

#### AUGUST/SEPTEMBER TRENDS

Ahead of elections set for December, a crackdown on dissent and civil liberties escalated as security forces killed over 50 anti-UN protesters in the eastern province of North Kivu. Meanwhile, armed group violence continued in the east, with M23 insurgents having increased their activity in recent weeks.

#### WHAT TO WATCH IN THE COMING WEEKS AND MONTHS

##### 1 Electoral preparations could crystallise tensions, especially if opposition is obstructed

Party in power and opposition will likely continue to instrumentalise security situation for electoral purposes, especially in the east, where further fighting could disrupt the vote scheduled for **20 December**; may continue the hard line position against M23 insurgents and Rwandan interference.

Security forces could continue heavy crackdown, suppress anti-government demonstrations and campaign meetings, especially in the east where state of siege (akin to martial law) in place since May 2021.

Political opposition, fragmented among high profile leaders including Moise Katumbi, Augustin Matata Ponyo, Martin Fayulu and Denis Mukwege, could launch major protests, underlining their rejection of voter registration to

buttress arguments for a boycott, even though it is unlikely all major candidates would withdraw.

**TO WATCH** The arrest/killing or exclusion of political leaders from final list of presidential candidates in November could inflame tensions; divisive discourse and conspiracy theories on social media could fuel mistrust; lifting of state of siege in the east could ease tensions between voters and security forces.

##### Potential Consequences

If opposition is suppressed, many Congolese could seek ways to express protest, including not voting in presidential, legislative, provincial and municipal polls. Should the contest be close, lack of trust and wide perception of a stacked process could lead major opposition to reject outcome. Prolonged crisis could impede indirect elections of senators, governors, and vice governors planned for late **February/March 2024**.

##### 2 Violence could rise across country, lead to national crisis

Political leaders could instrumentalise armed groups to intimidate opponents and/or civilians, especially in the east, in Katanga and around Kinshasa.

Opposition coalitions could emerge in late November/early December and reduce number of candidates, with major impact on whether elections are close.

Armed groups could increase violent attacks; M23 could step-up its offensive, or national army could increase attacks against it. Given army ill-discipline and the M23's record of

abuses against civilians, such an offensive would likely fuel displacement and unrest, at least in short term.

Losing parties could reject final electoral results, call for supporters to take to the street.

Absent elections in the east, National Assembly will not reach its 500 members, may be unable to function properly.

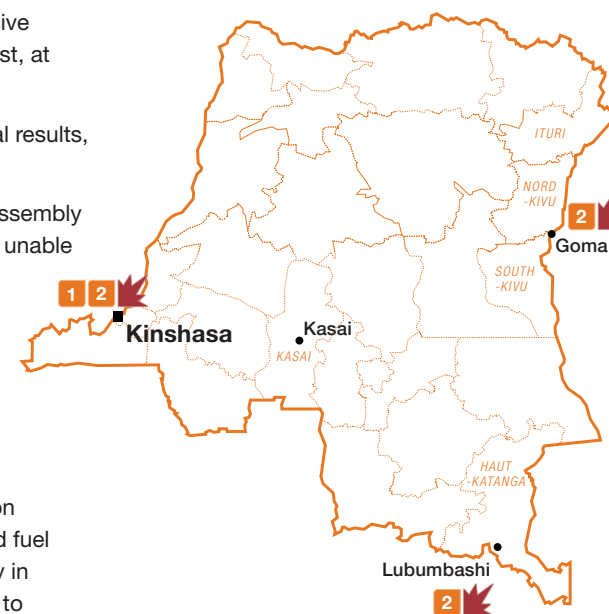
**TO WATCH** Campaign and vote carry multiple risks including repression of meetings, extortion of voters, spread of fighting.

##### Potential Consequences

When final results of presidential election are announced in January 2024, it could fuel violence/political crisis; significant delay in holding elections in North-Kivu will add to feelings of neglect and inflame violence in the longer term.

In former Katanga province, contested results could fuel communal tensions between Kasaiens and Katangais, especially in urban centres like Lubumbashi, and lead to major violence given the presence of armed groups in the area eg, Mai Mai Bakata-Katanga in Kundelungu and Upemba parks versus Baluba of Kasai.

Politicisation of violence could lead to the creation of more militias to support political movements/leaders.



#### Flashpoint

##### Published October 2023

On the Horizon offers a snapshot into emergent conflicts and crises in the next three to six months in a clear, accessible format, identifying triggers, key dates to watch and potential behaviour of conflict actors, to support global conflict prevention efforts.

