaigns use children to distribute and share campaign materials when the children should be in school.
- Among these challenges are the logistical questions about the deployment of electoral material, especially in provinces with high access constraints and given the recent developments with MONUSCO.
- In places as diverse as South Kivu to Haut-Katanga, inhabitants deplore that they have difficulty finding their names on the recently displayed electoral lists.

There are expected to be **75,000 to 80,000 polling stations total** ([source](#))



~1,000,000 citizens deprived of voter cards



Radio Okapi (24-Nov-2023)

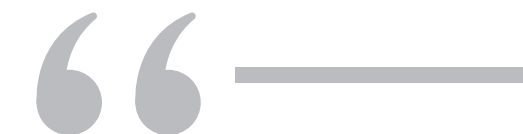
Despite the assurances of the CENI to do everything possible for the deployment of voting apparatus in all countries before the elections. **Many Congolese still doubt the capacity of the CENI to meet these challenges.**

Security concerns and natural barriers restrict movement of eligible voters



Radio Okapi (27-Nov-2023)

The election campaign remains timid in Bunia and other towns in the province. Some actors are still waiting for funds from their political actors. Others say insecurity has reduced their mobility. ([Source](#))



Radio Okapi (24-Nov-2023)

The head of the CENI in the province would like to point out that the deployment of electoral materials inside Tanganyika is being done with difficulties. These are notably those linked to the dilapidated state of the roads, especially during this rainy period, and the Kabalo Manono axis is no longer passable.

Online Sentiment towards INGOs Leading into Election

Sentiments towards INGOs generally positive, despite lingering accusations of complicity with rebels

A review of around 230 pertinent Facebook comments related specifically to international aid organisations operating in the DRC suggests that online sentiments towards INGOs are generally positive or neutral.

For example, comments praising international organisations for their work, or for speaking out about the conditions of vulnerable people such as IDPs were frequent and appeared to capture the general sentiment among reviewed social media users.

8% of Facebook comments were negative. Most of these comments accuse the international aid organizations of collaborating with rebels. Despite this dangerous dis- or mis-information, there is no indication that these comments are shared by the wider community on social media, or that it is spreading on public social media platforms.

“ ——— 
Facebook User from Goma (November-2023)
Good luck and may God bless you for your help to the displaced.

“ ——— 
Facebook User from Kinshasa (November-2023)
The same organisations which create war and then want to come with their aid to distract us.

Despite the positive general sentiment, risks remain for the international aid sector

- Social media users commenting in reaction to INGO statements or media interventions to increase awareness about the conditions of vulnerable people such as IDPs often use this information to criticise the current administration's perceived failings. In this context, INGO statements which highlight topics such as lack of support for refugees can and may be interpreted as indirect criticism of the administration by supporters.
- The conflict in Gaza was repeatedly mentioned by social media users when participating in discussions on INGOs operating in the DRC, even if the topic was out of the immediate context of the conversation. Users posting such comments often deplored what they perceive as a lack of international support for the DRC in the M23 crises and compared it to the support Israel or Ukraine received seeing it as a clear case of double standards.
- Sentiments towards MONUSCO remain exceedingly negative among social media users. Sentiment results towards MONUSCO in the DRC indicate that the vast majority of users are against its continued presence in the country, with many blaming it for the current debacle in the East against the M23 rebels.

Case Study on Online Sentiment towards INGOs: Moïse Katumbi's Aid Donations for IDPs through Caritas

In November 2023, opposition candidate Moïse Katumbi donated 100 tons of aid to IDPs from Nyiragongo through Caritas.

The donation, which reportedly was initially blocked from being distributed by local authorities, received significant publicity and controversy in the DRC.

With election campaigning in full swing, did the controversial move by the candidate risk undermining civilian perception of the aid sector's principle of neutrality?



Katumbi

We explored the data regarding this question to understand the risk INGOs and the aid sector in general face when it comes to public perceptions. The humanitarian principle of neutrality is critical in a country where INGOs have been repeatedly accused of complicity with rebels.

We examined public online discussions of Caritas and INGOs in the context of Katumbi's aid donations. The data consisted of nearly 500 observations from Twitter (Tweets, retweets, and comments) and Facebook (posts and comments).

Results showed that while a significant number of social media users joined in conversations regarding the controversial donation, **discussions focused on partisan political considerations**, with pro-Katumbi supporters praising their candidate's gesture and opponents questioning it in light of the current election period.

Although it was clearly present in the information provided and discussed by social media users, **Caritas was rarely the subject of the discussion itself, and its political neutrality was never overtly questioned.**

Methodology

Social Media Data

Social data was collected from two social media platforms (Twitter and Facebook) during the period of 01 November to 30 November 2023. Insecurity Insight used proprietary technology powered by an artificial intelligence tool to collect the data. The data was filtered using a number of Boolean search query using the following search string, adapted to the different research questions explored.

The collected data was further filtered by human analysis to exclude irrelevant content and news reports. The final filtered data set consisted of above 1000 tweets, posts, and replies. A custom taxonomy was created and applied to establish and exploit data patterns in opinions expressed online on social media.



FM Radio Data

Radio broadcasts were collected from four FM radio stations (Radio Moto Butembo-Beni, Radio Maendeleo, Radio Okapi, Radio Tayna) with a strong physical presence in North and South Kivu during the month of November 2023. Approximately six hours of content was monitored daily prioritizing popular news and interview programs. RootWise used proprietary technology to collect the content, transcribe the content using automatic speech recognition technology powered by Artificial Intelligence and Machine Learning. The content was then indexed for clip retrieval by Boolean search query. Snippets of the full broadcast were extracted using the following search string (including different stem endings) on the transcribed text:

elect AND (CENI OR processus OR paix OR cartes OR listes OR prenantes OR violence OR délivrance OR confiance OR haine OR police OR respect OR observateurs)*

252 extracted clips were further filtered by human analysis for relevance to the research questions in this report. The source language of all broadcasts is French.

Analysis

The datasets were analyzed using a combination of quantitative and qualitative methods. In order to create unbiased and representative samples of underlying content, the data was classified for relevance to our three research questions, and if yes, further classified for narrative content relevant to the specific research question. This classification system resulted in the research question narrative rankings found on each slide. The content was also analyzed by human analysts and linguists to provide narrative assessments and analyst insights relevant to the research questions.

