

## LATEST TRENDS

More than 2,000 Burundian troops are fighting RED-Tabara rebels and the M23 insurgency in the eastern Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), fuelling tensions with Rwanda, which reportedly backs the groups. Amid reports of soldiers deserting and refusing deployment, Burundian authorities accused RED-Tabara of orchestrating violent attacks in Bujumbura and continued their crackdown on dissenters.

## WHAT TO WATCH IN THE COMING WEEKS AND MONTHS

### 1 Deployments in the eastern DRC will likely drive up tensions with Rwanda and at home

The government will likely continue to send troops to the DRC's North and South Kivu provinces, to fight M23 and RED-Tabara rebels respectively, as Gitega aligns more closely with Kinshasa and distances itself further from Kigali.

Unrest and frustration within the army over poor service conditions in the eastern DRC might increase, possibly adding to ethnic frictions along Hutu-Tutsi lines.

The Imbonerakure, the ruling party's youth wing, will likely keep getting paramilitary-style training prior to potential deployment to the DRC.

RED-Tabara rebels could organise more attacks on Burundian soil, possibly with Rwandan and diaspora support.

**TO WATCH** Hostile rhetoric from Rwandan and Burundian political leaders; more troop deployments to the eastern DRC possibly including Imbonerakure members; discontent in army with poor service conditions; more Burundian soldiers being captured by M23 rebels.

### Potential Consequences

Heightened tensions with Rwanda could pull President Evariste Ndayishimiye's government further into wider regional confrontation, pitting Gitega and Kinshasa, on one side, against Kigali on the other. As all sides are using unaccountable proxy groups alongside their armies, which are known for indiscipline, people in the eastern DRC could witness more abuses including killings, sexual violence, forced evictions and livestock theft. Burundian insurgent groups could carry out further attacks on Burundian soil, killing or injuring civilians.

Dissatisfaction within the security forces might increase strains among the Burundian elite and open cracks within the political and security apparatus, including but not limited to widening ethnic divides along Hutu-Tutsi lines, fuelling political instability and violence.

### 2 Political space is likely to close further ahead of the 2025 legislative elections

The government will likely step up its crackdown on supporters of Agathon Rwasa, former leader of opposition National Congress for Freedom (CNL), before the vote.

Police, intelligence services and Imbonerakure will likely further restrict space for dissent.

Civil society, the opposition and others who protest these steps might be forced into exile or to retreat from public platforms amid deteriorating socio-economic conditions.

**TO WATCH** Fate of supporters of former CNL leader Rwasa; divisive rhetoric on social media in advance of **2025** polls; increased insecurity, including attacks on the opposition; possibility of protests sparked by the rising cost of living, a stream of corruption allegations and collapsing public services, including electricity.

### Potential Consequences

The ruling party, already under strain due to Great Lakes politics and poor socio-economic prospects, could show fissures and will likely further restrict democratic space in the lead-up to the **2025** legislative elections, which could pave the way for future political instability.

Increased violence – including against the opposition – could worsen insecurity countrywide, particularly in the Cibitoke province.



### Flashpoint

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On the Horizon sounds the alarm about conflicts and crises that may emerge over the next three to six months. It identifies key actors and dates to watch in support of global conflict prevention efforts.

