"ARM the WAZALENDO"

Social media narratives on the Wazalendo in the DRC

March – June 2025

Insecurity Insight

Introduction

The Wazalendo—a loosely structured coalition of local self-defence groups—have emerged as a prominent force in the conflict dynamics of eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC). To understand how the Wazalendo are perceived within the social media space, this brief analyses 4,580 public social media comments posted in response to 33 posts which shared content referencing the Wazalendo on X and Facebook between March and June 2025. These posts were selected due to their high levels of engagement—measured by the number of likes and comments—during the period analysed. While the posts originated from both individuals and media outlets, the comments published in response to the original posts provide insight into public perceptions of the Wazalendo from a broader range of social media users who framed them either as defenders, abusers, or victims. Many comments extend beyond immediate conflict updates, revealing underlying narratives of mistrust, fear, and fractured cohesion, as well as contested views of legitimacy and protection. Moreover, many comments mention other actors and in particular the M23 and the Forces Armées de la République Démocratique du Congo (FARDC) as the Wazalendo support the FARDC in opposing the M23 in the Eastern part of the DRC.

Though a peace agreement between the DRC and Rwanda was signed in late June 2025, after the data collection **period** for this brief, clashes between Wazalendo and M23 have reportedly **continued**, with both groups accused of human rights **violations**. The Congolese government's support for Wazalendo has further blurred the lines between state and non-state security actors, raising urgent questions about coordination, and accountability in light of continued human rights violations.

Most Congolese internet users report relying primarily on WhatsApp, suggesting that a significant portion of public discourse occurs in private channels. However, due to technical and ethical considerations, this brief focuses only on public social media platforms where users through their setting choices indicate consent for public use of the information. Furthermore, armed actors like the Wazalendo and M23 have also reportedly engaged in narrative manipulation through fake **accounts** on public and private social media platforms.

For the aid sector, this report offers practical insight into how public narratives shape the operating environment. Although the aid sector was not a central focus of most posts, the way it is mentioned, or omitted, within discussions about protection and accountability signals a need for more effective engagement with public sentiment. Ultimately, understanding how groups like the Wazalendo are discussed online can support more informed, context-sensitive approaches to aid delivery, conflict sensitivity, and peacebuilding.

Key findings

- **The comments showed the high-polarisation** of social media users as the Wazalendo were either portrayed as patriotic defenders of the nation or as undisciplined and dangerous militias responsible for insecurity and a potential threat to long-term stability once the M23 are “defeated”. While the main focus of the dataset was on the Wazalendo, similarly polarised views—dominate the online space around the M23, the group the Wazalendo opposes.
- **Growing distrust in state institutions:** A significant segment of social media users consistently expressed disillusionment with the Congolese government and the FARDC, portraying them as absent, corrupt, or ineffective—often described as abandoning eastern communities and enabling insecurity.
- **Evidence of emerging online mobilisation:** Dozens of comments indicate that members of the Wazalendo and M23 use social media and may contribute to informal recruitment dynamics online.
- **Harmful narratives impact social cohesion:** Frequent references to treason, infiltration, and looting reflect deep mistrust between civilians and armed actors. These dynamics, often laced with ethnic undertones, contribute to a fragmented information environment.
- **Edited media coverage of the Wazalendo drew strong criticism,** especially toward one aid-linked media platform, with users accusing it of bias, misinformation, and foreign alignment, echoing patterns seen in previous social media monitoring reports.
- **The aid sector is marginal in the discourse:** Only three positive comments were found relating to humanitarian or UN actors. 58 comments accuse the UN and the aid sector as a whole of bias, irrelevance, or complicity. The aid sector otherwise appears largely excluded from public narratives around protection and legitimacy. Indirect criticism of the aid sector are marked in the context of the media platform where negative comments accusing the aid sector of bias and foreign alignment are very common, suggesting either organic rejection of aid-linked messaging or a deliberate effort to undermine the credibility of international actors through targeted attacks around wider content disseminated through the radio station.
- **Public appeals highlight unmet needs:** While not dominant, some comments expressed exhaustion, fear, and a desire for peace, though they rarely mentioned aid actors—indicating a possible disconnect between aid efforts and public visibility or trust.

Social media as an armed group recruiting tool

In eastern DRC, social media serves as both a platform for genuine expression of identity, solidarity and grievance, as well as a tool for influence and manipulation.

Coordinated inauthentic behaviours—such as the use of fake accounts and personas, have been documented by multiple sources in support of armed groups, particularly M23. These tactics enable the spread of polarising content while concealing its origins, creating the illusion of widespread grassroots support. In some cases, individuals even pose as activists, civil society representatives, or journalists to boost the credibility of messages aligned with M23 narratives. Yet among these accounts are also the opinions of ordinary social media users who share their views, frustrations and hopes.

While explicit evidence of online recruitment was limited in the comment set analysed, several users clearly aligned themselves with the Wazalendo, FARDC, or M23. At least thirty-four comments indicated they were part of or emotionally supported and welcomed the movements of the Wazalendo and/or the role of the FARDC. Eleven accounts, included here because they mentioned 'Wazalendo' were explicitly aligned with the M23. Several claimed affiliation outright—stating **"I am Wazalendo"** ("je suis wazalendo") or **"M23, we are real fighters"** ("M23 nous sommes des vrais combattants"). A handful of comments also asked how to join or assist Wazalendo efforts. These expressions may be spontaneous or aspirational, but they hint at a public-facing posture of mobilisation that could facilitate informal recruitment dynamics.

The rapid exchange of unverified content increases the reach of disinformation and hate speech, often targeting vulnerable ethnic groups (in this dataset evidence of hate speech towards the Congolese Tutsi or Banyamulenge communities was present). Dehumanising rhetoric, paired with a notable absence of moderation on X and Facebook, contributes to the normalisation of violence and undermines efforts at national cohesion or peacebuilding. In this context, online spaces can not only mirror conflict dynamics but actively shape them, reinforcing polarisation and offering an avenue for informal mobilisation and radicalisation. Indeed, the UN has warned of rising recruitment by armed groups, particularly of children. As shown in this analysis, individuals who identify as members of armed groups are clearly active on social media, and a handful of comments directly ask how to join, including one call for users to send their children to fight.

This brief therefore wants to contribute to the broader understanding of how the Wazalendo are discussed in the digital space.

Who are the social media users commenting on Wazalendo-related posts?

Using AI to detect patterns in usernames and analyse comment content allows for rapid, large-scale insight into potential coordinated, inauthentic behaviour, but also comes with limitations. While AI enables efficient processing of vast datasets, it cannot assess intent, verify identities, or access behavioural metadata such as account activity, location, or timestamps.

The AI analysis of **4,508 usernames of the 4,580 comments**[1] analysed in this brief revealed no clear signs of bot-like naming patterns, such as long random strings of numbers and special characters. However, it identified 2,750 usernames that could be grouped into 613 separate clusters based on textual similarity. These clusters include many accounts with structurally similar or formulaic names, suggesting possible coordination, naming conventions within groups, or multiple accounts managed under similar identities.

A complementary review of 382 negative comments about the Wazalendo—found no evidence of inauthenticity, such as repeated or copy-pasted messages. While some users explicitly stated affiliation with armed groups, the content itself appeared organic and varied, without signs of automation or mass duplication .Further analysis is also required to determine whether the names that appear to cluster are also promoting a shared narrative or coordinated messaging.

That said, this type of AI analysis has important limitations. Text similarity alone cannot confirm coordinated or inauthentic behaviour, as similar names may arise naturally. Without metadata, it is not possible to definitively distinguish between real users and organised influence operations. Due to ethical and technical constraints, we also did not attempt to verify the identities or formal affiliations of individual users manually. The findings highlight patterns worth further investigation but should not be interpreted as conclusive evidence of manipulation.

Sentiment Analysis

The 33 posts analysed—28 from media outlets and five from individual social media users—were selected based on highest engagement and present a predominantly conflict-centred narrative, with the Wazalendo appearing mainly in the context of military offensives, territorial control, and evolving alliances with the FARDC against M23 forces. While most posts adopt a neutral or factual tone, a few reflect tension or criticism—highlighting operational challenges, coalition friction, allegations of human rights abuses, or concerns over the legitimacy and conduct of both the Wazalendo and their adversaries.These posts were sourced predominantly from Facebook (30 posts) and a smaller subset from X (three). Collectively, the posts and comments reached an estimated audience of **1.8 million social media users**.

Although the search focused on posts mentioning the Wazalendo, the analysis reveals that other actors, such as the FARDC, M23, the Congolese government, Rwanda, and the aid sector, also attracted negative and positive comments in the contexts of discussions around the Wazalendo. The overall discourse was highly polarised. Among the comments mentioning the Wazalendo by name, positive comments were the most common reason for referring to the Wazalendo, with many comments portraying them as patriotic defenders filling a security vacuum left by the state. However, they are also criticised as undisciplined militias contributing to instability. When discussing the Wazalendo, social media users frequently accuse the FARDC and the central government of incompetence, while M23 and Rwanda are largely condemned as aggressors. Despite being marginal in the dataset, the aid sector drew hostility, mainly via symbolic attacks on a media outlet seen to represent aid narratives. Across all comment categories, the line between genuine public opinion and coordinated propaganda is blurred, making it difficult to draw firm conclusions about the authenticity or intent behind the engagement.

1 Not all usernames can be downloaded due to privacy settings.

Categories*	Count
Negative comments about specific actors in the contexts of discussions related to the Wazalendo186	
Negative towards the edited media	611
Negative towards the DRC government	416
Negative towards Wazalendo	382
Negative towards the FARDC	364
Negative towards FARDC-Wazalendo alliance	181
Negative towards M23	164
Negative towards Rwanda	67
Negative aid	58
Negative FARDC - Positive Wazalendo	29
Negative towards Uganda	1
Positive comments about specific actors in the contexts of discussions related to the Wazalendo	
Positive towards Wazalendo	451
Positive towards M23	115
Positive towards Wazalendo-FARDC alliance	112
Positive towards FARDC	44
Positive towards aid efforts and intentions	3
Neutral	1283
Unknown	176

* Comments are manually classified individually, which may introduce a degree of human error; as a result, the counts should be considered approximate rather than exact.

Social media comments on the aid sector and traditional edited media under Wazalendo-related posts

Negative comments towards the edited media and aid sector

A significant number of comments express negative sentiment toward the media coverage of the Wazalendo, mentioning four local edited media in particular. One edited media with links to the aid sector was the primary target for criticism. Users accuse the broadcaster of bias, particularly for highlighting setbacks faced by Wazalendo while downplaying or ignoring their territorial gains. There were repeated accusations that the broadcaster station is aligned with foreign interests (mainly Rwanda), or M23. Language in these comments is often inflammatory, with frequent calls to shut down the outlet. This criticism is not specific to information related to Wazalendo as the same outlet attracted negative comments also in relation to internal displacement and the USAID freeze. In this instance, four additional outlets were also accused of bias or misinformation, though less frequently and with less intensity. Of the four other media outlets posting about the Wazalendo and attracting negative sentiment, one is a well-known national platform typically viewed as independent. The others are smaller, locally focused outlets whose coverage may be shaped by regional power dynamics.

> **“A radio station belonging to our attackers. A disgrace to the Congolese media.” (“Une radio de nos agresseurs.Une honte pour le media congolais.”)**

> **"XXX, you're just eating while we suffer — focus on the extermination of those nyangalakata over there. Bibembe will rise up. Alliance with M23 — the homeland or death, we shall overcome ."(“XXX bolamba bolia biso focus na extermination yaba nyangalakata wana Bibembe yako telema alliance M23, la patrie ou la mort nous vaincrons 🔥”)**

> **“When the Wazalendo took these areas, you said nothing, but since they are your allies, you published your statements emphatically.” (“Quand les wazalendo ont pris ces localités, vous n'avez rien dit, mais comme ce sont vos alliés vous publiez avec force.”)**

Rejection of edited media triggered by choice of words: Framing of rebel withdrawals as “voluntary” or “without confrontation,” are read by social media users as attempts to minimise the efforts of national or local resistance forces. Angered by such descriptions of the conflict, these phrases trigger accusations of distortion, misinformation, and betrayal by edited media outlets. Additionally, phrases like “selon lui” (“according to him”), used in reporting without specifying a clear source, have been interpreted as evidence of either manipulation or incompetence.

These critiques of the edited media platforms frequently overlapped with broader attacks on aid actors, especially when those media were perceived to reflect aid or UN-aligned perspectives.

Although only three of the 33 analysed posts made explicit reference to the aid sector—two mentioning the UN and one referring an INGO—these posts attracted a disproportionate volume of aid-related comments. In particular, users directed criticism almost exclusively at the UN and its peacekeeping mission, MONUSCO.

> **"These people are integral enemies of the Congo. They are there to facilitate the extermination of our people. Imagine for a second that Security Council Resolution 2773 had no positive effect on the ground. On the one hand, they condemn Kagame, and on the other, they support him with all NATO logistics to completely eradicate the Congolese people." ("Ces gens font partie intégrante des ennemis du congo ,ils sont là pour faciliter l extermination de notre peuple, imaginez une seconde que la résolution 2773 de conseil de sécurité n a eu aucun effet positif sur le terrain ,d un côté ils condamnent kagame et de l autre côté il le soutiennent avec tous les logistiques de L OTAN pour éradiquer totalement le peuple congolais")**

> **"What is the point of the UN in the world? It is an organisation of hypocrites and occultists who sow terror throughout the world. Mindele oyo tasala bango nini penza."("À quoi sert l'ONU dans le monde ?Une organisation des hypocrites et occultistes qui sème la terreur partout dans le monde.Mindele oyo tasala bango nini penza.")**

> **"MONUSCO does not have the necessary equipment to prevent the M23 from invading our territory, as they had sophisticated equipment. But it has all the means to carry out investigations. What a contradiction!"("La Monusco n'a pas les matériels nécessaires pour contrer le M23 d'envahir notre territoire puisqu'il avait des matériels sophistiqués. Mais pour faire les enquêtes, il a tous les moyens, quel contradiction ?")**

Many commenters challenged the credibility of human rights reports posted by media platforms that mentioned FARDC and Wazalendo, often interpreting them as selective or biased. These reports were seen by some as downplaying or ignoring abuses attributed to M23, reinforcing perceptions that the UN lacks impartiality. Several also accused MONUSCO of being complicit in the conflict or of serving foreign interests. In several cases, media reports perceived to align with UN narratives were used as a proxy to criticise both the aid sector and the broader international presence. While some of this criticism may stem from genuine frustration or disillusionment—particularly among supporters of the Wazalendo—others may reflect the influence of repeated propaganda narratives that encourage scepticism toward international actors. It is also unclear to what extent these expressions reflect deeply held beliefs versus emotional or performative responses shaped by the broader information environment.

Patterns of criticism suggest that negative sentiment toward both media and the aid sector are not driven by humanitarian conditions or journalistic content alone, but by how these actors are positioned within broader conflict narratives.

This discourse reflects deep mistrust and a sense that international institutions are disconnected from realities on the ground. This distrust - that may stem from genuine frustration is also likely reinforced, or even shaped, by repeated exposure to propaganda narratives. While the aid sector was not a dominant theme in the dataset chosen because of discussions centred around the Wazalendo, the negative

comments were triggered by mentions of aid activities that were linked to conflict narratives rather than in the context of humanitarian needs. For humanitarian actors, this points to the need for clear, transparent communication and sustained efforts to rebuild confidence in the impartiality and relevance of their presence. It may also call for explicit communication that delink aid activities from conflict narratives. Silence, and simple avoidance of mentioning conflict parties, can be interpreted as complicity and used to suggest links and alignments that slip into mis-and disinformation.

Positive comments towards the aid sector

Among the whole dataset, and in particular the 142 comments posted under the three aid-related posts (two referring to the UN and one an INGO), only three comments expressed support or appreciation for the aid sector. While the search focus was on the Wazalendo, the near-total absence of positive commentary suggests that the aid sector is largely not perceived as part of the wider conflict resolution dynamic—or where it is seen as linked to conflict narratives, it is not viewed positively.

> **"A chilling warning, but one that must serve as a wake-up call. XX International's cry for help cannot go unheeded. Since the mass escapes in Goma, Bukavu and Uvira—more than 8,000 prisoners on the run, including alleged war criminals—eastern DRC has been plunged into a spiral of reprisals. Victims and human rights defenders are now being hunted down, tortured and sometimes killed for daring to believe in justice. How can we talk about the rule of law when the perpetrators are set free and judges have to hide to survive? MONUSCO, the UN and the Congolese authorities must act without delay. Because without protection for victims, there can be no justice. And without justice, there will never be lasting peace. Thank you to XX for sharing this reality that is too often silenced. ✊🏽 #JusticeForVictims #DRC #HumanRights #Security"[1]**
>
> **"The UN is a stronghold" ("ONU aza liboma")**
>
> **"The UN is right" ("L'ONU à raison")**

Calls for help and additional perceptions of the aid sector

A number of comments (45) reflected a deep sense of exhaustion from civilians caught in the crossfire. The tone of these comments was often personal and urgent from mourning lost lives, to condemning human suffering, and appealing to both national leaders and divine intervention. These calls for an end to the violence were not rooted in political rhetoric, but in the everyday experiences of social media users. However, the international community is notably almost entirely absent from these appeals. Despite appeals for peace and security, along with some general requests for support—often underscored by a sense of abandonment lacking specific calls

1 Une alerte qui glace le sang, mais qui doit réveiller les consciences. Le cri d'alarme de XX International ne peut rester lettre morte. Depuis les évasions massives à Goma, Bukavu et Uvira — plus de 8 000 détenus en fuite, dont des criminels de guerre présumés— l'Est de la RDC est plongé dans une spirale de représailles. Des victimes et défenseurs des droits humains sont aujourd'hui traqués, torturés, parfois tués, pour avoir osé croire en la justice Comment parler d'État de droit quand les bourreaux retrouvent leur liberté et les juges doivent se cacher pour survivre ? La MONUSCO, l'ONU et les autorités congolaises doivent agir sans délai. Car sans protection des victimes, il n'y a pas de justice. Et sans justice, il n'y aura jamais de paix durable.Merci à XX de relayer cette réalité trop souvent étouffée. ✊🏽 #JusticePourLesVictimes #RDC #DroitsHumains)"

for humanitarian assistance—there is no mention of NGOs or UN agencies. This absence suggests that such institutions may be perceived as either irrelevant or effectively invisible to those most directly affected.This absence raises questions about perceptions of humanitarian actors on the ground and whether their efforts are sufficiently understood or trusted by the population.

> **"Stop the war What we experienced in Goma last January must be the end. War means death, oh my God, Congo." ("Arrêter la guerre Ce que nous avons vécu à GOMA en janvier dernier, doit être la fin, la guerre signifie des morts oh mon Dieu le Congo")**
>
> **"But we must not forget that before the flag was raised there, innocent people lost their lives. What we want is peace. As long as weapons continue to fire, people will continue to die. Let us seek dialogue instead of losing people like this." ("Mais sans oublier que avant que le drapeau soit visible là, les gens innocents ont perdus la vie. Ce qui nous intéresse c'est la paix tant que les armes retentissent, les gens seront entrain de mourrir. Cherchons à dialoguer au lieu de perdre les gens comme ça.")**
>
> **"We are suffering here in Bukavu ." ("Nous souffrons ici à Bukavu")**
>
> **"We ask the government in Kinshasa to come and help us." ("Nous demandons au gouvernement de Kinshasa de nous venir en aidé")**

References to looting and destruction in the social media comments

Civilian harm and attacks on infrastructure are not just seen as consequences of war but as deliberate acts of abuse. These are often attributed to the Wazalendo, M23, and FARDC. These comments also confirm recent reports revealing that while the Wazalendo receive military support from the government, they predominantly sustain themselves by exploiting local populations, often resorting to extortion. It also details numerous allegations of looting, with the group accused of plundering shops, homes, and public infrastructure under the guise of military operations. The sense of being abandoned by the government and international community adds to broader feelings of injustice and grievance, further eroding social cohesion.

"Unfortunately, they bombed a hospital, causing human and material damage. I don't know who is coordinating these war pilots." ("Malheureusement qu'ils ont bombardé un hôpital et causant des dégats humains et matériels. Je ne sais pas qui coordonent ces pilotes des guerres")

"The affairs of the DRC are none of the Rwandan minister's business. As for them, they steal and pillage in our country because they are protected by those who claim to be powerful. Are they not a nation of thieves? The wheel keeps turning..." ("Les affaires de la RDC ne concerne pas le ministre Rwandais. Quant eux vol et pillent chez nous pcq protégé par ceux qui se disent puissant ne sont ils pas une nation des voleurs? La roue continue à tourner...")

Opinions on the Wazalendo, M23, FARDC, DRC government and Rwanda under Wazalendo-related social media posts

Sentiment towards Wazalendo expressed by social media users

Negative sentiment:

While the Wazalendo received the highest number of positive comments, the dominant negative narrative that exists in parallel portrays Wazalendo as a "bomb waiting to explode", with users warning that the group may evolve into a future threat to national stability. Common criticisms focus on a lack of discipline, military training, and cohesion, with many questioning the wisdom of arming loosely coordinated civilian militias rather than reinforcing the FARDC. There is also some concern about human rights violations and insecurity in areas under Wazalendo control, including reports of looting, extortion, violence against civilians, and taxation.

These perceptions highlight a fragile public consensus around the legitimacy of Wazalendo as a security actor. The absence of clear command structures, state oversight, and accountability mechanisms fuels fears of long-term instability. The sentiment suggests a need for urgent reflection on integration pathways.

> **"We must rely on the FARDC... the Wezalendo are a time bomb. Now that they have weapons, the governor will be forced to negotiate with them in the coming days… "("Nous devons compter sur les fardc...les wezalendo est une bombe à retardement, comme ils ont eu les armes le gouverneur sera obligé de négocier avec eux dans les jours à venir…")**

> **"We who are in Goma know that this woman is telling the truth. The Bazalendo, whom we believed to be patriots, have stolen, raped, killed and pillaged in Goma."("Nous qui sommes à Goma, cette damme dit la vérité, les bazalendo qu'on croyait patriotes ont volés, violés, tués, pillés à Goma")**

> **"The criminals are among the ranks of the #wazalendo#."("Les criminels sont au rang des #wazalendo#.")**

Positive sentiment:

The Wazalendo received the most significant volume of positive commentary across the dataset, with over **450 comments** explicitly expressing support, exceeding the number of negative sentiment towards them. They were frequently portrayed as the only credible force on the frontlines, particularly where users perceived the national army as absent. Expressions of admiration were often accompanied by calls for state recognition, better resourcing, and integration of Wazalendo into the national defence structure.

A small number of users asked how they could join the Wazalendo, indicating a potential appeal for recruitment through social media, although no direct evidence of organised online mobilisation was observed. In addition, some commenters implied they were already part of the group, reinforcing the sense of proximity between the Wazalendo and certain segments of the online public.

> **"How can we join you?" ("On fait comment pour vous rejoindre ???")**
>
> **"LET'S SEND OUR CHILDREN TO FLY MASSIVELY TO THE WAZALENDOS" ("ENOYONS NOS ENFANTS À S' ENVOLER MASSIVEMENT CHEZ LES WAZALENDOS")**
>
> **"Courage to our valiant Wazalendo fighters!"("Courage à nos vaillant combattants wazalendo")**

A number of comments expressed support for the joint efforts of FARDC and Wazalendo, portraying them as defenders of national sovereignty and territorial integrity. Many users saw the collaboration as crucial to reclaiming occupied towns like Bukavu and Goma, and several mentioned specific operations. Several users also highlighted the importance of organisational structure such as proposing parallel command systems. This rarer narrative is promoted both by supporters of the Wazalendo, who frame the alliance as necessary given the failures of the state.

"Courage to our valiant FARDC and Wazalendo fighters ❤ I call on governments to respond appropriately as quickly as possible." ("Courage à nos vaillant combattants fardc et wazalendo ❤ Je demande aux gouvernements des bien réagir aux plus vite possible")

Sentiment towards the FARDC and the DRC government expressed by social media users

Negative sentiment:

A significant volume of online discourse expresses disillusionment and anger toward the Congolese armed forces (FARDC) accusing them of weakness, corruption, and betrayal. Social media users repeatedly cited that their "repli stratégique" (strategic withdrawals) were not "strategic" but rather a failure to hold territory. The perception of FARDC ceding ground to M23 and relying on civilian militias—rather than leading offensives—has reduced confidence.

Accusations of theft, extortion, and abandoning the population during crises recur throughout the commentary. For some, FARDC appears not only incapable but actively complicit in national insecurity. While a few comments appeal for a better-equipped and unified force, the dominant tone remains sharply critical and is often paired with criticism of the government.[1]

> **"Don't let them stay on the front line, they'll just give the enemy access again, these FRDC." ("Qu'on leur laisse pas la ligne de front, ils vont encore donner l'accès à l'ennemi ces FRDC")**
>
> **"So far, our FARDC have always retreated too." ("Jusqu'à présent nos FARDC ses replies toujours eux aussi 😥😥😥")**
>
> **"The FARDC are more than corrupt, they are seeking to impose themselves with voracity. Before fleeing from the enemy, they loot the property of the population and leave their weapons to the Wazalendo."("Les FARDC, plus que corrompues, elles cherchent à s'imposer avec voracité, avant de prendre fuite devant l'ennemi elles pillent les bien de la population,qu'elles laissent les armes aux wazalendo")**

1 For data classification reasons the main "target" of criticism is selected, some comments may be negative towards two or more groups but are only classified as negative towards one.

Additionally, several references to treason highlight a perceived lack of unity within the security forces, political leadership and their Wazalendo allies. Allegations that commanders prioritise personal gain over national defence suggest that citizens see leadership failures as a central threat to their security. The belief that internal betrayal could sabotage operations points to a deep erosion of trust in formal structures, particularly within the military and government.

> **"It is better to have two commands to avoid cases of treason." ("C'est mieux d'avoir deux commandements pour éviter les cas trahison")**

> **"This is what will cause frustration and lead to disorder within the defence of our territory, given that the senior officers in charge of the operation are not serious themselves. They will want to steal the money and ultimately this will lead to treason within the operation." ("Voilà ce qui causera des frustrations encore et arriver à un désordre Au sein de la défense de notre territoire, vu que les officiers supérieurs chargés de l'opération eux même ne sont pas sérieux, ils voudront voler l'argent et au finish c'est la trahison au sein de l'opération.")**

Frequent mentions of infiltration, particularly within the FARDC, reflect a belief that the national army is compromised from within. It is unclear who they are "infiltrated" by as some comments point to M23 and others the Wazalendo. This fosters a narrative where non-state armed actors are seen as more legitimate and committed than state institutions, making integration efforts more difficult.

> **"It's none of your concern. As long as all the traitors who have infiltrated our ranks have not been neutralised, the situation must remain as it is." ("Ça ne te concerne pas.Tant que tous les traîtres infiltrés ne sont pas encore neutralisés, la situation doit continuer ainsi.")**

> **"Given the behaviour of our FAEDC and their infiltration by the enemy, the WAZALENDO do not want to end up in the same situation. The central government should release some funds to help those affected and give them some breathing space." ("Avec le comportement de nos FAEDC et de leurs infiltrations Par l'ennemi les WAZALENDO ne veulent pas tombé dans le même état.Que le gouvernement central débloque un peu de moyen juste pour les donnés aussi un peu de souffle")**

A range of social media users also portray the central government as absent or complicit. Many users directly accuse the presidency of incompetence, broken promises, or favouritism in the support given to armed actors. A recurring theme is the perception that Kinshasa has abandoned the population in the east. Commenters question why Wazalendo fighters receive limited or no logistical, financial or armed support. At the same time, there is anger over what many see as preferential treatment of formal military units that are viewed as less active while receiving higher salaries. Calls for the resignation of the president are frequent.

> **"They took advantage of the cowardice of our authorities. Eza mawa" ("Ils ont profité de la lâcheté des nos autorités Eza mawa")**

> **"Tshisekedi is distracted by diplomatic negotiations and will be overthrown without a fight. He must change his strategies." ("Tshisekedi est distrait par les négociations diplomatiques et il sera renversé sans combat ,il doit changer ses stratégies")**

> **"And a shadow government that swears only by our waza, the shame of an entire nation, like a country that no longer has an army."("Et un gouvernement fantôme qui ne jure que par nos waza, la honte de toute une nation, comme un pays qui n'a plus d'armée")**

Sentiment towards the M23 among social media users expressed in the context of discussions related to the Wazalendo

Negative sentiment:

While the primary focus of this analysis is on perceptions of the Wazalendo, a number of comments also express strong views about the M23. Typically in contrast or opposition to the Wazalendo and/or the FARDC. These observations are based on a relatively small sample and should be understood as shaped by the Wazalendo-focused search criteria, rather than as a comprehensive representation of broader sentiment toward the M23.

Several social media users accuse M23 of committing human rights violations against civilians, including killings, abductions, and looting in territories under their control. Several commenters stated that M23 does not respect ceasefires and uses negotiations as a cover to regroup or advance militarily.

In several instances, the tone of comments is explicitly violent. Users call for the bombing of M23 positions and the complete eradication of the group, rejecting dialogue or peace efforts as futile and dangerous. The group is also frequently labelled as a proxy of Rwanda, with individuals linked to M23—such as political figures or commanders—accused of serving foreign interests.

> **"They must be bombed indiscriminately; enough is enough."("Il faut les bombardés en désordre trop c'est trop.")**

> **"Negotiating with such animals is a waste of time. It will never stop this war."("Négocier avec des tels animaux c'est perdre le temps. Ça ne peut jamais stopper cette guerre.")**

Positive sentiment:

The positive comments about M23 praised the group for its military capabilities, discipline, and strategic organisation. Several users framed the M23 as a corrective force, claiming it had stepped in to challenge what they described as corruption, tribalism, or incompetence under the current government. Phrases like "libérateurs" (liberators) or "révolutionnaires" (revolutionaries) were used repeatedly. Others encouraged the group to expand its control, with mentions of Kinshasa and Kisangani as future objectives.

These opposing narratives reveal a deeper level of polarisation in the online discourse, where support for one group often entails not just criticism but active hostility toward the other.

Similarly to the Wazalendo, there was also a small subset of comments from users who appeared to identify as members of the group, and one of the three X posts included in this dataset was authored by an individual presenting as an M23 “colonel” (see screenshot above). Understanding how these digital narratives interact supports the understanding of how polarisation is constructed and maintained within the conflict’s online space.

> **“Thank you, Nanga. Even in the United States, Trump has shut down NGOs that do not comply with his administration.”(“Merci Nanga.Même aux États-Unis , Trump a fermé des ONG non conforme avec son administration.”)**

> **“The M23 are a godsend for us, protecting us from the tribalism of Tshisekedi and his allies.” (“Les m 23 sont des mannes tombes du ciel pour nous proteger contre le tribalisme de Tshisekedi et ses alliers.”)**

> **“Stay strong, M23, we are behind you...✊TSHILOMBO must resign, otherwise all localities will be under NANGA's control... 🥂” (“Force à vous M23 nous sommes derrière vous...✊TSHILOMBO doit démissionner au cas contraire toutes les localités seront sous contrôle de NANGA... 🥂”)**

Negative sentiment towards Rwanda among social media users in the context of discussions related to the Wazalendo

Users describe Rwanda as a foreign aggressor with expansionist ambitions, directly supporting or orchestrating rebel activity through the M23. Many comments link the Rwandan government to acts of violence, land occupation, and long-standing regional destabilisation. Some comments reject any sort of negotiations with Rwanda, viewed as deceptive and ineffective. In many instances, comments also adopt violent language, with calls for retaliation, the bombing of Rwandan reinforcements, and the removal of Rwandan influence “by force.” The negative comments targeting Rwanda, likely served to justify the presence and actions of the Wazalendo, who are framed by supporters as a grassroots defence force responding where the state is seen to have failed.

> **“The Rwandan invaders must be wiped out.” (“Les rwandais envahisseurs doivent être anéantis.”)**

> **“Too much suffering for our people. This suffering must end. It is always the Congolese who are targeted. If our military were to attack Rwandan territory, it would put pressure on this mad president.” (“Trop de souffrance pour notre peuple. Cette souffrance doit cesser. C est toujours les congolais qui sont visés.Si nos militaires attaqueraient les territoires rwandais, ça serait une bonne pression pour ce président fou.”)**

The underlying tone across many of these comments reflects a fragmented and distrustful social landscape, where confidence in formal institutions is low and narratives around armed groups are shaped by deep grievances, and are potentially orchestrated by armed groups and shaped by deeply ingrained partisan views. Divisive or harmful discourses often centre on allegations of treason, infiltration, and looting involving both the Wazalendo and M23, as well as criticism of the government and FARDC for perceived corruption and incompetence. These dynamics arefurther complicated by implicit and explicit ethnic or regional tensions embedded in discussions of armed actors. Together, they suggest that efforts to build cohesion or consensus are likely to face resistance in an environment where polarisation, suspicion, and frustration are entrenched in the public conversation. Indeed, any peace deal which does not address deeper social cohesion issues will be unlikely to succeed.

What can be concluded from the social media sentiment analysis of posts referencing 'Wazalendo'?

The comments analysed in response to Wazalendo-related posts reveal a deeply polarised landscape, where thousands of social media users express sharply contrasting allegiances, from one comment to the next within the same conversation threads. Dozens of users claimed direct affiliation with armed groups or inquired about how to join them. These comments, combined with broader patterns of emotional mobilisation and partisan messaging, suggest that social media may serve as a low-barrier entry point into informal recruitment ecosystems and propaganda for armed groups in the DRC.

The polarised online space complicates the visibility of aid actors. The online experience of conflict in the form of calls to join the fight and narratives of betrayal and defence, leaves little room for the principles behind aid interventions. In this online space, aid is not seen as neutral but rather as slow and not reaching communities and silence is misinterpreted as indicating at best irrelevance in what people experience as a deep crisis or at worst as indication of alignment with the opposing party.

For the aid sector, the near absence of positive engagement, and the predominance of hostile or dismissive commentary, mirrors findings from Insecurity Insight's previous report on **displacement** and the **USAID freeze** in the DRC. In both reports, aid actors are not primarily associated with protection or assistance but are instead viewed through the lens of broader political disillusionment and a sense of abandonment. Whether through allegations of bias, irrelevance, or complicity, the aid sector appears excluded from the narratives shaping perceptions of legitimate presence on the ground.

This exclusion does not necessarily reflect a rejection of humanitarian need. On the contrary, this report demonstrated that some social media comments—pleading for peace or calling for help—show an unmet demand for protection, justice, and basic security even before food and water. But where these needs exist, the aid sector is not the entity to which users turn for solutions. Instead, the discourse often elevates armed actors, as more visible or decisive responders to local crises.

This dynamic poses serious implications for humanitarian access and acceptance-based policies. If aid actors are not seen as relevant in moments of crisis, their presence risks being ignored at best, and resented at worst. The increasing normalisation of violent language, against perceived collaborators, ethnic groups, or foreign actors, further erodes the space for neutral engagement and complicates people-centred assistance. Understanding public narratives is therefore, not just a communications task. It is a critical component of risk management, community engagement, and programme relevance.

Building trust in such an environment requires listening to public discourse not just for criticism, but for insight into shifting expectations, needs, and emerging risks linked to social cohesion key for any truth and reconciliation process. **It also means recognising the importance of visibility and explaining the humanitarian imperative in a language adapted to common forms of communication on social media.**

What Insecurity Insight analyses on social media:

💬 What is social media data?

Social media data includes original and public user-generated content (posts by individuals, NGOs, journalists, or media platforms) and the public responses to them—comments, shares, and likes. This analysis considers both the narrative set by the original posts and the public's reaction through the comment sections.

🔍 How was the data collected?

Between February and April 2025, Insecurity Insight used AI-enabled tools to collect and analyse public posts and associated comments on Facebook and X that referenced the Wazalendo in the DRC. Given the high volume of content referencing Wazalendo during this period, only the 33 posts with the most engagement (measured by likes and comments) were selected for in-depth analysis.

Posts shared via private channels such as WhatsApp, Telegram, or private Facebook groups were not included in this analysis.

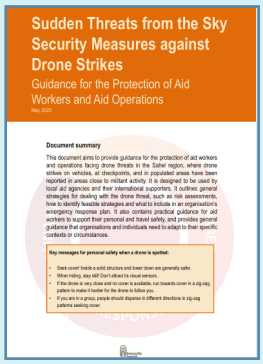
⚠️ Key terms:

- **Misinformation:** False or misleading information shared without the intention to deceive.
- **Disinformation:** Intentionally false or manipulative content shared to mislead or cause harm.
- **Hate speech:** Language that incites discrimination, hostility, or violence.

All comments were categorised by sentiment—positive, neutral, negative towards Wazalendo as well as the FARDC, aligned with the Wazalendo and the M23, the group they oppose, and the aid sector or the concept of aid to better understand public attitudes towards the Wazalendo

Other resources

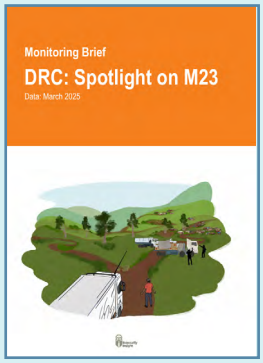
The Safeguarding Health in Conflict Coalition (SHCC) identified 84 incidents of violence against or obstruction of health care in the DRC in 2024, compared to 118 in 2023 and 136 in 2022. The total number of incidents decreased in 2024, but some regions experienced notable increases in attacks. Incidents of this kind continued to be recorded in the DRC's northeastern region, including the Kivus and Ituri province, representing nearly two-thirds of total incidents. Reported cases doubled in Tanganyika province and often involved threats and violence towards vaccinators. Damage to health facilities, the looting of medical supplies, and health worker killings and kidnappings continued in 2024. Read the full factsheet in English and French. Download the data



Armed drones are an escalating threat in humanitarian settings, with their use expected to grow. Once rare, they are now a defining feature in modern conflicts. Adapting to the growing threat of drones means rethinking security risk measures in high-risk contexts. This practical guide by Insecurity Insight brings together current best practice and is available in English and French. See also:

- Personal Safety: Outside When a Drone is Spotted: English | French
- Personal Safety: Inside a Building During a Drone Attack: English | French
- Operational Preparedness: Responding to Drone Attacks on Aid Work : English | French
- Traveling in High-Risk Areas: What to Know About Drones: English | French

DRC Monitoring Brief: Spotlight on M23. This is brief (available in English and French) is part of a series examining factors impacting the aid agency access and safety in the Eastern DRC to support aid agency risk mitigation and forward-looking approaches to maintain access to food, health care, education and protection.



Using Insecurity Insight's incident monitoring data, social media sentiment analysis and armed actor activity analysis from the Armed Conflict Location & Event Data (ACLED), the series provides aid organisations with insight into patterns of violence affecting civilians and aid access. Through examination of reported violence affecting key sectors of aid activity attributed to various conflict parties, the series provides background to better assess specific threats to aid access, food security, health care, education, and community protection in IDP and refugee camps.

Subscribe

This document is published by Insecurity Insight.

The analysis and opinions expressed in this report belong solely to the publisher, Insecurity Insight. Insecurity Insight is a Humanitarian to Humanitarian (**H2H**) organisation committed to the **Humanitarian Principles**.

This document is funded and supported by the generous support of the H2H Fund which is supported by aid from the UK government. The opinions expressed in it do not reflect in any way the position of the H2H Network or the UK government who are not responsible for the content expressed in this document.

We welcome questions and feedback. Share what you're observing both on the ground and online. Your insights help us keep the analysis accurate and up-to-date. Email: info@insecurityinsight.org. Join our efforts to protect humanitarian space. Subscribe to our **Social Media Monitoring** mailing list. Find more resources at the **Social Media Monitoring** website.

Help support our work by sharing this resource. Please copy and paste this link: **https://bit.ly/July2025DRCSMMWazalendo**

Data Use and Privacy Disclaimer

This report includes analysis of publicly available social media content collected from open platforms. All data has been anonymised to remove or obscure identifying details, and no content from closed groups was used. The analysis was conducted in the public interest and in line with the EU General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR), under a legitimate interest basis. The purpose of this analysis is to support humanitarian dialogue, inform policy, protect aid workers and those they help, and contribute to public interest research.

Insecurity Insight. 2025. "ARM the WAZALENDO" : Social media narratives on the Wazalendo in the DRC (July 2025). Switzerland: Insecurity Insight. https://bit.ly/July2025DRCSMMWazalendo