

Congolese protest for end to President Kabila's presidency, 2016-2019

- [an example of regime change](#) [1]
- [included participation by more than one social class](#) [2]

Timing

Time period notes:

The campaign officially began in 2016, however there were protests in 2015 against a census amendment.

2016

to:

January

2019

Location and Goals

Location City/State/Province:

Kinshasa, Democratic Republic of Congo

Location Description:

Capital of Democratic Republic of Congo

[View Location on Map](#)

Goals:

Remove President Kabila from power; release all political prisoners; place opposition leader as country's Prime Minister; hold fair elections for new president as soon as possible.

Methods

Methods in 1st segment:

- 001. Public speeches
- 003. Declarations by organizations and institutions
- 004. Signed public statements
- 006. Group or mass petitions
- 038. Marches
- 052. Silence
- 085. Merchants' "general strike"
- 119. Economic shutdown

Methods in 2nd segment:

- 052. Silence
- 065. Stay-at-home

Methods in 3rd segment:

- 038. Marches

Methods in 4th segment:

- 002. Letters of opposition or support
- 065. Stay-at-home

Methods in 5th segment:

- 001. Public speeches
- 003. Declarations by organizations and institutions
- 038. Marches

Methods in 6th segment:

- 001. Public speeches
- 003. Declarations by organizations and institutions
- 038. Marches

Notes on Methods:

The methods did not change drastically, they moved from picketing, to streetwide protests to dead-city strikes.

Segment Length:

5 months

Classifications

Classification:

Change

Cluster:

Democracy

Group characterization:

- Congolese civilians

Leaders, partners, allies, elites

Leaders:

Moise Katumbi

Etienne Tshisekedi

Felix Tshisekedi*

Martin Fayulu

Samy Badibanga

Bruno Tshibala

Partners:

"Rassemblement"

Union for Democracy and Social Progress (UDPS), Forces of Union and Solidarity (FONUS), Lumumbist Progressive Movement (MLP).

External allies:

USA

EU

Catholic Church

Human Rights Watch

UN

MONUS

Involvement of social elites:

Catholic Church Leaders/Pope Francis

Joining/exiting order of social groups

Groups in 1st Segment:

- FONUS
- LUCHA
- MLP
- Rassemblement
- UDPS

Groups in 2nd Segment:

- Catholic Church

Groups in 3rd Segment:

- UN

Groups in 4th Segment:

Groups in 5th Segment:

Groups in 6th Segment:

Additional notes on joining/exiting order:

Rassemblement is a coalition of UDPS, FONUS, MLP

Segment Length:

5 months

Opponent, Opponent Responses, and Violence

Opponents:

President Kabila & his administration

Nonviolent responses of opponent:

No nonviolent responses of opponent.

Campaigner violence:

Vandalism, lynching

Repressive Violence:

Vandalism, beatings, public humiliation, public murders, assassinations

Success Outcome

Success in achieving specific demands/goals:

3 points out of 6 points

Survival:

0.5 points out of 1 point

Growth:

1 point out of 3 points

Total points:

4.5 out of 10 points

Notes on outcomes:

Felix Tshisekedi was elected president but he actually had turned into a puppet of Former President Kabila

Following the assassination of his father, Joseph Kabila took power and the position of President of the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) on 26 January 2001. He subsequently won re-election in December 2011, with charges of an illegitimate election surrounding the outcome. On 17 January, 2015, students began mass protests over an announcement that President Kabila would remain in power until the government completed a census. This began the nonviolent protest movement to remove President Kabila from office and prevent him from remaining in power for a third term.

Beginning on 21 August 2016, the opposition party (UDPS) and “Rassemblement” (gathering), alongside the Party for Reconstruction for Democracy and the Commitment for Development and Leadership Party, called for a strike to protest the decision to delay the November 2016 elections. The DRC constitution prohibited President Kabila from running for a third term. The opposition, led by protestors supporting Moise Katumbi as well as other leaders, called for President Kabila to step down, hold elections, and ensure a fair transfer of power.

The opposition, led by 83-year-old Etienne Tshisekedi, called for nationwide protests against President Kabila after the Commission électorale nationale indépendante (CENI) stated that elections would not be held until 2017. This delay in holding the election resulted in President Kabila remaining in power.

Tshisekedi called for protests and condemned President Kabila’s abuse of power, speaking on the need for nonviolent action he said, “...the people to [sic] mobilize as one to stop this umpteenth abuse of authority by observing a dead city strike this Tuesday August 23.”

After Edem Kodjo, the former Premier Of Togo, was asked to step in as a mediator between Rassemblement and President Kabila’s administration, the African Union (AU) called for a meeting between the opposition and President Kabila to discuss his removal from office and for fair elections to be held. The opposition stated they would only agree on the conditions if Kodjo stepped down as mediator and the government released all political prisoners.

Through sustained protests led by Rassemblement, security forces killed nearly 50 protestors on 19 September

2016 who were marching peacefully and holding signs decrying the Kabila regime. The government claimed that security forces only killed 17 protesters, as well as one police officer.

In light of the deaths and security force crackdown on protests, opposition leaders from Rassemblement spoke out against the violence and committed themselves to further protests and action against the government.

“We will keep up the pressure ... and announce more street actions and more demonstrations until Mr. Kabila is removed from office,” Martin Fayulu, a parliamentarian and leader of an opposition party, told *The Guardian*. “[Taking to] the street is a right of popular expression in the face of a power that cannot be heard or seen,” said Ève Bazai?ba, another major opposition politician.

On 28 September, the United States placed economic sanctions on Kabila personnel in response to the deaths of protestors on 19 September. The initial stage of sanctions targeted senior officials, including Major General Amisi Kumba and John Numbi, a former senior police official responsible for severe crackdowns on protestors.

The Kabila administration delayed elections until April 2018. Rassemblement called for more protests and a “dead city” strike, which resulted in protestors remaining in their homes, leaving the city of Kinshasa empty aside from security forces personnel.

“The people will take over,” said Tshisekedi. “Kabila has performed a coup d’état against himself by signing that agreement [to delay elections], because he made an oath to protect the constitution.” said Valentin Mubake, Tshisekedi’s political adviser. Mubake continued stating, civil war was “a predictable consequence” of the government’s delaying tactics.

“We’ve decided we’ll just keep going. If they kill us, well, we’re ready to die, and those behind us will come up in our place,” said Kalala Tshinyama, a resident of Kinshasa. “Mobutu killed people, but he didn’t finish all of us off. Kabila won’t kill all of us either.”

In a presidential decree read on state television on 17 November, President Kabila announced that opposition leader Samy Badibanga would serve as the country’s next Prime Minister following a deal for a transition of power between Rassemblement and the Kabila regime aimed at calming political tensions.

On 12 December, the EU placed additional sanctions on seven senior Kabila administration officials for use of disproportionate force on civilian protestors. The Kabila administration announced a social media blackout on 15 December 2016, presumably to prevent further protests by the public; however, they did not provide a reason for this decision. Ignoring the blackout, Rassemblement organized another protest on 18 December, where security forces killed nearly 40 protestors.

With increasing turmoil and further protests, President Kabila’s administration and the Rassemblement bloc came to an agreement on 31 December, which confirmed elections would happen in late 2017. In the meantime, President Kabila appointed a Prime Minister from the opposition. This decision quelled protests as the government began to direct logistics and plan the upcoming election. On 1 February 2017, Tshisekedi passed away, setting up the country for more turmoil as there was no real leader able to take on the mantle to unify the opposition. His son, Felix, became the next leader of the opposition. On 15 February, the budget minister, Pierre Kangudia, stated that the government lacked the necessary funds to hold the election that year. At that point, the US and other European countries expected to partially fund the elections. Rassemblement called for a general strike on 3 April, which led to an empty city and massive economic losses.

“The people's response to our 'dead cities' call shows they do not support the President," said Augustin Kabuya,

a spokesman for UDPS, the largest opposition party. "We hope the president is listening to the people and does what is right."

President Kabila and his administration further intensified the conflict by banning any and all political protests and increasing security forces on the streets. Soon after the strike, President Kabila named Bruno Tshibala Prime Minister. This was one of the key components of the deal struck at the end of 2016 as Bruno was one of the leaders of the opposition party. This was met by the opposition's call for rallies on 10 April. The calls went mostly unheeded, as the regime significantly increased the number of security forces and most people chose to stay home out of fear.

As protests continued, President Kabila visited South Africa where President Jacob Zuma hosted him. Protesters picketed outside the bilateral conference to discuss trade relations between South Africa and the DRC in Cape Town as President Zuma applauded President Kabila for his leadership in the DRC in their joint-interview following the meeting.

"This agreement charted a process that should lead to the next elections. We congratulate you, Mr. President, on the progress achieved thus far and the manner with which you have handled the process," said Zuma.

As the ban on social media use continued, Rassemblement called for another dead-city strike on 7 August. Security forces arrested over 50 protesters who left their homes. Even with the protests, the government chose not to provide updates on the election, leading Moise Katumbi and Felix Tshisekedi, the two main opposition leaders, to condemn the actions of President Kabila.

"In order to prevent the legal vacuum and chaos foreseen when elections are not held by 31 December 2017 at the latest, [we] demand a transition without Mr. Kabila, who has become illegal and illegitimate," Katumbi and Tshisekedi wrote.

The protests and calls to an end of President Kabila's regime escalated when protestors lynched a police officer on 30 October and security forces attempted to disperse protestors by use of live ammunition and tear gas. Security forces killed four more protestors but alleged they were caused by stray bullets.

Soon after, on 17 November, Rassemblement called for additional protests against President Kabila for failing to step down and not holding elections. MONUSCO (United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo) urged President Kabila to respect the peaceful protests and order security forces not to use force against protestors. The protests were due to the election commission stating that the elections would be delayed another year, to 23 December 2018. Security forces fired live ammunition in the air attempting to disperse protestors, which became a common occurrence for all protests.

Kabila maintained that he would step down once new elections were held in 2018. On 30 December, over 160 churches throughout the DRC joined the protest, reading the following message written by Cardinal Laurent Monsengwo:

"The time is over when one tried to hold onto power with arms by killing one's people, these young people who only seek out their right to live with a little more dignity."

The government refused permits for street-wide protests, which were to be held on 31 December. Additionally, the government shut down all SMS and social media, citing security concerns. Security forces shot and killed another seven protestors.

Repeatedly, Kabila's administration cited logistical and financial obstacles as delays in holding the election. President Kabila's second term was marked by mass casualties of civilians. As this was going on, the election commission maintained that the election would be held on 23 December 2018.

Into the new year, the church called for more protests and attempted to push further for the movement to advance. The Lay Coordination Committee of the DRC, which was heavily supported by members of the church, called for more action and protests against President Kabila on 22 January 2018.

After additional protests and more death and injuries incurred by protesters at the hands of security forces, Lambert Mende, President Kabila's Communications Minister, reiterated that President Kabila would not seek a third term.

"We are threatened every day. They tell us: 'Stop what you are doing or something bad will happen to you.' The worst thing is not the threat of prison, it is the fear of not being able to act to change the situation," said Gloire Wahzavalere, a 20-year-old Lutte Pour Le Changement (LUCHA) activist in Goma.

On 21 August 2018, Amnesty International called for President Kabila to stop suppressive tactics by security forces. This request followed calls for protesters to allow more accessible treatment to Ebola victims in the country, which was hampered by the protests and rallies.

"All gains that we have made so far in fighting Ebola in North Kivu are at risk because of this violence... And, in recent weeks, we were quite optimistic about Beni city because we have seen some decrease in numbers. However, now again with this surge in violence, we may again lose these gains," said World Health Organization (WHO) spokesman Tarek Jasarevic.

As the election process approached, President Kabila announced his party's candidate for the election, Emmanuel Ramazani on 9 September 2018. Over the next few weeks, President Kabila's administration allowed for the opposition to hold a political rally against the use of voting machines.

Rassemblement held the rally on 22 October. Thousands of participants marched in central Kinshasa shouting, "We will fight to the death," and "Voting machine equals cheating machine." This was the first time that while security forces were placed throughout the city of Kinshasa, there were no injuries or violence on either side. On 12 November, Rassemblement approved Martin Fayulu to run as the main opposition candidate against Ramazani. The next day, Tshisekedi broke from UDPS and announced he would run as a third candidate.

Protests continued with President Kabila maintaining he would not seek a third term and that he would respect the constitution. More protests were held on 18 December, when President Kabila's regime stated they wished to delay elections to allow more care for Ebola victims, resulting in another one week delay. The elections were held on 30 December 2018 and Tshisekedi was said to have won by a margin of 38.57% to 34.8%.

Immediately after winning, President Tshisekedi stated, "I pay tribute to President Joseph Kabila. Today, we should no longer see him as an adversary, but rather, a partner in democratic change in our country." This led to calls for more protests, and candidate and opposition leader Martin Fayulu challenged the result in court and lost. In leaked data on 20 January 2019, it was shown that Martin Fayulu actually won by 60% of the vote. This marked the end of the campaign to remove President Kabila from office.

Research Notes

Influences:

2015 Protests against President Kabila

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