



In brief: elections in the Democratic Republic of Congo

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Presidential and parliamentary elections are due to be held in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) on 25 November. However, some predict that, in the coming weeks, the polls will be postponed by the National Independent Electoral Commission because essential preparations have fallen well behind schedule.

12 candidates for the presidency have been registered. There are only two possible winners:

Joseph Kabila, who is the incumbent after winning in late 2006 elections which officially marked the end of the DRC's 'post-conflict transition' He leads the People's Party for Reconstruction and Development (PPRD), which has with coalition allies, been in government since the last elections.

Etienne Tshisekedi, a combative veteran of opposition politics. He leads the Union for Democracy and Social Progress (UDPS).

Some of the other candidates have the potential to win significant slices of the popular vote, most notably Vital Kamerhe, former president of the National Assembly, whose Congolese Union for the Nation (UNC) has strong support in the east of the country, where Kabila did well last time around but could lose ground this year. An absentee is Jean-Pierre Bemba, Kabila's main challenger in 2006, who is in the custody of the International Criminal Court. His bail request so that he could file his candidacy was refused. His party, the Movement for the Liberation of Congo (MLC) is the second largest in the current National Assembly.

Opposition leaders argue that Kabila will lose his mandate to govern on 6 December, five years to the day after he was sworn in. Even without a delay, inauguration this time around is not scheduled until 20 December. Some are calling for a transitional government to be formed that can bridge whatever 'unconstitutional gap' there turns out to be. Tensions between supporters of the main protagonists have already led to incidents of violence and deaths. In early September, an arson attack on PPRD headquarters in Kinshasa was followed by an attack on the UDPS headquarters. The UN Stabilisation Mission in the DRC stepped in to mediate. Any delay in holding the elections could exacerbate such tensions.

In January 2011 President Kabila and his supporters in the National Assembly succeeded in passing a constitutional amendment abolishing the second round of the presidential election. This leaves the winner needing only to win a larger number of votes than the other

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candidates. The aim was to stop his opponents joining forces behind his nearest rival and so defeating him in the second round, although the move was justified in public on the grounds of cost. This is true. Estimates place the cost of the November elections at over US \$700m.

At the time, it did seem to place Kabila in a position of strong advantage. However, despite a flurry of public works projects over the last 12 months, he does appear still to be vulnerable. The political opposition is being held back by rivalries and divisions and for now is unable to agree a united front. However, victory for Kabila is far from guaranteed. *Africa Confidential* ("A rocky electoral road", 23 September 2011) states:

In the provinces of Bas-Congo and Katanga, the President is the only candidate with concrete achievements to display, even if they are incomplete. In western Congo, he is perceived as an eastern Kiswahili-speaker. In Kinshasa, they like his quiet temperament. In Bas-Congo in 2007-08, he lost support when his army ruthlessly suppressed the politico-religious Bundu dia Kongo cult. In Equateur Province, his repression of the MLC is often seen as a regional persecution. In the eastern Kivu and Orientale Provinces, he is blamed for failing to restore peace. The nation is divided and the election campaign could turn into a bloody struggle.

It should also be noted that the two Kasai Provinces are strongholds of Tshisekedi's UDPS.

Foreign donors are supporting the electoral process, but they are supplying a much smaller part of the election costs (about 40%) than they did in 2006 (90%). The EU is amongst those sending election monitoring missions. There is a growing ambivalence amongst Western governments, about Kabila, based on his track-record in office. Their purchase over him has weakened considerably since the last elections, partly as a result of growing Chinese investment and influence in the country. Kabila has also periodically called for the withdrawal of MONUSCO. Below is the most recent UK Government statement (HC Deb 6 September 2011 c450W) on the forthcoming elections in the DRC:

Mr Bellingham: The British Government, through Department for International Development, is offering significant assistance to the Democratic Republic of Congo elections, aimed primarily at ensuring that everyone has the right to vote, and encouraging as wide a participation as possible. We are also supporting critical logistics assistance from MONUSCO, the UN peacekeeping force, to which the UK contributes through UN assessed contributions.

The EU plans to deploy an election observation mission for a period of three and a half months, from the end of September 2011 until mid-January 2012. We will also stay in close contact with other Congolese and international election observers, including the Carter Centre. These elections can help embed a democratic tradition in Congo, and mark an important milestone on the road to lasting peace and prosperity.

Further background

Previous House of Commons Library briefings:

SN/IA/5012, [The Democratic Republic of Congo: An Update](#) (December 2009); SN/IA/4503, [The African Great Lakes: An Update](#) (November 2007); RP 06/51, [The African Great Lakes: An End to Conflict?](#) (October 2006)

See also:

[International Crisis Group reports on the DRC](#); [Amnesty International documents on the DRC](#); [European Network for Central Africa](#); [Congo Siasa blog](#)